

Articulating the Contemporary Circus Sector in the United States

By

JOSHUA STUART FRANCIS

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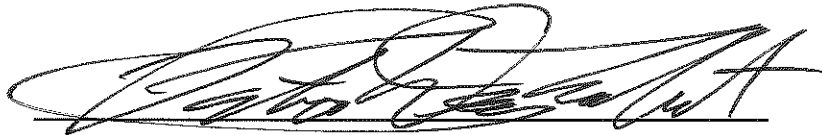
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PROJECT APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Joshua Stuart Francis

Title: Articulating the Contemporary Circus Sector in the United States

This project has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Arts and Administration Program by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patricia Dewey-Lambert', written over a horizontal line.

Patricia Dewey-Lambert, PhD
Associate Professor, Arts and Administration Program
University of Oregon

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Date

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Chapter 1: Introduction	4
1.1: Introductory Definitions	5
1.2: Research Topics	7
1.3: Biases and Approach	10
1.4: Delimitations and Data Collection	12
1.5: Conclusion	17
Chapter 2: Historical Context	19
2.1: Early Origins of the Circus	20
2.2: The Father of the Circus	22
2.3: The Circus Comes to America	24
2.4: The Decline and Redefinition of the United States Circus	26
2.5: Trends in Circus History	28
2.6: Defining the Circus Today	31
2.7: The Contemporary Circus	36
2.8: Conclusion	38
Chapter 3: The Circus Sector – Downstream Infrastructure	40
3.1: The Creative Sector	40
Figure 1	42
3.2: The People of the Circus Sector	44
Figures 2 & 3	45
Figures 4-6	46
3.3: Circus Organizations	49
3.4: Educational Products	54
3.5: Performances	58
3.6: Touring and Presenting	60
3.7: Festivals	63
3.8: Social Circus	67
3.9: Conclusion	64
Chapter 4: The Circus Sector – Upstream Infrastructure	68
4.1: Education and Training	69
4.2: Professional Development	74
4.3: The American Youth Circus Organization/ The American Circus Educators Association	77
4.4: Circus Now	82
4.5: Equipment and Supplies	86
4.6: Financial Support and Funding Streams	88
Table 1	93
Table 2	94
4.7: Conclusion	94
Chapter 5: General Public Infrastructure and Conclusions	96
5.1: Public Funding	96
5.2: Policy Authority and Legal Regulations	104
5.3: Advocacy	107
5.4: Professional and Trade Associations	110
5.5: Conclusions	112
Appendix A	121
Bibliography	122

ABSTRACT

The contemporary circus arts are in an era of increasing prominence in the United States due to increased exposure in a wide range of media and throughout a variety of different performing arts forms. However, in spite of this, the art form still maintains a degree of separation from public understanding – many still view it as a rare art form that only a select few learn and practice. Furthermore, those who are participating in the circus arts either as an artist, administrator, teacher, or any number of other categories are not as aware as they could be of the services and products present throughout the country for and by other circus organizations. This project endeavors to explore the activities present in the circus field by approaching it as a microcosm of the “creative sector,” as articulated by Cherbo et al. (2008).

Understanding the resultant circus sector in this way involves analyzing the people that work at the core of the sector, the circus activities in which this core engages, the downstream distribution infrastructure that connects the sector with its markets, the upstream production infrastructure that supports and develops the sector itself and its workers, and the general public infrastructure that externally influences the sector. From there, conclusions are drawn about what the state of these various sections say about the state of the circus sector as a whole.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the contemporary performing arts field, circus performances and aesthetics are becoming more and more prevalent. Cirque du Soleil from Canada, one of the most well-known circus companies in the world, has a huge international reach with almost twenty shows currently touring within four continents (“Cirque du Soleil shows”, 2015). In parts of Europe and Australia, circus artists are tirelessly pushing the boundaries of the art form forward with hugely innovative acts and shows. Circus artists in Russia and China, known for an incredibly high level of technical precision and achievement, continue to execute some of the most awe-inspiring feats of the human body. In Ethiopia, circus artists combine “circus skills such as juggling and contortion with indigenous forms of dance, song, and costumes and with didactic messages about social issues such as HIV/AIDS” and perform all around the world (Niederstadt, 2009, p. 76). Many South American countries are also rising in prevalence as producers of artists and companies that interpret the form in new and exciting ways. As Catton of the *Wall Street Journal* says, “Like it or not, it adds up to a movement ... When circus takes over the performing arts, it won’t be hard to figure out what happened here” (2013).

The profile of the circus arts is growing in the United States as well, with studios, classes, and performances proliferating in cities across the country. Even outside the circus world itself, more performing art forms including ballet, symphony, and theatre are beginning borrow circus artists and aesthetics for their own performances. For example, the current Broadway tour of the musical *Pippin* was reimaged to heavily feature aerial dancing and other tumbling stunts

performed by members of one of the world's top circus companies, Seven Fingers of the Hand ("Pippin the Musical," 2015). Demand for circus education for all ages is growing as well, with "around 10 new [youth circus] organizations popping up each year" (Cohen, 2012, p. 8), as well as more adult recreational classes and serious training programs.

In spite of all of this growth, there is a gap in the scholarly research on contemporary circus in the United States. Much of the published work about the contemporary circus focuses on outputs from Canada, Europe, and Australia, who are credited as being on the vanguard of the art form, while only a few United States organization like the Big Apple Circus and Circus Smirkus garner any mention. Amy Cohen (2012) goes into depth about why this disparity exists in the research, including factors like the historical differences between circus in the United States and Europe, much different levels of financial support and educational infrastructure, and a different degree of societal appreciation of circus arts. Regardless of perception, the United States has a large amount of circus activity that is only growing and deserves academic exploration. This project approaches the United States' field of contemporary circus broadly, to better understand the connections between different actors and to see a fuller picture of how the sector works.

1.1: Introductory Definitions

It is necessary to first unpack what the term "circus" really means. The umbrella term of "circus arts" encompasses a wide range of different kinds of activities from aerial arts and gymnastics to fire spinning and juggling to clowning.

In some cases, animals are involved in the performance as well. Even circus historians cannot agree on what to include as “circus” for the purpose of their own research. Stoddart (2000) says that, “the glorious and diverse array of acts...we may find on vaudeville stages, street corners or country fairs, can be argued to belong to the circus because their performance in some way embodies a characteristic circus energy or aesthetic” (p. 4). Speaight (1980), on the other hand says that, “entertainment of human bodily skills and trained animals that is presented in a ring of approximately 13 metres in diameter...is the essence of Circus” and that other forms do not count (p. 8). The fact that there was a large shift in what circus meant in the early 1970s could account for Speaight and Stoddart’s disagreement given that the “new circus” movement was still very fresh as Speaight was writing (and will be covered next chapter), but a coherent set of boundaries still does not exist.

Speaight’s definition of circus was the prevailing one during a certain era of circus history, but is increasingly anachronistic to the realities of the circus world of today. Still, the ring is a very important and identifiable part of circus history, which will be covered later in this paper. Today, though, saying that circus is only the feats of humans and animals in a ring of a 13-meter diameter would be like saying that only ballet is dance. Just as modern dance emerged from ballet in the early 20th century, in the 1970s, *Cirque Nouveau* or “New Circus” emerged from the “classical circus” that Speaight defines.

The genre had reinvented the circus by stripping the art of the codes of old. The new circuses got rid of the animals and emphasized human talents. They ‘theatricalized’ the form by introducing characters and plot. Instead of vast arenas, they played in intimate settings (Wall, 2013, p. 8).

Wall presents a good conceptualization of how to think about the contemporary circus in an accessible way, but it still does not help with defining boundaries on which sorts of activities and organizations would and would not be included in a scan of the contemporary circus sector. Just as modern dance can include elements of ballet, so too can contemporary circus include the codes of the past. Indeed, some European and American circuses still include elements such as ringmasters, trained animals, and traditional structuring of acts within a show (Wall, 2013, p. 8).

In researching a sector, it is important to look at professional associations and advocacy organizations to get a good idea of salient definitions and boundaries. Circus Now is the advocacy organization for the circus arts in the United States, and their “State of the Circus” survey (2014) asked respondents across the country what disciplines they practiced. Responses fell into 28 different activities along with an “other” response, which helped limit which organizations and activities to include in this study. Cohen (2012) also included in her study a division of many of these activities (with some differences) into seven different broader categories, which is helpful to further define the scope of the art form. Approaching the contemporary circus with Wall’s conceptualization of an art form’s code, Circus Now’s survey responses, and Cohen’s categorizations provided the best boundaries for this project.

1.2: Research Topics

With boundaries and definitions established, the broad topical area that the research covered was the contemporary circus sector as a “creative sector.” Cherbo, Vogel, and Wyszomirski (2008) provide a diagram of the “creative sector” that

outlines the interrelation between the people, the infrastructure, the actions, and the products (p. 14). While this diagram applies to the arts as a whole, taking its essence and distilling it to illustrate just the contemporary circus in the United States helped to clarify how the circus functions here.

From that broad topical area, there emerged a number of more specific topics to investigate about the circus sector. The first was the kinds of people and the organizations that are producing circus products in the United States. Circus Now's aforementioned "State of the Circus" survey gives a good idea as to what people practice, how old they are, what education level they have, and other demographic information. Additionally, they have a "Circus Map," which shows where their members are located across the country. A more specific mapping of people and organizations producing circus is a large project that could result from this broader sectorial approach; the demographic information from the "State of the Circus" survey provided much of the relevant information for my study.

Another topical area to cover was the educational streams – how are people learning circus arts and on what basis do students pursuing careers in circus performance choose programs? How do programs assess students and create curricula necessary to be successful in the sector? This conceptual area borrows from some questions from the people section, while expanding more into educational and safety standards, the difference between recreational learning and more serious professional and pre-professional training, and how instructors are trained.

Financial infrastructure is another conceptual area of the sectorial approach. This is also a structural question, because certain organizations (like nonprofits) can apply for grants that others (freelance artists, for-profit companies) might not be able to. How much money do circus organizations make from donations? From ticket sales? What is the general ratio of earned to contributed income for nonprofit circus organizations? Many circus organizations make their much of their money from class tuitions, and similarly practitioners make money by teaching – a full 40% of respondents to the “State of the Circus” survey indicated they participated in the sector as teachers (2014).

The purpose of this, of course, is to define and model a contemporary circus sector for the United States. As shown earlier, the contemporary circus is a growing field in the performing arts, with more and more circus companies and organizations appearing around the country and more people drawn to consume circus either as an audience member or as a student. To help the larger public understand what circus is and to further legitimize the field, a sectorial model that clearly shows the activities, agents, and infrastructure would be a great help.

With so many seemingly disparate parts comprising the creative sector, Cherbo et al. (2008) broke the sector up into three different categories of infrastructures. The first category is downstream distribution infrastructure, which connects a sector with its markets and consumers. Upstream production infrastructure is the second category and comprises the various support and development networks that facilitate the maintenance and development of the sector and its workers. The final category is the general public infrastructure, which

includes the funding, advocacy, professional associations, and legal regulations that support the sector more from an external perspective (pp. 14-15).

1.3: Biases and Approach

Being that I am a practicing aerial artist myself, I am biased as a researcher because I am approaching this project with an insider's understanding and subjectivity. Also, as an active participant in the sector my bias falls on the side that circus is an art form that has just as much reason to be viewed as legitimately as a symphony, opera, theatre performance, or ballet – I am very pro-circus. Ultimately, for this study, though, I think my positive insider's perspective was helpful because circus is close to me and does not seem like an impenetrable, sort of magical art that only the most elite can practice. I have looked behind the curtain, as it were.

I approached this study from an Interpretivist/Constructivist paradigm, in that the contemporary circus sector already exists – the elements of the various infrastructures of the sector just needed to be interpreted and modeled to best reflect how it works. This paradigm affected my research design insofar as it propelled me to collect information from people in a variety of different areas of the sector. Someone who knows a lot about educational institutions and standards might not have as much expertise on funding streams and grant writing for circus artists. I had to collect and synthesize the knowledge of a group of circus professionals to get a full picture of the sector.

All of this brought me to my main research question (hinted at above), which is similar to the title of this project: How does the contemporary circus sector function and what would a model of it look like? From there, sub-questions emerged

based on the different areas that make up the circus sector. What are the roles for participation across the sector as students, performers, educators, and administrators? What sort of educational infrastructure is there and how does it differ for recreational education, which is growing in the United States, and the education of future professional circus artists? What are the standards for educational institutions and individual instructors and coaches and where do they receive training and certification (formal and informal)? How do circus organizations financially sustain and grow their operations? What are the income streams available in the circus sector, both for individuals and for organizations?

As I mentioned earlier, answering these questions required a good definition of what I mean when I use the term “contemporary circus.” In brief, and for the purpose of this project, the term “contemporary circus arts” encompasses an artistic activity whose primary medium is at least one of the “disciplines” outlined either on Circus Now’s 2014 “State of the Circus” survey or included in one of Cohen’s seven categories. Also required is a definition of a sector. I will go more into depth about what is widely accepted as a definition of “contemporary circus” in the next chapter. The term “creative sector” is defined by Cherbo, Vogel, and Wyszomirski (2008) as “a cluster of related arts and arts-related industries that require for production a pool of talented and skilled individuals who, along with ancillary organizations, provide products and services integral to the workings of the creative industries” (p. 9). Combining these two definitions along with my findings throughout the course of this research have produced a rich introduction to the “circus sector” that many of the sector’s participants will hopefully find useful and illuminating.

Another important definition that repeatedly needed to be clarified throughout this project was the definition of what a “professional” circus artist is. This is important because it helps explain how certain parts of the sector, specifically education, count as downstream infrastructure (which is directed at non-professionals), and which count as upstream (which is directed at professionals). Defining the word “professional” in the circus sector is also somewhat a tricky proposition: as chapters two and four will demonstrate, many circus sector participants do not make a majority of their income from their participation. The definition must be thought of in terms of training, then. Professional circus artists in the United States are those who have completed their studies at one of the multi-year professional and/or pre-professional training programs that exists in the United States and abroad. This definition, along with the educational institutions that create circus professionals, will be explored more in depth in later chapters.

1.4: Delimitations and Data Collection

As the title of this project suggests, I am delimiting this study to contemporary circus happening in the United States. Circus is a global art that takes countless forms depending on the culture that practices it, but a rich study of global circus trends is not possible in the timeline of this project, unfortunately. Another delimitation of this study comes with the definition of “contemporary circus arts” above. I mentioned the Broadway tour of the musical *Pippin* containing aerial dancers and other circus artists, though because its primary medium is theatre, it is not a circus performance the same way an aerial show would be. (The aerialists

performing in *Pippin* are still circus artists on an individual level, though.) This also means that my study did not directly include organizations that perform what is known as “traditional circus,” which is more to the tune of the Ringling Brothers & Barnum and Bailey. Again, I will cover the different types of circus more deeply next chapter.

Because of the delimitation to the United States, a limitation of this study is that it only applies to the North American context. European circus, for example, exists in a completely different paradigm and deserves a similar sectorial approach (that would show much more governmental involvement in the support of, and advocacy for contemporary circus, among many other differences). Also, because this study is so broad, it could not explore any one type of organization within the circus sector too deeply – my intention was to represent the sector as a whole, which unfortunately glosses over some of the nuance that exists that, for example, would show the differences in income streams between a professional aerialist, a professional clown, and a professional juggler.

Because a sector consists of a variety of different elements from people, organizations, and institutions to products, finances, and infrastructure, I had to get information from a breadth of different sources. That, coupled with the fact that there is not much academic literature about the contemporary circus, meant that my research had to spread far beyond a literature review. This is not to say that an in-depth literature review was not important to my study. Quite on the contrary: doing a literary survey of circus’s history and how it developed to the point it is today was a crucial foundation for understanding the contemporary sector. The field of

contemporary circus is an emergent one, having only existed in its current form since the 1970s, which makes a historical understanding all the more important (Wilson, 2002, p. 27). Another value that lay in the literature review was a way to conceptualize the contemporary circus accessibly to those who are not participants in the sector. Wall (2013) conceptualizes of contemporary circus in terms of “codes,” that is, just as modern dance stripped the codes of ballet (height, weightlessness, pas de deux etc.), so too did contemporary circus strip the codes of its antecedent (three rings, a ring master, specific rules as to which acts happened at which time and where). Without the context that the literary review provided, any discussion of the sector would be meaningless for those who do not already have some background understanding of the contemporary circus.

However, to find information about the actual sector, I had to move beyond the literature. To get this information, I conducted interviews with key people who have this sort of “sectorial knowledge” – those who were able to view the field both from birds-eye-view to see the connections and interactions as well as from within their own area to see the inner functioning. I conducted individual interviews with 10 such individuals to get the most information. I started with Amy Cohen, Executive Director both of the American Circus Educators Association and the American Youth Circus Organization. She was an invaluable resource not only because of her key position within the circus sector, but because she also wrote her masters thesis about the contemporary circus in the United States (though her project focused more on barriers the contemporary circus in the United States faces to reach the prominence of other countries with more robust circus sectors). From

there, I used a combination of purposive and snowball sampling to gain connections to other interviewees. Circus Now has staff members that have a variety of different focuses and backgrounds – all of whom made great interviewees. Fortunately for the scope of my research, the circus sector is relatively small, so many of the people who work for one organization also work for or serve as a board member for another organization. I also got in touch with an organization in St. Louis called Circus Harmony, which does work in the area of “social circus,” an important part of the sector that uses the circus arts to help those in need. Outside of direct circus sector participants, I interviewed an individual who had experience working at a performing arts center doing the booking of the performances that comprise their presenting season, and had experience working with circus artists. He also had insights into what it means to be an artist’s agent as it could apply to the circus sector.

Because I studied the contemporary circus sector in the entire United States, much of my data collection happened remotely. Most of the interviews I conducted were with individuals who were not near me, so they were conducted over the phone or Skype. Skype was the preferred medium for these interviews, because talking “face to face” as it were allowed for a more comfortable and conversational interview. Each interview lasted an hour, and most individuals only needed to be interviewed one time, though many did necessitate email follow up throughout the process.

These targeted interviews were the way that I gained my most general information, but for more specific data, document analysis was also necessary.

When it came to financial information, analyzing the form 990s of circus nonprofits was helpful for identifying trends in the funding breakdowns of these organizations. Other documents that proved useful included grant parameters for grants that circus artists/organizations have won in the past, annual reports of circus organizations, performance playbills, organization websites and brochures, teaching materials and curricula, and fundraising campaign documents. Clearly, this document analysis was helpful both in the downstream product section of the sector as well as the upstream support section.

Fortunately, for the document analysis, many of the documents that I was hoping to study (websites, playbills, Forms 990, grant parameters, fundraising campaign communications) were public documents, making them easily accessible to me. For more sensitive documents that I came across (financial information for for-profit businesses, strategic planning documents) I first had to get permission from organizational executives to access them.

Additionally, surveying circus sector participants about income streams and geographic distribution was a good complement to Circus Now's "State of the Circus" survey to learn more about the "products" section of the sector. This was a short SurveyMonkey survey that I sent to organizations present on the public directories on Circus Now and The American Circus Educators Association as well as distributing it on circus groups on various social media platforms including Facebook and Reddit. Respondents were individuals who accessed the survey through some social media channel and thus were self-identified participants in the circus sector. The survey only required 5-10 minutes of an individual's time and did

not ask for any personal identifiers beyond region of the country that the respondent resided at the time of the survey and what percentage of their income comes from work in the circus sector. There were a total of 301 respondents from all across the country.

Because of the lack of a large base of research about the contemporary circus, particularly in the United States, this project was very much a synthesis of many different data. Finding the connections among the qualitative accounts of various circus sector participants and between those accounts and the quantitative data gleaned from document analysis was only possible once I had all of that information in front of me, which is largely the point of the study: to get all of the information in one place. Because of that, it grew organically and morphed throughout the various stages of conception and execution.

1.5: Conclusion

As I have stated before, circus is experiencing a surge right now, but is not viewed with as much legitimacy as it could be. In fact, the lack of perceived legitimacy of the art form and of the sector is one of the main factors that is holding the art form back from reaching its huge potential. This is something about which I am personally very passionate not only because I participate in and love the circus, but also because I believe that the circus, as a medium of artistic expression, has been adding so much to the larger creative sector in the United States and in the world. Unfortunately, in the United States, its contributions are not garnering the recognition and the increase in legitimacy for the field that they should. That is changing, though. Many of the artists and organizations explored in this study are

working hard every day to bring more and better circus to the greater United States public. Contemporary circus is an art that is transformative, inventive, visceral, challenging, and ultimately one of the most real demonstrations of the potential found in the human body. Articulating the sector that supports this art will hopefully help bring to light both for participants and outsiders more access points for support and growth, so that more people can be transported by these artistic experiences.

Chapter 2: Historical Context

As stated in the introduction, circus in the United States is on the precipice of huge growth. The scope of circus arts is increasing, with more amateur companies performing in most major cities, Broadway shows and other forms of popular entertainment featuring circus disciplines, and a resurgence in some regions of modern versions of vaudeville, burlesque, and other circus-adjacent performance styles. More people are considering circus classes for purposes of fitness, recreation, or amateur artistic creation. Plus, organizations like The American Youth Circus Organization (AYCO) are finding that the number of new youth circus groups increases every year, meaning that circus engagement is starting at a younger age, which will result in deeper, more high-quality outputs in future decades.

In spite of this boom, many people do not realize just how long the circus has existed in some form and how it helped to revolutionize some aspects of performing arts that are now considered commonplace, including touring and alternative marketing forms. Jando (1977) asserts, “circus has a history, like dance, theatre, or cinema, and it is unjust that those who popularized circus arts are only too rarely freed from the dungeons of the past” (p. 7). This chapter will unearth some of that history while highlighting how circus arts helped to shape important aspects of modern performing arts during its multi-century journey in and out of prominence. The narrative will focus at first in Europe and then in the United States once the art form crosses the Atlantic Ocean.

2.1: Early Origins of the Circus

Circus performance can be traced all the way back to a variety of different ancient cultures spanning modern-day Europe and Asia (Cohen, 2012, p. 20). The ancient Roman circus, which consisted of trained animals, feats of acrobatics and a large emphasis on clowning, seems one of the more familiar (Bouissac, 1985, pp. 11-12). The Romans called these performers “circulatores” and their performances were somewhat gory by modern standards (p. 11). Documentation of a similar style of performance in 421 BC tells of a troupe of entertainers performing at the dinner party of wealthy Athenians (Speaight, 1980, p. 11). The performance mostly consisted of a jester performing comedy, but also featured a female juggler and tumbler who performed dangerous feats over swords. This style of performance, though popular, never gained widespread attention and acclaim. Yet, it persisted for centuries, developing and evolving along the way. At the turn of the millennium, the private dinner party performances began to feature more acrobats and ropedancers and the stunts became more daring, but still mostly took place in Athens and Rome, according to records (p. 12). As the centuries progressed and these performance practices spread across Europe, the performances went from being confined to the parties of the wealthy to performances to honor and welcome politicians or prominent public figures.

By the 16th century, circus-related performances in England gained the name of “feats of activity” (p. 13) and consisted of rope dancing, tumbling, juggling, and vaulting performed by traveling troupes for local political officials. Even though this practice and its performers were mostly English, there were also French, Dutch,

Italian, and Turkish people featured in varying capacities. This period of European touring and feats of activity is also when animals began to tour along with these companies mostly for the novelty of their exoticism, though some were trained to do tricks such as a dancing horse in 1628 and a baboon “that can do strange feats” (p. 14). At this point in circus’s development, horses started to catch on as a prominent performing animal not only for the tricks that they could be trained to do but also for equestrian feats that their riders would present. This era of circus development (it should be noted that these performances were not called circus at the time; that would come more than a century later) saw more diversification in performance style with a special emphasis on the “exotic,” including the aforementioned exotic animals as well as puppeteers and “human freaks” (p. 15).

The performance style was gaining a great deal of popularity in the mid-17th century and was poised to explode into the hugely popular spectacle that it became in the late 18th century. What halted it from developing in this era was the 1642 Civil War in England, which closed theaters across the country and prohibited performances of any kind. As Speaight recounts:

By the Resotation in 1660 the old arena theatres had all been demolished or fallen into ruins. And so we had to wait a hundred and thirty years for the simple concept of a variety of human and animal performers playing in a circular arena to be discovered afresh (p. 15).

Up until this point, these performances seemed to be largely disconnected from the times in which they were occurring – the politics, wars, and religions of the era did not halt circus’s development and evolution. The fact that the Civil War in 1642 stunted the growth of the to-be circus is a testament to how popular it was becoming in that time and how it was threading itself into its era’s social fabric.

Unfortunately, it did mean that its popularity and development took many steps backward.

After the 1660 Restoration, circus acts retreated to the fairs, where they took on a tone of street performance that would last through many centuries and is still present in some form today (p. 17). Concurrently, the mid-17th century saw the inception of “riding masters:” people with such a high degree of control over their horses that they could ride and perform acrobatic and vaulting tricks at the same time (p. 21). These riding masters took an incredibly important place in the course of circus history: they were instrumental in paving the way for the circus that we know today, including giving the art form its name.

2.2: The Father of the Circus

1768 was the year that the circus began to turn around. A trick horse rider named Philip Astley in England began to advertise his “riding school,” where people could come to see feats on horseback (Stoddart, 2000, p. 13). Now, this in itself was nothing new; people had been performing equestrian feats for years at this point. What set Astley apart was partly the energetic and personal marketing he undertook, which made him the “first real circus impresario” (p. 14). Circus historian Pascal Jacob as cited by Wall (2013) has described Astley as “obsessed. There’s no other word for it. He lived his entire life inside the circus” (p. 109). His main contribution, though, which made him be regarded by many as “the father of circus” (Speaight, 1980, p. 31), was his creation of the circus ring in 1770 (Wilson, 2002, p. 25). The 42 feet in diameter ring not only helped horse riders improve their balance due to centrifugal force, but also transformed these equestrian

performances to an arena-style performance where people would pay to enter as opposed to a fair-style performance where people would walk by and watch for a little bit, leaving money if they so desired. Artistically, Astley himself was not much of an innovator when it came to performance but he set the stage, as it were, for his more inventive contemporaries to develop the performance style. One of these contemporaries, Charles Hughes, was the person responsible for giving the circus its name. Hughes was a former employee of Astley's who, with the help of popular actor Charles Dibdin, created "The Royal Circus and Equestrian Philharmonic Academy", or "The Royal Circus" for short, in 1782 (Stoddart, 2000, p. 14). Interestingly, historians do not really agree on why Hughes called the circus the circus. Wilson (2002) believes that he was naming it after the Latin word for ring (p. 25), Speaight (1980) believes that he named it after a horse riding ring called "the circus" in the middle of Hyde Park (p. 34), and many believe that he was drawing on the roots of the ancient Roman performers called "circulatores."

Regardless, Astley began a practice during this time that Hughes and Dibdin later picked up of making circus performances more representational, rather than just an exposition of skills and stunts; the practice became theatrical and musical. In this era of real growth, the circus spread to France with a branch of Astley's "Amphitheatre," and later proliferated Europe, with permanent structures devoted solely to circus popping up in many major cities (Stoddart, 2000, p. 15). Hughes also helped to bring the circus to Russia, which started a large circus movement there that persists today (Wilson, 2002, p. 26). However, even though the European circus had finally taken its foothold and was beginning to boom, it was not completely

smooth sailing. Both Speaight (1980) and Stoddart (2000) point out that these circus theatres were on shaky legal ground due to theatre patent and licensing legislation in England at the time, which stated that circuses “were prevented under the law from presenting straight prose drama” (Stoddart, 2000, p. 16). In this instance the vagueness of what a circus actually is was advantageous and helped many companies avoid legal battles, though it was a constant concern for these companies.

2.3: The Circus Comes to America

At this point in circus history, the art form finally made its way across the Atlantic to North America in 1785 thanks to Thomas Pool, who added clowning to his Philadelphia-based equestrian show. It quickly took off from there when Hackaliah Bailey brought a 7,000-pound elephant to the country, which started the popularity of traveling menageries in the United States and set the precedent for animal performances in the American circus for many years to come (Wilson, 2002, p. 26). Really, though, a former associate of Hughes’ named John Bill Ricketts is the main name associated with the beginning of the American circus in 1792 with the opening of his riding school in Philadelphia (Speaight, 1980, p. 112). Ricketts’ show was filled with the kind of equestrian feats, clowning, and acrobatics that were typical of the concurrent European circus. A great boon of Ricketts’ was that George Washington, an accomplished horseman himself, appreciated and patronized the Ricketts circus (Stoddart, 2000, p. 21). Ricketts’ presentations, like other American and European circus presentations at the time took place in permanent or semi-permanent buildings and arena-like tent structures.

This changed in 1825 when J. Purdy Brown, a circus proprietor from Delaware took his show on the road with tents, somewhat mimicking the travelling minstrel bands of Europe's 16th and 17th centuries. This evolved into travelling by wagon in the 1830s and 1840s and then by rail in the middle of the 19th century. The advent of the American railroad was huge for the development of the American circus. Not only did it allow circus companies to travel to a wider breadth of different communities (while also allowing small town inhabitants to take the train to big city shows) as opposed to the big cities that they used to exclusively visit, but also increased circus organizations' organizational efficiency due to new touring capabilities like sleeping in the train cars overnight during a tour. This railroad era coincided with what was known as the "Golden Age" of the American Circus, which lasted from 1870-1915 and saw the rise of such well-known circus impresarios such as P.T. Barnum, James A. Bailey, and the Ringling Brothers (Stoddart, 2000, pp. 22-23). A final important innovation of this era is the three-ring circus structure. Pioneered by P.T. Barnum in 1881, this structure consisted of the traditional 42-foot ring as a central presentation zone for the main act, with two smaller rings on the periphery for smaller presentations like exotic animals or "freak shows" (p. 41). This structure maximized potential audience attendance at the expense of all attendees being able to see the main spectacle, which would later be harmful to American circus companies.

It should be noted that at this time, the circus was hugely popular and could be incredibly lucrative for its producers and performers. In 1871, for example, P.T. Barnum partnered with two showmen named William Cameron Coup and Dan

Costello to use the railroad system do a grand tour of a show called “P.T. Barnum’s Grand Traveling Museum, Menagerie, Caravan, and Circus,” which was so successful that it grossed over \$1 million – the first show in history to do so (Wall, 2013, pp. 199-200). In 1870, a circus producer by the name of Seth Howes retired with over \$70 million from his work in the circus (p. 193). Circus performers were celebrities and household names. Because of the promise of fame and fortune, many other business-minded people entered into the field to build their own circuses or team up with others: familiar names like James Bailey (who teamed up with P.T. Barnum) and the five Ringling brothers: Al, Alf, Charles, John, and Otto (pp. 200-201).

2.4: The Decline and Redefinition of the United States Circus

As the American circus entered into the 20th century, it continued to experienced great popularity among all economic levels due to its diverse content and the fact that it gave Americans a glimpse of what was going on not only across the country but also all over the world (Wilson, 2002, p. 27). However, circus quickly gained competition first in cinema, vaudeville, and burlesque, and later in radio and television, which were able to produce a similarly appealing spectacle much more conveniently and without some of the seediness that had crept into the art form in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A variety of other factors also saw to the decline of circus, including World War I and the Spanish Flu epidemic taking many able-bodied performers, the Great Depression sharply reducing people’s capacity to afford shows, and a growing worry about the safety of audience members at circus shows after some unfortunate accidents including fires and structural collapses (Cohen, 2012, p. 22). The American circus continued to

experience problems in the 1960s and 1970s because of the social climate of the time, as Albrecht (1995) outlines.

As if films and television did not give the American circus enough to contend with, the 1960s and 1970s brought even more: The Vietnam War, hippies, and a counterculture that rejected almost everything that smacked of traditional American values, including the traditional three-ring circus. Instead of spotlighting individual achievement and creativity, the circus, at least in the United States, with its emphasis on spectacle, came to be seen as promoting conspicuous consumption, an embodiment of an evil consumer culture (p. 4).

Additionally, with growing political controversy about the use of animals in circus performances, the art form no longer matched the desire of its audience; it had failed to evolve with the changing times.

During the decline of circus in the United States in this period, though, European circuses took place in a one-ring setting that emphasized “artistry and skill rather than spectacle and dare devilry” (Wilson, 2002, p. 23). The golden age of American circus had taken it down a very different path than that of the European circus, which was just as popular, but was not as motivated by such manic commercialism. Among other differences, this distinction gave it a different tone from its American counterpart, the general public appreciated it in a different way, and it did not experience the same fall from grace that the American circus had. This is important to the American circus because in the 1960s a number of North American artists separately adventured to Europe and experienced the circuses and street performance there, which helped them define their practice upon returning (Cohen, 2012, p. 23). A European circus artist named Alexis Gruss influenced these artists, with his circus that redefined the form away from being “an example of commercialism at its worst” and back to a more musical and theatrical place that did

not involve animals (Wilson, 2002, p. 28). Americans like Hovey Burgess, Larry Pisoni, and Paul Binder followed suit, helping to bring the European style of circus to America, shedding the three-ring circus structure in favor of one ring, so that all audience members could experience the main spectacle and focus on “the power of the human being” (p. 29). Another important figure who followed the lead of the European circus was Guy Laliberté, a Canadian street performer who went on to create Cirque du Soleil, today’s hugely innovative and most commercially successful circus organization. From Cirque’s creation, the circus arts only grew all over the world with new circus companies big and small appearing across the Americas, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Africa.

As these “first-generation” performers grew older in the 1980s and shifted their focus from performing to educating the next generation of performers, the United States saw a boom of youth circus programs, many of which have developed into respectable and high-quality institutions that serve as the first step toward a professional circus career for many children. Still, the country lacks the conservatory-style, degree-granting circus education programs of Europe and Canada that have become standard requirements for those auditioning for professional circus companies around the world. This gap in the United States will be discussed later.

2.5: Trends in Circus History

Before moving on to the modern day, there are some threads that trace through many different eras of circus history that deserve mention. Circus has been an innovative art since its inception, yet not explicitly presented in the prior

historical survey of circus's development are the innovations that occurred outside of the three rings. One of the most noteworthy of these innovations is the equality present on the stage (or in the arena, as it were) that was present all the way back to the ancient Roman circus. Speaight (1980) pointed out that one of the aspects of ancient performances that should be noted "is that women and men performed equally in their shows" (p. 12). Even in the period when women were legally not allowed to be performers in the mid-16th century in England, there were still women performers (who were met with a degree of contempt, but still performed and toured). Stoddart (2000) also points out that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States, women had just as much (if not more) of an opportunity to become incredibly well paid stars that enjoyed a celebrity status stronger than early film stars (pp. 56-58). The same sort of celebrity was also possible in Europe, exemplified by Madame Saqui in France, who rose from teaching herself rope walking to performing for Napoleon, owning her own 500-seat theater, and being one of the most celebrated circus artists of her time (Wall, 2013, pp. 138-143). Jando (2008) captures how important this gender equality was:

At a time when female sexuality and physical culture were often repressed by the prevailing religious and conservative social mores, the circus did something that no other performing art was able to achieve: It welcomed women for who they were, gave them career opportunities, let them exhibit their bodies and physical strength in public, and managed to do all this without losing one inch of its – and their – respectability. (p. 167).

The importance from the equality comes from the fact that talent was more treasured than social norms of the time, which is a progressive idea for many of the eras in which the circus arts existed. Because circus often existed on the fringes of mainstream society, it was able to enact practices like this. And it went beyond

gender diversity: circus acts included more racial diversity much earlier than other art forms (though often in a problematically tokenizing way, due to the focus on exoticism-as-spectacle, especially in the United States). Still, in 1886 in France for example, one of the most famous clown duos was Footit & Chocolat, an unlikely duo of an English son of an equestrian and a Cuban-born man with parents of African descent. Their acts would be incredibly inappropriate by today's standards, though many historians maintain that "the act was less about race and more about the shifting class standards of the period" (Wall, 2013, pp. 223-224).

Another innovation of the circus is its willingness to participate in technological pioneering. As earlier mentioned, circuses took great advantage of the American railroad to improve their business model and provide the precedent for other arts organizations to participate in similar tours. Circus companies also sat on the cutting edge of other technologies. For example, as Stoddart (2000) says, "the fact that the circus was the first American show to be electrically illuminated is testimony...to its popularity and cultural significance at the time" (p. 35). Its implementation of electric lighting also paved the way for it to be an early participant in and experimenter with emerging cinema and video projection technologies (which would, somewhat ironically, replace the circus for a time) further demonstrating Stoddart's claims about its popularity and cultural significance.

Something that Astley imbued into the circus as he was creating his own show was an innovative sense of marketing. Because of his incessant advertising, Stoddart argues that circus was "comparatively highly commercialized from the

start,” (p. 14) though many circus artists would likely balk at the idea. These marketing innovations can be seen years later as P.T. Barnum employed some advertising techniques that would today be called guerrilla marketing. For example, he had a man set up four bricks on four adjacent street corners and took a fifth in a circle, systematically replacing each brick with another. After a time, a large crowd had gathered, curious about the nature of the stunt, which the man led into the nearby Barnum American Museum, where the crowd would buy tickets to see the resolution of the “trick,” (which never resolved) (p. 54). Other techniques he used to market his museum included hiring a terrible brass band to play at all hours of the day to attract people to see the source of the din. At night, he advertised with Drummond lights, which was the first time outdoor lighting was used for advertising in such a way (Wall, 2013, p. 196). These marketing innovations are also related to circus’s willingness to embrace new technologies so that they could be among the first businesses to have advertisements boasting the use of the “Immortal Electric Light!” or claiming that the spectacle is “Worth Travelling 1,000 Miles to Look at!” (Stoddart, 2000, pp. 35-36).

2.6: Defining the Circus Today

Of course, these innovations did not save the circus in the United States from an era of unpopularity in the middle of the century (it is important to note that returning to a spirit of innovation in the 1960s and 70s is part of what helped bring circus back into a place of relevance). But where does this leave the American circus today? From all of this background, the American circus is very much in a stage of growth, definition, and redefinition. The number of people participating in the form

more for recreational and fitness reasons is growing, yet so is the demand for deep, artistic instruction and education. What this means for the sector as a whole is still unclear, but many of the people interviewed for this research project identified a feeling that the American circus is getting close to the point of big change. Adam Woolley of Circus Now said, “I haven’t seen a performing art poised to have as much success as circus could have since hip hop in the early 90s” (Woolley, February 6, 2016, personal communication). If history is any indication, there is a whole expanse of possibilities on the horizon and it’s going to take the concerted efforts of a group of passionate and visionary individuals to effect a huge change on the entire sector. Of course, the context and infrastructure around hip hop in the early 90s was incredibly different than what circus has now, which is why taking a broad view of the sector and analyzing its context and infrastructure broadly in light of the form’s complex history is necessary. It shows us not only what is happening now but also could help to show what is developing now that could be happening five, ten, or twenty years from now.

What this historical survey does not indicate, though, is what it means to practice the circus today – it does not firmly define what the circus is today. Over the centuries of its development, various different practices, practitioners, and venues have constituted the main elements of the broad and vague term “circus arts,” which continues to develop. In his day, Philip Astley’s equestrian variety show was certainly the most prevalent and “mainstream” version of the circus, but that kind of performance today would seem dated to many. Indeed, the fact that that style of performance was no longer relevant to the public is what prompted artists to push

the art form in a new direction in the 1960s and 1970s. Still, there was and still is a group of people who resisted the redefinition and opted instead to continue to perform and refine the older form. From there, it is apparent that there are at least two different kinds of circus: the kind that occurred before the redefinition and everything created after. This distinction is largely accepted by circus scholars. The style of circus originated by Astley and later cemented into the American public's psyche by the likes of the The Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey is known as traditional circus. What happened after the redefinition was known for a time as "new circus," but is now largely called contemporary circus.

If one asks the average American what they think of when they think of the circus, they will probably describe the traditional circus: a highly-structured spectacle show taking place in a tent with three rings; a cast of familiar characters like a ringmaster, clowns, and various daredevils; and other attractions like trained animals or side shows like knife throwing or walking on glass. Another notable aspect of the traditional circus is its dynastic structure. Until the advent of circus schools in the 20th century, people interested in learning circus arts either had to be born into circus families or travel to join a circus and learn there. In this way, families created and maintained many traditional circus companies and the vehicle of learning circus arts was through a "mentorship and apprenticeship" structure (Cohen, 2012, p. 48). This is where the term "running away to the circus" originated. Interestingly enough, the first circus school that broke this structure was created by the Soviet Union in Moscow in 1927 in an effort to take state control of the art and "elevate the art" (Wall, 2013, p. 32). Albrecht (1995) notes the irony of this

development in that “the effect of such a school was, after all, to democratize the profession. With the advent of professional schools, anyone with the proper talents, inclination, and determination could become a circus performer” (p. 162). Still, the traditional circus persists as an appealing form to a variety of performers and audience members who find themselves employed or attending shows by Barnum and Bailey or the Ringling Brothers.

The movement away from the traditional circus in the 1970s retroactively gained the title of “new circus” or *cirque nouveau*. This is an imperfect title because it describes as “new” something that had been happening for years before the movement, and because it assumes that everyone was producing similar kinds of art at that time, which was not the case. Some artists modified traditional circus practices and still performed with animals or presented similar skills and tricks, just reconceived in a new context. Others took a huge departure and made their works gritty and politically charged. In the 1980s, the French Circus Archaos, for example, “told the history of Brazil, including its slave rebellion, through Capoeira dancing set to heavy metal” (Wall, 2013, p. 260). In spite of all of these differences, they had one important commonality: “they all began with the specific intention of reinventing the circus in some form” (Cohen, 2012, p. 49). And in spite of the broad scope of the new circus, there were some aesthetic characteristics that defined the movement: “a theme or loose narrative tying the acts together, ensemble created and performed acts, and the nonexistent or limited use of animals” (p. 51). The focus on spectacle and just stringing together impressive skills also shifted to exploring the circus as a means of artistically expressing something about oneself or society.

New circus, however, is largely viewed just as a transitional period in circus's development. Today, most agree that we are in the era of "contemporary circus," a broad term that is not without disagreements and problems. On one hand, it is a helpful (though not all that descriptive) term that is a simple way of indicating the collection of circus art being created in the contemporary era. However, this problematically puts organizations creating traditional circus in the same category as organizations that have sought to move beyond it, which seems contrary to the point of defining different movements within the art. Cohen (2012) defines contemporary circus in terms of the education a professional performer has received: "the possibility to opt into an established system of circus education of at least three years of comprehensive training which prepares an artist for a career in contemporary circus performance" (p. 56). This definition works for Cohen's study, which focused on education and educational institutions, but is not as effective for the focus of this project. Tying the definition of an art form to a level of educational achievement creates artificial barriers of entry and discounts a wide range of practitioners at different skill levels. Someone who has just started taking ballet classes, for example, is still dancing the same genre of dance as a professional, conservatory-trained ballerina. Another problem with this definition is the fact that the United States has no such three-year professional circus school, which means that the artistic output of the entire country (excepting art by those who have traveled abroad for school and then returned to perform) does not register as contemporary circus. Given that this project is about the contemporary circus in the United States, that definition simply does not fit.

2.7: The Contemporary Circus

Still, it is difficult to define a contemporary art form because doing so is trying to give a name to a current movement, when these sorts of titles and definitions tend to emerge after the fact as critics, scholars, and practitioners view the movement's overall themes and styles in hindsight. As pointed out before, falling back on the easy definition of "what is happening now" does not fit either because there was such an intentional effort to redefine the circus away from the traditional form. Woolley (personal communication, February 6, 2016) offers a helpful perspective on what contemporary circus aesthetics tend to include: minimalism in costuming, stage, and character; a focus on the performer as herself, with just her skills; and an incorporation of expressive movement and modern dance. The contemporary circus also tends to have moved from the one-ring structure to the proscenium stage, borrowing from dance and theatre and responding to the unrealistic costs of touring tent shows. Of course, these characteristics are not universal (many contemporary circuses have featured performers with intricate costumes and heavy makeup for example), but they are useful as a guiding framework. These aesthetic tendencies are also helpful for articulating why traditional circus is not contemporary circus and also why many within the contemporary circus do not include Cirque du Soleil as an example of it. This is not to delegitimize the work of traditional circuses and Cirque du Soleil – who produce high quality work and have done so much for raising the international profile of circus to a larger audience – but rather to add plurality to the circus sector. Circus, like dance, has a variety of styles, and one of Woolley's hopes for the sector is that,

when a layperson is told that someone is a circus artist, they ask, “wow, what kind of circus?” (Woolley, February 6, 2016, personal communication).

Beyond aesthetic considerations, there are also a number of activities included in the contemporary circus landscape. The introduction mentioned Circus Now’s State of the Circus survey, which included 28 different circus activities and an “other” option. Even though the survey was open to all kinds of practitioners including traditional circus artists, almost all of their different activities could be included in the purview of this study. The only exceptions are “equestrian arts” and “sideshow skills” which are more components of the traditional circus (only 2%, or 11 respondents, indicated participation in equestrian arts, and 4%, or 25, practiced sideshow skills). Cohen (2012) offers an expansion and organization of contemporary circus activities by categorizing them. The categories are as follows:

- **Aerial apparatus**, which includes a variety of apparatus including static trapeze, flying trapeze, swinging trapeze, single point trapeze, doubles trapeze, corde lisse, Spanish web, hammock, sling, net, and fabric (alternative names for this apparatus are tissu, ribbon, and chiffon).
- **Juggling**, which includes scarves, bean bags, balls, bounce balls, clubs, rings and a variety of invented props of diverse shapes and sizes.
- **Prop manipulation**, which includes diabolo, devil sticks, hula hoop, contact juggling, shaker cups, cigar boxes, and poi.
- **Equibristics**, which includes rolling globe, tight wire, object balancing, plate spinning, stilting, unicycling, walking ladder, German gym wheel, Cyr wheel, Chinese pole and rolla bolla.
- **Acrobatics**, which includes tumbling, hand to hand, adagio, acrobalance, contortion, trampoline, and hand balancing.
- A variety of **clowning** techniques and styles.
- Physical theatre, yoga, voice, movement, mime, drama, and music are often integral to circus performance and training (pp. 6-7).

Because I could not view performances of every organization included in this study, I combined Woolley’s aesthetic framework with Cohen’s categories to

establish a definition for inclusion. Thus, for this project, I am defining contemporary circus as follows:

A branch of the art separate from traditional circus that focuses on one or many of the activities listed above while tending toward one or many of Woolley’s defined aesthetics: a degree of minimalism; a focus on the individual or individuals performing (as opposed to ensemble); an incorporation of expressive movement, modern dance, and/or theatre; and performances occurring in diverse venues instead of just rings.

Organizations and artists that create and present this kind of circus are contemporary circus organizations and artists. My initial goal in this study was observing and articulating the more “emergent” part of the sector, which is why I settled on such a definition of “contemporary circus.” Still, I wanted to be inclusive and broad as possible to get the widest possible view of the sector, so my definition is similarly broad. As stated earlier, defining the characteristics of an era of an art form as it is developing is difficult, and definitions cannot possibly specifically include every emergent aspect of it. This requires these definitions that emerge *in medias res* to be more general than specific. It should also be noted that practicing contemporary circus is not mutually exclusive with practicing traditional circus; some organizations have performance seasons that include both styles of performance, and many artists are equipped to do either to maximize their hiring potential. Thus, a variety of organizations and individuals included in this study practice traditional circus to some extent.

2.8: Conclusion

It is my hope, though, that this historical survey will show the foundation on which the contemporary circus rests, while indicating that just as modern dance, ballet, hip hop, and all other forms of dance can coexist in the greater performing

arts landscape, so too can the various forms of circus. Because the contemporary circus is so emergent, though, it deserves the extra analysis that circus historians have made sure to perform on the traditional circus's behalf. Plus, it is now the contemporary circus in the United States that has huge potential for growth in its future. It is necessary, then – now that we know where it came from in the past – to look at where it is in the present.

Chapter 3: The Circus Sector – Downstream Infrastructure

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the circus arts have included – and continue to include – a large group of diverse activities, participants, and supporting institutions and infrastructure. Especially when compared to other performing art forms, the scope of circus can seem dauntingly broad – what does a member of an informal, amateur juggling troupe have in common with the artistic director of a for-profit circus production company? That seeming disconnect is exacerbated in an era when artistic definitions and boundaries for circus are still shifting and cementing. In the dance world, one of circus' closest analogues, there are much clearer lines between different styles, along with well-understood advancement tracks for those seeking artistic or administrative careers in that sector, making it easy for people both within and without the dance world to at least conceive of the larger organizational, institutional, and structural connections and interrelations it contains. In contrast, while circus as an art form is not new, and there was at one time a relatively well-defined circus sector in the United States (during the “golden age”), today's sector is emergent and developing; it demands a closer analysis.

3.1: The Creative Sector

In the past decade, there has been much published on arts administration and cultural policy research about the creative economy and its related sectors, cities, and industries. The references to these ideas “reflect a common belief in the importance of innovation as an essential engine of economic and social development and integral to community and personal satisfaction in the emerging global knowledge-based economy” (Cherbo et al., 2008, p. 9). In talking about the creative

economy, researchers approach the broad set of artistic activities going on in a certain place and seek to understand them as an interrelated sector that influences communities and the greater society, like the healthcare sector or the finance sector.

In recent years, the arts, taken in the aggregate, are coming to be understood as a distinct societal sector – a cluster of related arts and arts-related industries that require for production a pool of talented and skilled individuals who, along with ancillary organizations, provide products and services integral to the workings of the creative industries. (p. 9).

This is what is meant when researchers refer to the “creative sector.” A sectorial approach like this is useful for a variety of reasons. Internally, it helps sector participants better conceive of how individual and organizational actions and development fit into a larger contextual whole. Additionally, it allows them to see previously unknown support infrastructure, possibilities for collaboration and growth, as well as larger sectorial trends. Externally, conceiving of the creative sector helps the greater public understand how the sector works along with a case for how it influences communities and economies. With this new understanding, the arts become more accessible, and this public might be more likely to support the arts as audience members, donors, grant makers, and participants themselves.

Because it includes all artistic activities, the creative sector is incredibly broad. Wyszomirski’s (2008) conception of it includes performing arts, museums and heritage, cultural and entertainment industries, literary publishing, architecture and design, visual arts and crafts, and informal arts (p. 14). While many of these categories might not have much in common with each other in appearance (a publisher is very different than an opera singer, and a publishing organization would look very different than an opera company), they all fall under the umbrella

of creative pursuits. It is in this way that the creative sector model can be useful to the circus arts, which is also very broad and contains many seemingly disparate activities under its umbrella. Wyszomirski's categories of artistic activities that make up the creative sector could be replaced with Cohen's (2012) categories of circus activities, and the resultant sectorial analysis would be a distilled version of the creative sector that indicates the functioning of the circus sector. This project does exactly that: it takes the existing creative sector analysis models and reduces them to analyze the circus sector as a microcosm of the greater creative sector.

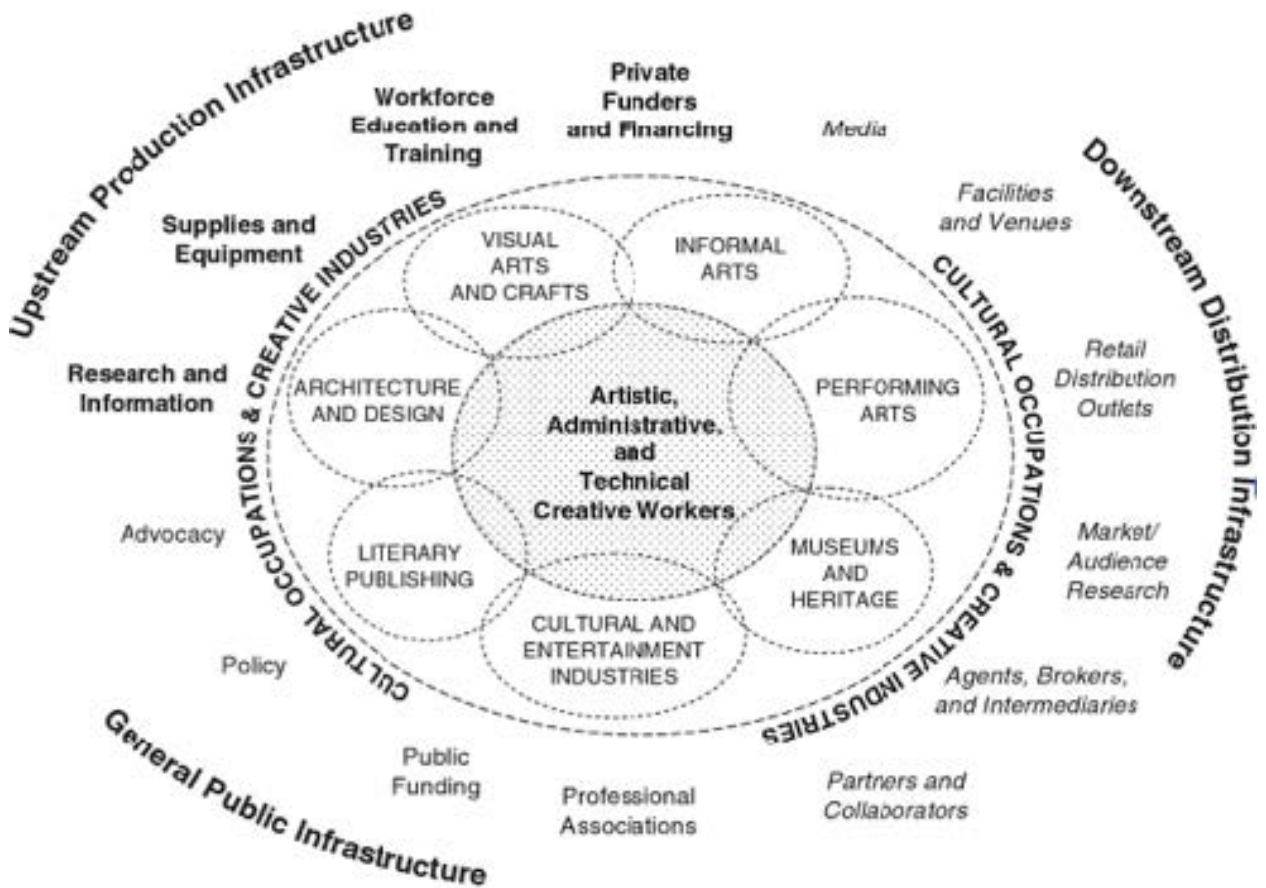


Figure 1: The Creative Sector. (Wyszomirski, 2008, p. 14)

In figure 1.1, Wyszomirski (2008) illustrates the creative sector. At the center are the people who create the artistic core of the sector with their work in all realms from artistic to administrative to technical, surrounding them are what they create and facilitate – the artistic activities that make up the sector, and on the outside are the “support systems” that make an “integral part of the infrastructure of the arts and creative sector” (Cherbo et al., 2008, p. 15). Taking it further, the support systems are categorized as “upstream production infrastructure,” or generally what the sector produces and provides for itself to continue its creative production and development; “downstream distribution infrastructure,” or what the sector produces for and presents to its consumers and its vehicles for reaching its markets; and “general public infrastructure,” encompassing public policy, funding, regulation, and advocacy (pp. 15-16).

These categorizations are helpful guides for mapping the flow of the sector, but they are not all mutually exclusive, and certain sectorial activities do not fit nicely into one category. Take education, for example. By the above definition, education activities would fall under upstream infrastructure, and are indeed explicitly stated to be included in that category: “the education, training, and professional development system that trains the creative workforce” (p. 15). However, as shown in earlier chapters, amateur circus classes are becoming more and more popular around the country for people who just want to try it as recreation, exercise, or a personal artistic hobby. In that way, education activities are not training the creative workforce, but are rather products that the sector offers to consumers similar to performances, which would make it part of the

downstream distribution infrastructure. However, there are education programs with set curricula and rigorous auditions that are training the next generation of professional circus performers, which would count as upstream infrastructure. Thus, the categories are helpful, but not perfect fits with the activities of the sector. Still, with something as broad and hard to define as circus, such categories are welcome guideposts.

3.2: The People of the Circus Sector

To begin unpacking the shape of the circus sector, this chapter will focus on the downstream distribution infrastructure. As an access point, talking about what the circus sector creates for an external audience before moving internally would be the most instructive, as it allows the stage to be set with the organizations and products that define the sector for most people. Before that, though, some time must be spent discussing the core of Wyszomirski's creative sector model and its manifestation in the circus sector: the people. Because circus as an art form has vague boundaries and is still in the process of defining itself, getting comprehensive data about circus sector participants is not easy. Furthermore, many people that create work for the sector do so in an informal context as freelance performers and teachers, volunteer administrators, and unincorporated performing groups, for example. Still, there is some data about the kinds of people participating in the circus sector.

The two main sources of data about United States circus sector participants are a State of Circus survey conducted by Circus Now, and a survey conducted for the purpose of this project. The latter survey asked specific questions about income

streams and will be covered later. Circus Now says in an introduction to their survey that “rough estimates have placed the number of people participating in circus in the US around 10,000, and that number is conservative” (State of Circus Survey, 2014).

How old are you?

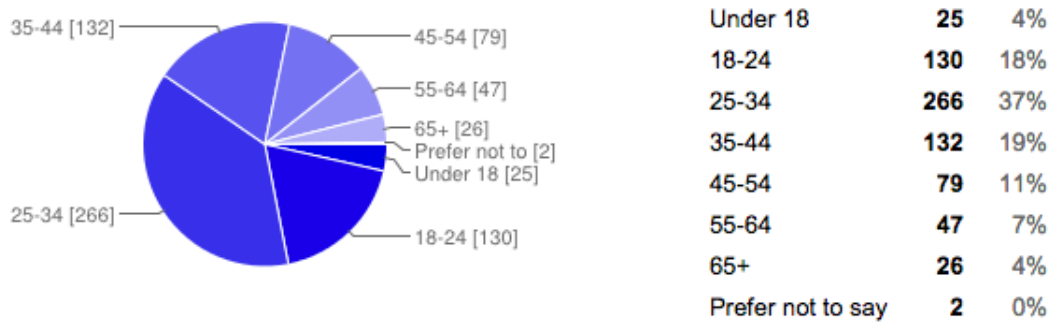


Figure 2: Circus Now Survey Respondent Ages (State of the Circus Survey, 2014)

Gender

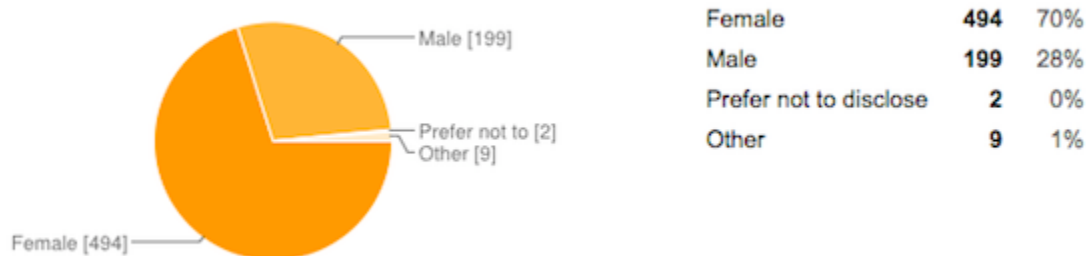


Figure 3: Circus Now Survey Respondent Genders (State of the Circus Survey, 2014)

What is your household income?



Figure 4: Circus Now Survey Respondent Incomes (State of the Circus Survey, 2014)

How many hours per week do you engage with circus (i.e. training, studying, attending shows, administering, writing about circus)?

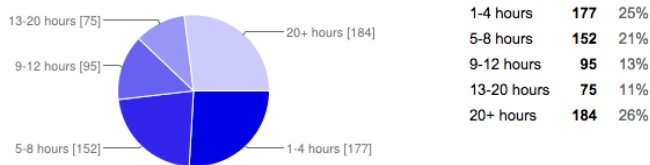


Figure 5: Circus Now Survey Respondent Hours of Participation (State of the Circus Survey, 2014)

How are you involved in circus?

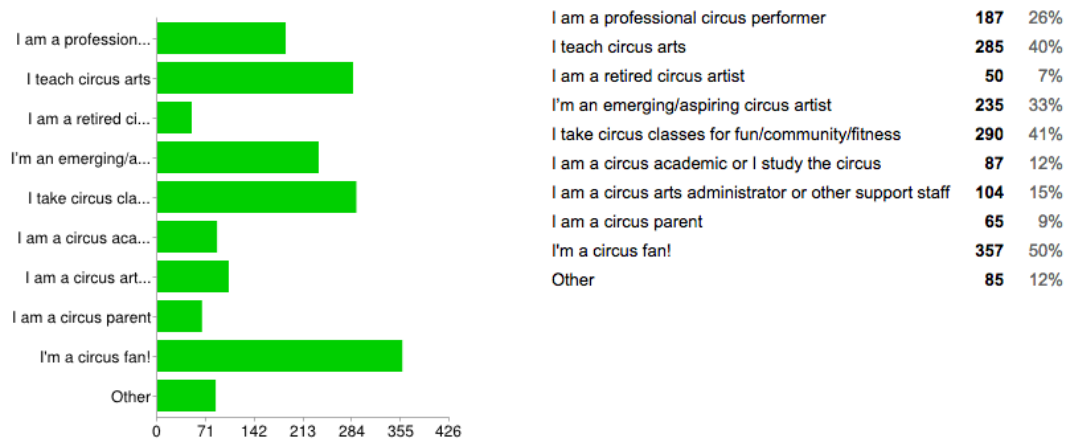


Figure 6: Circus Now Survey Respondent Forms of Involvement (State of the Circus Survey, 2014)

Their survey garnered slightly more than 700 responses, and was distributed online mostly over social media, so it presents an imperfect, but still interesting snapshot of circus participation. They found that most of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 44, with the largest share of responses coming from those in the 25-

34 range (37% of total respondents). Respondents were 70% female and 28% male, and a majority had a bachelor's degree or higher. As far as household income goes, there was a relatively even spread with 23% making less than \$25,000, 13% making \$25,000 to \$24,999, 11% making \$35,000 to \$49,999, 14% making \$50,000 to \$74,999, 14% making \$75,000 to \$99,999, and 17% making \$100,000 or more. For only 25% of respondents was circus their primary source of income (the survey conducted for this study went further into income streams, which will be discussed later). In spite of that low number, a full 37% of respondents said that they spend 13 to more than 20 hours a week engaging with circus (26% said they spent more than 20 hours a week). The next highest proportion was the 25% that spent 1 to 4 hours a week. When it comes to modes of participation, the majority came from the recreational side of the sector with 50% being circus fans, 41% saying they take circus for community/fun/fitness, and 40% saying they teach circus arts (presumably mainly for the prior two categories). Because there was the option to select multiple responses, there is no way to know where the overlap happened, but it is not hard to imagine that some portion of the teachers also made up the 26% of people that identified as professional circus artists. Still, these results correspond with Cohen's (2012) identification of the rapidly growing demand for circus classes for the general public. An interesting area of Circus Now's survey asked what part people most appreciate about their circus experience. The top three responses were "the opportunity for person growth" at 25%, "the sense of community/connection" at 22%, and "the artistic and/or entertainment value" at 18%. These responses would probably track well with other disciplines that ask a similar question of its

participants, just as Cherbo et al. (2008) pointed out that the arts are “integral to community and personal satisfaction,” and these responses seem to reflect that (p. 9).

As expected with such diverse art form as circus, the profile of the circus sector participant is similarly varied. It is expected that these participants skew younger, as circus tends to be such a physically demanding art form, though there are a variety of disciplines (juggling, object manipulation) that are more accessible to people of all ages. It is encouraging that there is such an even spread of participants across all incomes, suggesting that circus is appealing and accessible regardless of how much money one makes, and that the economic barriers to entry are low, which might be one of the reasons why so many people are trying it out. What perhaps is most interesting about these responses, though, is the clear distinction between those who participate in the circus in a more informal recreational way, and those that do so formally and professionally and what that means given that a vast majority did not identify circus participation as their main source of income. It is a distinction that the United States circus sector will have to continue to reconcile as it grows and questions arise (as they already have) about what it means to have a developing art form being taken in very different directions by people with different intentions and goals in practicing it. It brings up issues of definitions of art and artists and the hybridization of art forms that unfortunately are not contained deeply in the scope of this project.

Finally, another philosophical question arises about the definitions of participation. Because Circus Now included “circus fan” as an option in their forms

of participation responses, it implies that audience members are sector participants, which they are in a way. However, defining them as participants on the same level as sector workers presents problems for the distinctions between upstream and downstream infrastructure. If upstream infrastructure means services that support the sector itself and downstream means services and products that connect the sector with its markets, then audience members must be consumers (those who are at the end of the downstream distribution line) even if attending circus shows makes them a participant. Audience members and those who recreationally take circus classes are indeed sector participants, and crucial ones, but they participate outside the group of artists, administrators, researchers, technicians, etc. that form the core of the circus sector. Upstream infrastructure supports that core while downstream infrastructure is directed to these other participants like audience members and recreational students. This is another way to conceive of the recreational versus professional divide in the sector (which can be confusing when some professionals are not making the majority of their income from their circus activities).

3.3: Circus Organizations

In Cherbo et al.'s (2008) definition of downstream infrastructure, they identify it generally as “[connecting] the creative industries to their markets and consumers” (p. 15). With this definition in mind, this study will begin exploring the circus sector’s downstream infrastructure with circus organizations, as they are the main vehicles through which the sector connects with the public. However, they are not the only vehicles. A large group of individuals work as freelance artists and

teachers and run their own studios or offer their performance services for corporate and private events or to other companies. The products they offer are very similar to those that organizations offer and will be discussed later this chapter, and their financial structures will be discussed in the/ next chapter.

Like many art forms and organizations in general, circus organizations come in three major forms: nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations and unincorporated organizations. There are a variety of pros and cons that come with each model, along with some tendencies of organizational and leadership makeup. “Emerging circus companies and smaller circus companies tend to be nonprofits, while larger circus companies tend to be for-profit” (Wall, February 5, 2016, personal communication). Wall, who founded Circus Now and is familiar with a large variety of circus organizations, also pointed out that the disposition of an organization’s founder affects which structure the organization chooses, with those undaunted by the business side of running an organization tending more toward for-profits and those that are more artistically oriented choosing nonprofits. This is not to say that for-profit company founders have no artistic vision nor that nonprofit founders lack business acumen, rather that certain structures fit certain people and their goals better than others. To highlight the differences between these structures, each category comes with an example of a United States circus organization working in that model.

In Portland, Oregon, there is an aerial arts/dance organization called AWOL (Aerial Without Limits). As a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit, AWOL has a mission “to embody the notion of “aerial without limits” through presentation of world class

performances and educational opportunities that defy expectation, ignite inspiration, and foster creativity” (“AWOL About,” 2016). Another requirement that comes with their nonprofit status is having a board of directors, and AWOL’s consisted of four officers as of 2013 (“AWOL 2013 Form 990,” 2013). Additionally, being a nonprofit means that they can engage fully in public fundraising to support their activities, because any donor can write off their donation on their taxes as a charitable contribution (Byrnes, 2015, p. 460). From the “contribute” section of their page, they have the familiar, “ticket sales do not fully cover the cost of productions nor do tuition dollars fully fund our classes” (“Support AWOL,” 2016). Having to fundraise is a double-edged sword because an organization must always be investing its resources into its fundraising to continue to support itself, which can be a financially and personally stressful. On the other hand, the organization has the potential to undertake a variety of different kinds of campaigns based on its need and has a straightforward path to raise the necessary money. “One of the reasons we chose to be a nonprofit is so we could have that way to grow,” said Elsie Smith of NECCA (The New England Center for Circus Arts), who is currently undergoing a capital campaign to expand their building (Smith, March 21, 2016, personal communication). Additionally, fundraising allows the public to get involved in the organization beyond just buying tickets or coming to classes.

Hideaway Circus, based in New York, provides an example of a for-profit circus company. They present themselves as a “circus and theatrical production company founded to create innovative and engaging live entertainment” (“Hideaway Circus About,” 2016). The company is structured as a production

company, which means that each show that they create is its own company that is owned by the umbrella of Hideaway Circus. Because they are not nonprofit, they have to go about fundraising in a different way. “As part of our collaborative approach, we do allow accredited investors to back our theatrical and circus production,” says the “work with us” section of their website (2016). “The shows are open for qualified investors to invest in,” says Josh Aviner, CEO and Co-Founder of Hideaway Circus, “and we have a separate pool of investors for each production from the umbrella company” (Aviner, February 23, 2016, personal communication). Beyond having those investors, the company also reaches out to corporate sponsors and partners “to highlight our brands in new and exciting ways (“Hideaway Circus Work with Us,” 2016). As a good example of a difference between nonprofit and for-profit circus organizations, the language difference between the above support sections of AWOL and Hideaway Circus are particularly indicative. AWOL’s page talks about sharing aerial dance with the community, and how important individual gifts are to spreading the art (“AWOL Support,” 2016). Hideaway’s page, on the other hand, frames support around the idea of getting in on an exciting venture and growing the reach of a brand (“Hideaway Circus Work with Us,” 2016). Another difference comes in with what happens with a production’s profit after the show’s run. On the nonprofit side, the money goes back to the organization to pay off the costs of the production, with the leftovers being unrestricted funds for the organization to use at it pleases. On the for-profit side, the profits go to cover the costs of the show first as well, then it goes to paying of the show’s investors, and

then it finally goes back to the company (Aviner, February 23, 2016, personal communication).

Unincorporated companies are mostly a “none of the above” category that can take any number of forms, such as a group of performers from a local circus school or studio, or freelance artists that are hired to put on a show or perform for an event, but never incorporate as either a for-profit or a nonprofit. This structure provides the highest level of freedom, but offers none of the support structures or assumptions of legitimacy given to nonprofit and for-profit organizations. An example of this structure is a group of aerialists that I was involved with. We decided to use our extra time to put together a show over the course of half a year, which we then performed in our training space to a small audience. The budget for the show was incredibly small and mostly out-of-pocket, and we made a small profit (because there were so few expenses with putting on such a small-scale performance). In the end, we formed the group simply because we wanted to put on a performance, not because we had aspirations to better our community or make a large amount of profit. Each story of an unincorporated organization is probably different, but the uniting factor is choosing to work outside of established structures for ease, necessity, or freedom from the requirements for boards or profits.

It is important to note that these structures do not exist in a vacuum. That is, sometimes nonprofit circus schools can have an attached for-profit performance company, or a group of students from a for-profit studio might come together as an unincorporated organization to put together a onetime show, as outlined above. These relationships are usually based on a mutually-beneficial relationship. In the

case of a nonprofit school having a for-profit performance company, the nonprofit school can provide space and training for the members of the for-profit company, who in turn boost the profile of school through their performances, thus encouraging more support and enrollment. Additionally, this dual structure can allow continued performance opportunities for former performers who have transitioned to teaching (Smith, March 21, 2016, personal communication).

3.4: Educational Products

With the three different forms of circus organizations established as the foundation vehicle that supports the downstream distribution infrastructure of the sector, focus must now move to what it is that the sector actually distributes – what are circus “products?” Given that circus is a performing art, performances are the most obvious product of the sector and there are a variety of organizations and companies whose only product is performances. However, there is a subset of circus organizations on the for-profit and nonprofit side that take a two-part approach to their public offerings: performances and classes. Focus will begin on the educational products of the sector.

A good example is AWOL, who offers classes in different categories including skills classes in a variety of different aerial apparatuses and movement, conditioning classes like flexibility and aerial conditioning, and fitness classes like aerial yoga (“AWOL Classes,” 2016). These classes are available for people at all different skill levels from beginners to experienced performers looking to maintain their form. They are also specified for different age groups including kids classes, teen classes, and adult classes. The intended audience for the classes of many of these programs

is as broad as possible to encourage the widest participation. “Our oldest student is in her 80s!” said Elsie Smith of NECCA, whose community classes attract everyone “including 300-pound dads wanting to learn to juggle with their kids” (Smith, March 21, 2016, personal communication). Though the intended consumer demographic and specific classes that are offered vary from organization to organization (some focus only on children, or only on juggling, for example), offering educational programs is a reliable revenue source for organizations in the sector. Unfortunately, it is difficult to say precisely what percentage of revenue comes from educational programs for organizations that offer both classes and performances, due to the structure of revenue reporting in publically available financial documents like form 990s. Still, the proliferation of circus classes, especially aerial classes, should be an indication that the revenue is significant.

It is important to reiterate that as this chapter is focusing on downstream infrastructure, the above exploration of classes offered by organizations focuses on classes offered for recreational purposes. More specifically, this means that these classes are not geared toward students who are looking to become professional performers. This creates a tricky distinction, though, because some of these organizations (like AWOL) offer classes for advanced students that have been practicing circus for some time. These students can become advanced enough that they eventually form part of performance companies attached to the organization. Sometimes these performing companies can be a source of income for their members or springboards into professional training program. In that way, these classes are creating the sector workers and artists that form the core of the sectorial

structure, which would make them part of the upstream infrastructure. However, taken to its logical end, this line of thinking means that any sort of class, even recreational classes, could be considered upstream infrastructure because it could result in its students starting on a professional track and becoming sector workers. To make this distinction clearer, there are some programs that count as upstream infrastructure that have specifically outlined professional or pre-professional track programs, which will be covered in the next chapter. The rest of these classes can be considered as part of the downstream infrastructure, as they tend to fall under the mission of bringing circus arts to the larger community, even if some of the students end up becoming circus professionals. In the end, the difference between downstream classes and upstream classes comes in intention – if the class’s express purpose is to prepare students to become circus professionals, then it is part of the upstream infrastructure. Otherwise, it is part of the downstream infrastructure (which can be the first step for many potential professionals into the upstream professional-track classes).

To put their students’ circus training into context, though, organizations with educational programs offer performance opportunities that can be counted simultaneously as an educational product and a performance product. These performances can take a variety of forms and largely depend on the disciplines that are the specialization of the organization, but there are some commonalities. The most common practice is to present regular student recitals and showcases. Performances like this provide a venue both for first-time performers and for more seasoned students to present their work to the public. The production value of these

performances tends to be much smaller and they are usually structured more as a collection of individual acts rather than a cohesive show with narrative, though sometimes there is a uniting theme. Similar to this, organizations that teach children tend to put on a children's production that is a more full-length performance with narrative, characters, costumes, and higher production value.

These recitals, showcases, and kids shows often factor into a "season" of performances for the organization. As an example, Illuminar Aerial in Colorado has four performances in 2016 including a preview show, a showcase of their internship program that is "Heroes and Villains" themed (fitting the recital/showcase model presented above), a show put on by their professional company, and a children's show based on the professional show ("Illuminar Aerial Events," 2016). This sort of season structure is common among many educational/performance circus organizations where performances by different groups of students throughout the year supplement the higher-level offerings of the professional performance company, many of whose members are also teachers in the educational programs. This way, educational/performance organizations can gain income both from tuition and from ticket sales to the performances while simultaneously engaging the public both as audience members and as students.

A different style of educational/performance product of the sector is youth circus summer camps. Cohen (2012) has identified youth circus as one of the particularly booming areas of the circus sector, and this can be most easily exemplified through circus camps. One of the exemplary circus camps in the United States is the Circus Smirkus camp, founded in 1987 ("Circus Smirkus, Our Story,"

2016). Their camps are aimed at youth under the age of 18 and focus on skills including acrobatics, aerials, balance, juggling, clowning, pantomime, and more. They offer various different sessions depending on age and previous circus experience. The older and more advanced the attendees are, the more they work on creation of acts and performances, with most of the sessions ending in a showcase or performance. The showcases at the end of the most advanced sessions are created by the campers themselves (“Circus Smirkus, 2016).

3.5: Performances

The Illuminar Aerial example above provides a good transition into the more purely performance offerings of the sector. As mentioned above, many circus organizations, regardless of whether or not they offer educational programs, have a “professional” performing company. These corps of artists produce a variety of different kinds of performances. It should be noted that even though these performance companies tend to be called “professional,” it does not necessarily mean that all of their artists are solely circus professionals. In this context, the term “professional” more designates a level of artistic achievement and performance experience, rather than denoting that the artists’ sole job is performing (individual income streams and professions will be discussed next chapter). Many professional performance troupes, like Illuminar Aerial’s, produce an annual show with high production value that the organization can use as its central staged-show offering. These annual performances can be staged shows, like Illuminar’s, or they can take place in a wide variety of other venues. AWOL’s annual show, Art in the Dark,

converts an outdoor, forested park into a multi-disciplinary circus performance space, for example (“AWOL, Art in the Dark,” 2016).

Performing at these annual shows is not the only performance product offered by professional performance troupes. A style of performance known as “ambient performance” is a common activity that can be lucrative for troupes and individuals. Ambient performance is when an individual or group of artists are hired to perform as part of an event, often a corporate party or gala. These performances can be simply providing background entertainment in the form of improvised movement while people mingle, to performing a choreographed piece as part of a program. These gigs are easy for performance companies to produce and book, as they often do not need to prepare any work, and can show up and improvise sequences of skills they know. Seasoned performers that make up performance companies grow to understand which skills work for ambient performances and can improvise appropriately. Even for more demanding gigs that require a choreographed act with group pieces, performance troupes tend to have a bank of past pieces and routines that they can easily draw on and adapt for any event or venue. Aloft Circus in Chicago, for example, has many products available for a wide range of different audiences and occasions: “With a one-off feature act at a corporate or private event, Aloft will leave the audience thrilled and begging for more!” (“Aloft About,” 2016). Aloft’s featured acts for hire highlight the multi-disciplinary talents of their performing troupe including solo and duo aerial acts on many different apparatuses, contortion, clowning, tightwire, hand balancing, acro balancing, Cyr wheel, and many more (“Aloft Featured Acts,” 2016). This structure also works for

more specifically focused organizations like the Ann Arbor Juggling Arts Club, who have a section on their website for inquiries into hiring jugglers for any kind of event (“Ann Arbor Juggling Arts Club Performers,” 2016).

3.6: Touring and Presenting

While ambient performance is common among circus organizations (most organizations with a professional company that I researched for this project featured some form of ambient performance information on their website), a less common form for circus organizations is touring and presenting, in which circus artists and organizations create a show that travels to a variety of locations to be performed in many different venues. Touring and presenting can be a tricky area to navigate for circus companies (who are used to working either independently, or with others familiar with the form) because there are already established systems in place through the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (APAP) and regional performing arts service organizations like Arts Northwest (ANW). These service organizations do not focus solely on circus, but rather provide resources for performing arts organizations in general, and would mostly count as providing services in the upstream infrastructure of the circus sector (and the larger creative sector, as well). Still, some of these arts service organizations hold annual booking conferences where artists of all disciplines, presenters, and agents convene to seek each other’s services, which would be another vehicle of product distribution in the downstream infrastructure. Arts Northwest presents a good summary of booking conferences:

Presenters of the performing arts will discover untapped resources, ideas and inspiration. Performers / artist's management have a medium that

allows them access to the presenting organizations and individuals throughout the northwest, and helps get them in front of the audience most capable of booking them into the western U.S. market! (“ANW Booking Conference About,” 2016)

These conferences give circus artists and organizations the opportunity to present their product to booking managers in a certain region, or in the whole country, and begin to develop relationships and performances as part of a tour. This structure is also particularly useful for circus because people outside the circus sector tend to have an inaccurate preconceived notion about what circus is. “Smaller, theater-based circus shows attend [the APAP conference], which helps road presenters understand what they’re offering. Most people like circus disciplines, but some have negative connotations with words like “circus,” or “clown,”” explains Josh Aviner of Hideaway Circus, who has attended these conferences (Aviner, February 23, 2016, personal communication). As the circus arts grow more mainstream, these conferences could become a growing dimension of the field. Seasoned presenting organizations have a variety of different versions of the same show to accommodate whatever presenting requirements there might be. Aloft Circus, for example offers three full-length shows and one 20-40 minute show (“Aloft Original Shows,” 2016), while Do Jump! in Portland offers their show “Ahhh HA!” either in one act or two (“Do Jump! Touring,” 2016). Through these booking conferences, circus performers not only get the opportunity to help presenters and venue managers understand what their product actually is, but also the exposure offered through showcases helps them book gigs, build touring schedules, and build their general exposure.

Not all organizations that tour and present access these vehicles for doing so, though. On one hand, it can be limiting because organizations must create circus

products that presenters would be confident have high earning potential; the show must be accessible for a wide audience, which can get in the way of some companies' artistic vision. "Large commercial shows tend not to use presenters, they self-present," says Aviner. "The advantage is that if you have enough money, you can do whatever you want. The problem is it takes a whole lot of money to support that kind of infrastructure. Depending on the scale of the show, you probably need to have \$5 million in the bank for a large tented tour" (Aviner, 2016). As an aside, many circus researchers agree that this is one of the reasons that the contemporary circus has taken on the minimal aesthetic of modern dance: with few performers and minimal costumes and sets, shows are more affordable both for the company and for the presenter in a wider variety of venues on tour.

Generally, circus tours are regional and not national – only the mega-companies like Cirque and Ringling Brothers do extensive and consistent national touring (Aviner, 2016). Most of the other circus companies that do regular performance tours stick to a certain region of the country surrounding their home state. It is much more affordable to stay nearby to an organization's home state, and presenters in the same region can utilize booking tactics like block booking to maximize their presentation season. Block booking is when an adjacent market books a performance happening in a nearby market around the same time to encourage the artist to travel and make more money. This is supported by the fact that many booking conferences focus on just one region of the country, like the Arts Northwest Booking Conference or the Arts Midwest Conference, so the presenters in that region can work together to strategically book acts.

3.7: Festivals

Circus festivals are another style of performance that are growing in popularity and number in the United States. Like many other aspects of the sector, festivals are at once downstream and upstream infrastructure. On one hand, they provide a venue for many circus performances, but they also can have aspects of professional development and other forms of sectorial support. New on the scene but quickly growing is the Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival (CCCF), which is its own nonprofit. Its mission is “to educate the American circus artist by bringing them to the level required for competition internationally and to elevate the perception of and promote the artistic view of circus performance in America” (“About CCCF,” 2016). The first part of their mission and its corresponding master class programming aimed at working circus artists would count as upstream infrastructure, but promoting “the artistic view of circus performance in America” necessarily means performing circus for a large public, which is downstream infrastructure. The performances featured in the most recent festival took place in venues across Chicago and included juggling, aerial, burlesque, acrobatics, hand balancing, clowning, trick cycling, physical comedy, and many more presented by a variety of different national and international artists and companies (“CCCF Performances,” 2016).

Another large festival is the American Youth Circus Festival, put on by AYCO (The American Youth Circus Organization). “Every two years, hundreds of circus youth and circus coaches gather from all across the United States for the American Youth Circus Festival. This five-day event is comprised of over 150 workshops, two

showcases, and plentiful social events and community building opportunities” (“AYCO Festival Description,” 2016). As the name suggests, this festival is geared specifically toward circus performers under the age of 21 and their coaches. Again, many aspects of the festival fall under upstream infrastructure, but the showcases performance are downstream (and some of them even occur at CCCF). The performances include individuals and organizations and “aim to be inclusive and reveal the diversity of the youth circus community” (AYCO, 2016).

Circus Now, a national organization that will be covered more next chapter created their own festival-like event as well. In 2015, they put on an event in conjunction with the APAP conference (mentioned above) to raise the profile of circus artists and performances to presenters. The event, “Circus Now: International Circus Exposure” or CN-ICE for short, lasted for three days and was “a combination showcase and festival...[including] nine companies from the U.S. and abroad, each performing an excerpt of a full-length work to an audience of international presenters and the New York City public” (“CN-ICE,” 2015). Not only was one of the goals to bring high-quality circus to the New York public, but also to help develop relationships between circus performers and presenters, so more presenters feel confident in programming circus performances into tours and presenting seasons.

Not all festivals are so broad in scope; some festivals are more regionally based or focused on one discipline. Examples of this include the Tucson Juggling Festival, which is a venue for jugglers to get together simply to juggle; the Pacific Fire Gathering, a festival in the northwest focusing on flow arts; or the annual World Clown Association Convention, where clowns unite to perform and compete in a

variety of categories (“Tucson Juggling Club,” 2016; “Pacific Fire Gathering,” 2016; “World Clown Association,” 2016). In some ways, the internationally famous Burning Man Festival in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada could be considered in part a circus festival as there are a number of circus performances that happen throughout and a prevalent circus community, even though the greater focus of the festival is not circus (Cohen, 2012, p. 14).

3.8: Social Circus

The final product of the circus sector covered in this chapter is one that has been gaining acclaim both from within the sector and without: social circus. “Social Circus is using the teaching and performing of circus arts to motivate social change by building character in individuals and bridges between communities” says Jessica Hentoff, Artistic/Executive Director of Circus Harmony, one of the foremost social circus organizations in the United States (Hentoff, March 16, 2016, personal communication). The way that social circus organizations achieve these social changes through circus depends on the community in which they work and the populations they serve. Circus Harmony, for example, began as an organization that brought Jewish and Muslim children together from neighboring temples to form Circus Salaam Shalom to bridge the communities. Since then, they hugely expanded the number of students they serve and the number of the performances they offer (“from 10 students to over 600, and from 40 shows a year to over 400!” said Hentoff). The students of circus harmony come from a huge swatch of different religious and ethnic backgrounds and over 70% are from low-income families (Hentoff, March 16, 2016, personal communication). St. Louis, where Circus

Harmony is based, has some problem with segregation in areas, but Hentoff firmly believes that “if you give kids a common language – circus – and a common goal – to put on a show – then they take it from there and break down the barriers themselves.” Her belief has certainly paid off and has resulted not only in a more unified circus community, but also in many of her students going on to become professional circus artists, some gaining international acclaim. Two former students are currently performing with Seven Fingers of the Hand, a highly regarded circus company based in Canada. Their hoop diving piece is based on their experience growing up black in St. Louis, and the hoops they had to go through to get out (Hentoff, March, 16, 2016, personal communication).

The Circus Project in Portland, Oregon provides another example of how social circus effects social change based on the needs of the community. Portland has a large homeless population and The Circus Project “[provides] specialized training to homeless and at-risk youth with a therapeutic approach, free of cost, by utilizing the unique appeal of circus arts to impart essential life skills such as self-care, discipline, communication, and accountability” (“The Circus Project Social Circus,” 2016). They partner with different human services agencies such as The Boys & Girls Club to provide their circus programming to “a wide range of youth at risk, including homeless/parentless youth, foster children, victims of domestic violence, victims of sexual and physical abuse, and youth suffering from mental and emotional disorders” (The Circus Project, 2016). Additionally, they also go out into the community to provide circus classes to low-income schools with little to no artistic or athletic programming for their students. Their website features

testimonials from their participants that sum up the hugely positive impact social circus can have:

The Circus Project has been the turning point in my life. It gave me a sense of hope and purpose and wonder again. I turned everything around in a matter of months: I moved inside after 4 years of living on the streets. I quit drinking and smoking. When I'm on the trapeze, it's the place where all my scattered pieces come together; the meeting place of body, mind and spirit (The Circus Project, 2016).

3.9: Conclusion

What this all indicates is a downstream production infrastructure that is varied, dynamic, and still growing and changing. Circus artists and organizations in the United States are producing classes, performances, and programs not only to delight the public (as many people think is the main aim of the circus) but also to artistically inspire a large group of people, and in some cases even use the art form as a vector to address the challenges facing their communities. It is also clear that the boundaries in Wyszomirski's creative sector model become blurred in the exploration of many of these products. Indeed, by distributing such a large range of different sectorial products, circus workers are also endeavoring to improve the sector in a variety of ways, exemplified by "[elevating] the perception...of the circus arts" being the motivating factors behind the Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival's performances ("About CCCF," 2016). Performances are certainly downstream infrastructure, but using them to better public perception of the sector could be seen as upstream infrastructure. The next chapter explores upstream infrastructure and provides some helpful boundaries between the two directions of sectorial production.

Chapter 4: The Circus Sector – Upstream Infrastructure

For many sectors, it is often easier to organize and describe the downstream distribution infrastructure, as a sector's products are more visible, widely-spread, and quantifiable. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the circus sector is no exception: its main products of performances, classes, festivals, camps, and social circus are enjoyed by a wide public and, as the "face" of the sector, are helping to bring the art form into greater prominence both within the creative sector and in the country as a whole. However, this public face would not be able to persist and grow without continuous support of people and systems tirelessly working "behind the scenes" to provide the training, funding, equipment, and other services that constitute the growing foundation of the sector. This support network is the "upstream production infrastructure" (Cherbo et al., 2008, p 15).

Contrary to the downstream distribution infrastructure, which connects the sector with its markets through products and the organizations that serve as vehicles for the distribution of those products, the upstream infrastructure is more inward-facing. In Cherbo et al.'s words (2008), it "provides equipment and supplies to the creative industries and encompasses the network of private funders and services that provide financial support; the education, training, and professional development system that trains the creative workforce; and research and information services" (p. 15). As in the previous chapter, what exactly is included as upstream production infrastructure is modified to fit more with the realities of the United States circus sector. For example, the circus sector is an emergent one, which means that there are not as many official funding streams available for circus artists

and organizations as there are available for, say, symphonies. The specific funding sources are covered later in this chapter. Still, in spite of a tendency toward more unofficial and developing upstream infrastructure, there are a variety of vibrant elements that make it up that are only growing.

4.1 Education and Training

To begin covering the upstream infrastructure, this chapter starts with the education of the sector's workers, as this area provides the context and boundaries that differentiate the education products of last chapter and the education training that is relevant to this chapter. In talking about the education of circus artists (probably the largest section of sector workers), it is necessary to widen to an international focus. The introduction to this project talked about how the United States has fallen behind in the presence of educational offerings compared with places like Canada, Western Europe, and Australia. How that specifically manifests is in the United States' lack of any conservatory-style educational institution that offers "comprehensive training, which prepares an artist for a career in contemporary circus performance" (Cohen, 2012, p. 56). Cohen goes on to describe what is generally included in these "professional training programs" for circus artists:

Students in a professional training program generally spend the first year training in strength and flexibility, and the subsequent years developing an understanding of and foundation in all of the circus disciplines, reaching an impressively advanced level in most all of the circus disciplines from acrobatics to juggling. They generally focus on a primary and secondary discipline, in addition to working with ensemble dynamics and act creation with their peers and teachers. They take courses in dance, drama, and business in order to ensure their versatility in the artistic landscape and ensure their ability to manage their career and secure job placement post graduation. (p. 56)

The fact that the United States lacks any institution that offers such a program is important to the discussion of the upstream infrastructure of the sector here, as a gap like that can provide barriers for the continued development of the sector (which Cohen explores in depth in her paper and will be developed later in this one).

Furthermore, with Cohen's description of a professional training program, there now emerges a new definition of the word "professional." As outlined in the previous chapter, many United States circus organizations have "professional performance companies" consisting of higher-level artists able to put on a range of different performances. Confusingly, though, not all of the members of these "professional" companies have received the "professional" training outlined by Cohen above. What this points to is a distinction that exists in the United States due to its lack of professional training options. The meaning of word professional in the context of these performance companies can be thought of more as a "lowercase-p" professional, designating a certain level of skill (that varies depending on the organization) necessary to perform with that organization and represent it well to the public. This is not to say that some members of these performance companies have not received the kind of professional training outlined above, rather it simply reveals that circus organizations use the word professional to better market their performances and indicate to potential audiences the level of product they will experience. Cohen's professional training programs, on the other hand, can be thought of as "uppercase-p" professional, signifying a level of artistic mastery in a variety of skills that qualifies an individual to audition and get jobs with the world's

leading circus companies and organizations.

Still, in spite of the United States' lack of a professional training program, there still exist institutions that provide the education and training that help sector workers find and create work. Cohen (and many others) describe these programs as "pre-professional" programs, as they provide the skills that allow students to go on to matriculate in the international professional programs, though graduates of these pre-professional programs can still be successful performers and teachers in the United States (Cohen, 2012, p. 98). Some of the most well-known and highest regarded pre-professional programs in the United States include the New England Center for Circus Arts in Vermont (NECCA), the School of Acrobatics and New Circus Arts in Seattle (SANCA), and the Circus Center in San Francisco (though their education program has been inconsistent due to budget problems). There are a variety of studios in Los Angeles, as well, and organizations like Aloft Circus in Chicago are ramping up their offerings, but the number remains relatively small (Cohen, January 27, 2016, personal communication). To provide an example, this chapter will focus on NECCA.

NECCA offers "a welcoming, safe environment [where] recreational and professional students alike can explore the charms and challenges of circus arts and gain a solid foundation of techniques and skills across a broad spectrum of traditional circus forms as well as 'new circus,' aerial dance, and physical theater" ("NECCA Mission," 2016). From their mission, it is apparent that they function both in the downstream and upstream infrastructures with recreational and professional offerings, respectively. NECCA's upstream pre-professional performance training

program consists of three different years of training that students participate in depending on their level. The first year is the foundation year, where students “develop their circus skills in a supportive environment designed for those newer to comprehensive physical training, and learn the culture of circus and performing arts;” the second year is the intensive year, in which students “improve their circus skill knowledge in a community of students seeking better flexibility, strength, creativity, and skill variety;” and the third year is the advanced pro-track year, which is “for more skilled students committed to focusing on their core strength and techniques while developing acts for performance” (“NECCA Performance Training Programs,” 2016).

The structure of NECCA’s program is consistent with many other pre-professional programs. As the students progress through the program, the focus shifts from a beginning of establishing skills and safe practice to a finishing of focusing of how to weave everything together into a performance or an act. This is another helpful way to think of the recreational versus professional spectrum: on the recreational side, classes focus on fundamentals and skills, whereas on the professional side, students learn how to perform and create their performances because that is what they are going to need to have once they get out into the sector and begin auditioning for companies or presenting their work at booking conferences.

There is more to being a successful circus artist than just the performance skills, though. “We want our students to have soft skills too,” says Elsie Smith, Artistic and Executive Director of NECCA. “You can be the most amazing performer,

but if you can't reply to an email or talk concisely on the phone, you're not going to get the job. You can't only know how to talk to your peers – you also have to be able to talk to a 65-year-old event producer who doesn't text" (Smith, March 21, 2016, personal communication). This is a great representation of the breadth of upstream education and training. On one hand, the artistic training is obviously necessary, but it is also the responsibility of the educational institutions to prepare its students for all aspects of working as an artist, including professionalism, self-promotion, and how to stay safe, which is crucial in the circus arts. "We look at the body as a holistic whole. How can we get this person to be an 80-year-old who can still those skills?" (Smith, 2016). Smith related to the story of someone from the National Circus Center in Montreal who said that they spent most of their time holding their students back. "In circus, the student's body is their tool. People come in with ideas of tricks they want to do, but their body – their tool – isn't ready. It's like painting: you might have nice watercolors, but you don't have oil paints yet. You have to learn how to mix your paints." What this means for circus school is a focus on conditioning, stretching, and flexibility to keep the body healthy and safe, while still honoring the desire to do big tricks to keep the student interested. With the idea of learning safety as an aspect of professional development for circus performers, it becomes even more clear how crucial upstream infrastructure is to supporting the circus sector.

Another important aspect of the upstream infrastructure to analyze is the career paths of students after participating in such a program. According to Smith, about a third of NECCA's students end up teaching and performing part time, which

is how many artists make a living across disciplines. She estimates that about half go on to do full-on performance work “anywhere from being the headlining juggler in Cirque to putting together a four-person show touring around the States to working on cruise ships” (Smith, 2016). At the top of NECCA’s Performance Training Program description page, there is the quote “Without NECCA, I would not have been able to say ‘I’m sorry, Mr. Letterman, I can’t be on your show tonight because I’m performing with Cirque du Soleil’” (“NECCA, Performance Training Programs,” 2016). It is interesting to note that, as with any art, some people realize after going through this sort of training that being a professional artist is not their desired path. Smith says that circus is no exception, and a number of NECCA graduates leave the circus sector to have careers in medicine or law instead, though they remain very supportive circus fans.

4.2: Professional Development

Artistic education programs are not the only form of training that the sector offers its workers, however; professional development takes other forms and occurs in other venues. The previous chapter outlined the performance products present at circus festivals, but most festivals also offer workshops and master classes to enrich the skills and professional strategies of their attendees. These offerings can be considered as “continued education” opportunities. At the Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival (CCCF) for example, they offer a series of artistic master classes taught by famous national and international circus artists. Examples of these master classes include “Intermediate-Advanced Vertical Rope,” “Knife Throwing: Beginner to Advanced,” “Physical Eloquence: Mime, Gesture, Physical Character,” and “Be a

Comedy Bad-ass” (“CCCF Master Classes,” 2016). This spread of classes demonstrates that artistic professional development not only has the purpose of giving advanced artists in a certain discipline deeper training and new perspectives in that discipline but also the opportunity to try something totally new like mime or knife throwing to diversify their performance skills.

The American Youth Circus Festival in Portland, Maine provides an example of another type of professional development offering. The subject matter of these workshops falls outside the realm of artistic skills building and instead covers other important information that is relevant to circus artists and teachers. These workshops include “Accessing Insurance,” “Evaluating the Efficacy of Your Work for Funders,” “Rigging Standards for Aerial Artists,” “Redefining the Female Performer,” and “Arts Advocacy or Engaging Your Community – Who is Your Audience?” It is clear from these various titles that there are a number of relevant professional development topics for circus artists. They can span from the incredibly important but seemingly mundane action of finding insurance to the more philosophical exploration of what it means to be a female circus performer. The utility of an “Accessing Insurance” workshop is apparent, but the more abstract workshops can be just as useful for an artist or administrator for other reasons: it might help them re-contextualize their practice in a helpful way, or they might be able to work through some problems facing their organization through discussion with others in similar situations across the country. In such an emergent sector, workshops like “Rigging Standards” are crucial as well – they help formalize a key aspect of safe aerial performing for many people who might, unfortunately, be working off of

limited information. This kind of workshop specifically demonstrates how this sort of professional development can influence the sector as a whole – the establishment of standards (in education, in safety, etc.) is an important aspect of sector development and will be covered later.

As an aside, professional development for circus workers does not just have to come from circus organizations. At performing arts booking conferences like the ones from the previous chapter, there are also a variety of workshops that can aid in the professional development of circus artists and presenters. The Arts Northwest Booking Conference, for example, has conference workshops that instruct on topics such as tips for creating a one-minute showcase for presenters, building a better board, and marketing and PR tips (“ANW Conference Workshops,” 2016). While these sorts of organizations and conferences do not necessarily fall directly into the realm of the circus sector, it should be noted that circus artists and administrators receive professional development and continued education from workshops and sessions like these.

Another set of institutions that fall outside the circus sector, but still help educate some of its workers are colleges and universities. There are many graduate and undergraduate programs across the country in fields such as Arts Management, Business Management, Theater Management, and Performance Studies that are educating and graduating circus sector administrators who go on to support and grow the sector. Though very few of these programs focus specifically on the circus arts or circus company management, they still form part of the educational trajectories of aspiring (and existing) circus sector administrators and leaders, and

thus deserve some mention.

4.3: The American Youth Circus Organization/The American Circus Educators Association

To continue unpacking the upstream infrastructure of the circus sector, focus now shifts to two national organizations whose services fall into many different areas of that section of infrastructure: The American Youth Circus Organization (AYCO) and Circus Now. Before beginning the exploration of AYCO, it should be noted that the organization has two branches: The American Youth Circus Organization, which serves youth circus performers, and the American Circus Educators Association (ACE), which is directed toward all circus educators (and falls under the AYCO umbrella). AYCO/ACE started as one organization in 1998 with the goal of promoting participation of youth in circus arts and supporting circus educators. They developed throughout the years, producing their first AYCO festival in 2001, becoming a nonprofit in 2003, and producing festivals regularly throughout the 2000s. In 2010, the organization branched ACE off of AYCO because they realized they were serving two different audiences. ACE began serving just youth circus educators but has since evolved to serve more recreational circus educators. Both organizations share a board and staff (Cohen, January 27, 2016, personal communication).

What AYCO/ACE offer to the sector is multifold. They function largely as a membership-based organization where individuals and organizations that sign up and pay for memberships get to access the services they offer. As mentioned earlier, the organizations host national conferences every year that offer attendees

opportunities to participate in performance opportunities, professional development workshops, and networking events. The subject of the conference rotates year by year depending on which branch of the organization is presenting it. On the odd years, AYCO hosts a youth circus conference and on the even years, ACE puts on a circus education conference (Cohen, January 27, 2016, personal communication). Beyond these conferences, AYCO also serves as a sort of facilitator for regional events. If someone in Florida, for example, wants to convene Floridian youth circus educators, they can go through AYCO, who has a handbook on how to successfully organize such an event and will help that individual implement the gathering.

Something else they offer that was alluded to earlier is setting standards for safety and helping organizations and studios across the country comply with those standards. This area is crucial to the circus sector, as circus arts generally involve a greater degree of risk than other art forms. The standards were developed with the help of a volunteer committee comprised of the most respected circus educators in the country. “The goal of the program is recognizing safe practices,” says Amy Cohen, Executive Director of AYCO. “It’s not a certification – in researching the legality around the term we found that it actually doesn’t have much weight and “certifications” pop up all the time without much credibility behind them – we prefer to recognize people’s safe practice and use our guidelines in order to ensure a growing and evolving culture of safety. We designed it to be an educational process with open source information” (Cohen, January 27, 2016, personal communication). There are two different branches of the safety program: the teacher training

program and the circus arts programs. The teacher training program, which is directed at programs that train circus students to be circus teachers, covers things like comfort and accessibility, risk assessment and management, rigging and apparatuses, documentation and record keeping, creating specific curricula, and practical skills like spotting and leading warm-ups (“Guidelines for Teacher Training Program,” 2016). The circus arts program is directed at programs that do not teach teachers but covers the above subject areas. Additionally, it provides specific guidelines for safety for a variety of different apparatuses from fire props to flying trapeze, to tight wire (“Guidelines for Circus Arts Programs,” 2016). Organizations can pay to become recognized “safety program recognized” by ACE based on a peer review process, which includes meeting with safety consultants stationed around the country. The Teacher Training Program costs \$900 for the first year, and \$100 per year for the next six years. There are three different circus arts programs, and each has a different pricing structure: the Policies & Practices program costs \$85 for the application and \$20 per year for renewal; the Staff & Curriculum program costs \$120 for the application and \$20 for the annual renewal; and the Facilities & Operations program costs \$250 for the application and \$20 a year for six years for renewal, at which point the organization must reapply (“ACE Circus Arts Programs,” 2016). Paying is not necessary, though, and organizations can still access and enact the safety program guidelines. “The most important thing is that people have the conversations around safety,” says Cohen (Cohen, January 27, 2016, personal communication).

Another important service that ACE offers to its members is access to

insurance for circus artists and organizations. This is important not only because having insurance is just smart as an artist or organization in a somewhat dangerous form such as circus, but also because many artists and organizations are required to have insurance before they can book gigs or get hired for events. The reason that providing access to insurance falls under upstream infrastructure is that it can be considered as a form of “financial support,” which Cherbo et al. (2008) have included as an element of upstream infrastructure (p. 15). Functionally, how the program works is groups that have memberships at the “institutional” level or individuals with memberships at the “professional” level get access to contact the two insurance companies (Borden Perlman and NSM) and set up their coverage, with a 10% discount if they have participated in ACE’s aforementioned Safety program. ACE also provides tips on what types and levels of coverage are usually required for organizations to comply with requirements and book gigs. Additionally, it even gives tips for organizations for whom insurance is too expensive: “If you are starting up, the cost of insurance can feel daunting. Rather than operate without insurance, it’s a good idea to find another organization that can bring you into their policy and have you operate under their umbrella” (“ACE Insurance,” 2016). This is another demonstration of the importance of upstream infrastructure support – areas like insurance can be incredibly difficult to navigate for individual artists and organizations that want to focus mainly on their art form, so organizations like ACE can do the leg work with the insurance companies and remove barriers for the members in obtaining insurance and functioning more professionally and safely. The barriers that ACE removes are both bureaucratic, in that the insurance

companies are ready for circus organizations to apply for coverage, and financial, in that members that have participated in the safety program receive a discount. All of this, like the above safety program, has the end goal of increasing the legitimacy, professionalism, and safety of the sector (Cohen, 2016).

Finally, in 2015, AYCO started an initiative to support the growing number of social circus programs in the United States. The social circus initiative is still in development, but it is taking the form of a network of “recognized social circus programs” who receive “pedagogical, capacity building and professional development support” (“AYCO Social Circus,” 2016). Organizations must meet certain AYCO criteria to be recognized as social circus organizations including being “focused on a clearly specified at-risk populations, directed towards achieving a particular social change and specific outcomes related to that change, and committed to evaluating effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes” (“AYCO Social Circus,” 2016). These criteria make it so that the organizations that apply to be recognized are actual, committed social circus organizations, and not just organizations that have some social circus programming that are looking for further legitimacy. “Circus is inherently positive for youth development,” says Cohen, but that does not mean that every youth circus is social circus (Cohen, 2016). Thus, the purpose of this program has another important sectorial function: to draw a specific definition of social circus so that the practice stays meaningful and an organization recognizes that in saying they are a social circus organization, there are expectations and responsibilities that come with such a title. With this program, then, along with the safety program, AYCO/ACE’s function of providing standards for the sector

becomes apparent. They use their platform and access to resources to bring their members up to certain levels so that the participating members can work at higher, more professional, and safer levels both as educational and performance institutions. This, in turn, raises the professionalism and standardized practices in the whole sector. In this way, AYCO/ACE are representative of upstream infrastructure.

4.4: Circus Now

The other national organization that works heavily in upstream infrastructure is Circus Now. Circus Now was created in 2013 partly as the result of the book tour of Duncan Wall's *The Ordinary Acrobat* and its subsequent circus meetings around the country led by Wall and Adam Woolley. They were also driven by the desire to fill the gap left by AYCO/ACE, who focus more on youth and social circus (Woolley, February 6 2016, personal communication). The organization's stated mission is

...to support the evolution of circus arts in the United States by educating the public, media outlets, and arts venues on the diversity, sophistication, and potential of the circus arts today; producing events and leveraging social media to connect and inspire US circus artists and practitioners; [and] nurturing the creation, production, and distribution of emerging quality circus. ("Circus Now Mission," 2016).

Like AYCO, the way that Circus Now approaches these broad goals of support and visibility is multifold. Their main focus right now is event production and maintaining a vibrant presence on the web and social media. Adam Woolley, Managing Director of Circus Now describes it as "standing in the middle of the town center, shouting 'We're Circus Now!' and seeing who comes" (Woolley, February 6, 2016, personal communication). Still, many of their functions are in the upstream

infrastructure and their services deserve closer analysis.

Last chapter introduced Circus Now's CN-ICE event, which fell under the realm of downstream infrastructure, bringing circus to the public and developing more vehicles to continue doing so, but that is not the only area of focus of the organization. First of all, they provide a variety of different styles of professional development. One of their main forms of professional development came at the Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival (CCCF) in 2015, where they offered "23 professional and participatory sessions," ranging topics including audition preparation, anatomy basics for circus performers, lighting 101, character creation, and more ("Circus Now at CCCF," 2015). These workshops fall into the model of festival-based professional development workshops presented earlier this chapter, though it speaks to Circus Now's position in the sector that they were given the platform at CCCF to present these workshops. The organization has also experimented with other forms of professional development. At one point, they undertook a webinar project to cover a variety of topics. The intended goal of the project was to bring people together from across the country "to learn and share" ("Circus Now Webinars," 2016). Unfortunately, the project did not seem to take off, and only one webinar was produced on the topic "Taking the Leap: Pros on Going Pro." A more successful professional development initiative of theirs is the "Women & Circus" project, which provides "a hub for professionals, practitioners, and enthusiasts to discuss and explore the ways the ways that women engage with circus, and how the art form is enhanced by their contributions" ("Women & Circus," 2016). The way that this project manifests is in a series of interviews with different

women working in different positions throughout the sector including aerial artists, animal trainers, clowns, booking agents, circus administrators and more. This sort of exposure goes a long way in showing the whole sector the kind of work that individuals are doing and inspiring aspiring sector participants in many different areas while showing them models of career paths through the sector.

Cherbo et al. (2008) identify “research and information services” as an element of upstream infrastructure, and Circus Now focuses some of its efforts on producing research as well. An example is the “State of the Circus” survey mentioned in the previous chapter. This survey aimed to get a sense of who was participating in circus around the country, how they participate, why, and what they thought about circus participation more broadly. Surveys like this are important for the sector’s development because they give a snapshot of participants’ motivation for of methods of participation, which can help organizations across the sector better understand and serve their constituents. Beyond that survey, Circus Now also has a research team. “The main emphasis of the research team is to give a platform for everything happening in the United States,” says Carlos Alexis Cruz, the research team head (Cruz, March 28, 2016, personal communication). One of their goals, according to Cruz, is trying to catalog what is going on in the United States to trace the journey of Circus’s development in the country. This aspect of the organization still appears to be in development, however.

It should be noted that Circus Now is far from the only entity engaging in research on the circus. Indeed, there have existed dedicated circus researchers for decades. Often, these researchers focus on the history of circus, and there is an

entire national organization devoted to the preservation and promotion of the circus called the Circus Historical Society (“Circus Historical Society,” 2016). Individual research interests expand beyond circus history, though. Cruz, for example, who is also a Professor of Physical Theatre at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte, researches how people use circus to tell their stories. Cohen from AYCO wrote research about the barriers facing the circus’s development in the United States. There is a community on Facebook called “Circademics,” where academics researching the circus convene to share research and resources. Topics present on that page include social circus initiatives, efficacy of circus education, injury rates of certain disciplines, and much more (“Circademics,” 2016). And, of course, there are other projects like these (and like Cohen’s) written for graduate programs that study circus as an art form, conduct case studies on a specific circus organization, or focus on some other aspect of the sector. It is clear, then, that circus-based research is not generated from one source, but rather emerges from all corners of the sector. Still, it can feel disconnected. “I feel like a lone wolf, but I know I’m not the only one,” says Cruz. That is where Circus Now comes in to provide connections (Cruz, March 28, 2016, personal communication).

Providing a space for connections is one of the main areas that Circus Now engages. Because circus is still emergent, many sector participants like Cruz can feel isolated. Circus Now tries to combat against that in a variety of ways. One section of their website is entitled “Circommons” and is marketed as “an online journal written by you” (“Circommons,” 2016). Anyone can submit their thoughts (in under 1000 words) and the submissions are curated and edited by the Circus Now team, who

then posts them to Circommons for all to read and start discussing. This way, sector participants who are geographically isolated from each other can still engage in conversations around topics and issues relevant to the sector and community, and connections can grow. Other ways that Circus Now engages in connecting the sector is through a “Circus Map” on their site that lists many educational and performance organizations around the countries so that people can find circus near them; they do a “photo of the month” contest where people see circus photos from around the country and vote on which photo becomes the Circus Now Facebook banner photo for the month; and they maintain a calendar of circus events going on around the country, sorted by region (“Circus Now Community,” 2016). Providing “spaces” like this is important for an emergent sector that still has many developing parts, as it brings participants together and starts conversations around so many subject areas necessary for sectorial growth – in that way, it would count loosely as a form of professional development, and thus as upstream infrastructure.

4.5: Equipment and Supplies

One aspect of upstream infrastructure that is defining for the circus sector is the equipment and supplies (Cherbo et al., 2008, p. 15). The majority of circus practices involve not just a person, but also other objects, props, or apparatuses. Even disciplines whose performances do not – such as contortion or acro balance – still rely on certain equipment for safe training. Hammarstrom, summarized in Wall (2013) regarding the differences between circus and theater says “Whereas the theater is mental...circus is physical. Theater treats conflicts between humans; the circus treats a human’s struggle with himself or the environment” (p. 150). This

struggle with oneself or the environment typically involves some outside equipment: aerialists need silks, trapezes, ropes or any other number of apparatuses, jugglers need clubs or balls, even many clowns center their acts around props. Thus, important members of the upstream infrastructure are those who fabricate and distribute these forms of equipment.

With the internet, finding suppliers of various forms of equipment has grown much easier and people are able to buy equipment from around the country and world and have it shipped to them, regardless of where they are located. Some manufacturers focus on just one form of apparatus (trapeze, or fabric, for example), which others provide a wide range of rigging supplies. Suppliers can be individuals who make equipment themselves on a smaller scale, or companies who distribute to the entire country; the diversity of offerings is about as broad as the diversity of kinds of disciplines in the circus sector that require equipment. Some circus organizations even fabricate and distribute equipment alongside their performance or educational output. An example of this would be Nimble Arts, the performance company attached to NECCA, who also make and sell trapezes, fabrics, and some rigging supplies (Smith, March 21, 2016, personal communication).

This is an area where the circus sector overlaps with other sectors as well. While some individuals and companies direct their product specifically at the circus arts, many supply to a wide range of customers, which makes this crucial part of the sector one of the areas that is largely not self-contained and supports many other sectors as well. For example, aerialists practice with mats, which are the same mats that gymnasts use and members of both sectors can purchase their mats from the

same supplier. The same overlap occurs with items like chalk and dry rosin (again overlapped with gymnastics), tights and spandex (which overlap with dance and gymnastics), and a wide range of rigging supplies (which many types of climbers also use). Again, the examples are countless, and appendix A has an example of a small group of different kinds of suppliers to get a sense of the range of necessary equipment and who provides it.

4.6: Financial Support and Funding Streams

The final aspect of upstream infrastructure as Cherbo et al. (2008) outline it is “the network of private funders and services that provide financial support” (p. 15). For the circus sector, this network takes a variety of different forms. For the purposes of this study, private funding will include money received from any non-public sector entities (any level of governmental organization counts as public sector). The previous chapter briefly introduced some of the structural differences between for-profit and nonprofit circus companies, and those differences are also prevalent when it comes to private financing. For for-profit companies, private funders come in the form of investors. Josh Aviner of the for-profit company Hideaway Circus, says that his company’s investors consist of “investment firms that focus on theater and film financing or wealthy individuals who have an interest in the arts, theater, circus, or ourselves as business(wo)men” (Aviner, March 26, 2016, personal communication). As mentioned in the previous chapter, these investors are largely invited to help finance individual shows that Hideaway Circus produces (which are their own companies), while few support Hideaway itself, which is the umbrella company over the shows. It is interesting to note the motivations behind

these investors as Aviner outlines them. It makes sense that many investors who have an interest in the arts, specifically circus or circus-adjacent arts would choose to back circus projects, but the fact that some backers support Hideaway because of the people leading the company is of note. This relates to the language on Hideaway's website outlined in the previous chapter about "highlighting [Hideaway's] brand in new and exciting ways" ("Hideaway Circus Work with Us," 2016). This demonstrates a sort of holistic view that for-profit circus companies present to investors; the artistic product is not the only draw, but also the people who run the company and their perceived vision, acumen, and potential.

While private funding comes in a different form for nonprofit circus companies, they must also present the above holistic view to their "investors." Their form of investors come through development and fundraising. Fundraising is a broad term defined by the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) as "the raising of assets and resources from various sources for the support of an organization or a specific project" (AFP quoted in Worth 2016, p. 5). This can encompass a large span of different forms including individual giving, capital projects, fundraising events, planned giving from estates, and many others. How deeply nonprofit circus companies engage in fundraising varies. In 2013, for example, NECCA raised almost one third of their total revenue from contributions and private grants – almost \$300,000 against their total revenue of \$935,685 (Internal Revenue Service, NECCA Form 990 2013, p. 1). As stated in the previous chapter, NECCA is also undertaking a \$2.5 million capital campaign for a new space. AYCO, on the other hand, only received half of a percent of their total revenue in

2014 from contributions and private grants – about \$4,500 to a total revenue of \$81,281 (Internal Revenue Service, AYCO Form 990 2014, p. 1). Some circus companies, like AYCO, rely heavily on their program service revenue, or the money made from tuition and ticket sales and do not enter the realm of fundraising. In fact, even the proportion of NECCA's revenue that came from fundraising is low, compared to other performing arts. Stein and Bathurst (2008) say that “depending on their size, performing arts organizations may raise between 50 and 80 percent of their income from contributed sources” (p. 167). Thus, it is clear that even NECCA, who of all of the circus companies surveyed for this study has one of the highest percentages of fundraising revenue to total revenue, is falling behind other performing arts organizations in other disciplines. This will be discussed more next chapter.

Grants can be another major form of private funding for nonprofit performing arts organizations, though this is another area where circus is behind other forms. Wall identifies that “there is not much going on in the United States for grants” (Wall, February 5, 2016, personal communication). One of the problems is that many grants that fund the performing arts do so categorically, but these categories typically do not include circus arts, thus circus organizations are either ineligible or they have to do extra legwork to explain why their program fits the scope of the grant (Cohen, 2012, p. 31). Still, this does not mean that grants for circus organizations do not exist, nor that circus organizations are not getting grant funding. In fact, a search of the Foundation Directory Online, a national database on grants, grantmakers, and grant recipients shows 1,399 United States grants when

the word “circus” is searched. Interestingly, a full 604 of those grants have gone to Big Apple Circus in New York, a company that tends toward traditional circus touring and style. It should also be noted that some of these grants come from public sources, and will be discussed next chapter, but a non-inconsequential amount come from private foundations. Some examples of this sort of funding include a \$10,000 grant from The Abramson Family Foundation in Florida for a youth circus program in Brooklyn called Pandemonium and the Dragon Fly; a \$10,000 general operating support grant from the Alphawood Foundation to an organization called 500 clowns, both in Chicago; and a \$1,500 grant from The Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice directed to Circus Amok, both in New York (“Foundation Directory Circus Grants,” 2016). This is just a small slice of the wide spread of grants available to circus artists and organizations, but as Cohen and Wall have suggested, it pales in comparison to other art forms: a search of “dance” yields 40,011 grants, “vocal” yields 11,462, and “theater” yields 104,018 (“Foundation Directory Online,” 2016). The implications of this discrepancy will be discussed next chapter.

Finally, when talking about private funding, it is also important to explore the funding of individual artists in the sector. Unfortunately, if private funding of organizations is scant, private funding of individuals is hardly existent. Circus Now has a “database” of available grants, which only features one opportunity: an “emergency” grant from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, which funds artists that have the opportunity to present their work publicly, but do not have the time to gain financial support to do so (“Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grant,” 2016). Other such opportunities exist, but they are hard to find, and many

come from the public sector. Beyond infrequent opportunities like that, opportunities for individual artists come more in the form of residencies. A good example of what these residencies can entail is encapsulated well in an offering of The Peñasco Theatre in New Mexico. Their residency program entitled “Art as Resistance” seeks performance artists “whose work incorporates, dialogues with, or is in some way inspired by the struggle for transformation and justice.” The residency includes a space to create and perfect work, opportunities to workshop performances for an audience, possibilities to offer classes, and a living space (“The Peñasco Theatre Artist in Residence,” 2016). Each residency is different in focus and offerings – the Peñasco residency focuses on its secluded and beautiful location as being the perfect place for artists to get away and create, while one in a city might focus being at the epicenter of other artists and creators.

With the lack of funding for individual circus sector participants in the United States, then, it becomes appropriate to explore, as part of the upstream infrastructure, how and if they finance their participation. A survey was conducted as part of this study to investigate where sector participants get income from their participation and how much. There were 301 respondents from all across the United States and they were asked questions about how much income they received from performing, teaching, researching, administrative work, and other work in the circus sector both in 2015 as well as the year in which they made the most income from those activities. The below table outlines what percentage respondents received any income from a given activity as well as which percentage of all respondents received over 50% and 90% of their income from that activity **in 2015**.

Activity	1% or greater of total income	50% or greater of total income	90% or greater of total income
Performing	52.75%	14.66%	6.59%
Teaching	52.43%	17.23%	2.62%
Administrative Work	29.12%	6.53%	3.07%
Research	7.87%	1.18%	0%
Other	16.67%	6.25%	3.33%

Table 1: Percentage of circus income in 2015

It should be noted that there is overlap in these results in that a performer who makes 50% of their income from performing and 50% from teaching would appear in both of those percentages in this table. Still, it is notable that a majority of respondents made some amount of money from performing and teaching and a significant amount also made money from administrative work and other work (which includes apparatus fabrication, rigging, other technical work, circus photography, and graphic design). However, a much smaller amount made more than half of their income from circus activities, and even fewer made more than 90% of their income from their participation. This table represents 2015 as a snapshot of circus participation income. For a deeper look, the below table represents the percentage of respondents that received certain levels of their total income **in the year in which they made the most money from their circus participation**. The numbers with up arrows next to them represent an increase from the 2015 snapshot and the numbers with down numbers represent a decrease.

Activity	1% or greater of total income	50% or greater of total income	90% or greater of total income
Performing	59.84% ↑	20.91% ↑	11.89% ↑
Teaching	50.83% ↓	16.94% ↓	2.07% ↓
Administrative Work	28.76% ↓	6.88% ↑	2.58% ↓
Research	3.93% ↓	0.44% ↓	0%
Other	16.22% ↓	5.4% ↓	1.35% ↓

Table 2: Percentage of circus income in most lucrative participation year

The most immediately notable aspect of this table is that, in spite of the fact that this is respondents' most profitable circus participation year, the only activity that sees increases compared to the 2015 snapshot across the board is performing. What could mean is that many of the respondents to this survey are performers or were at one point (they were not asked which year represented their most prolific). It should also be noted that even in the respondents' best year, only one fifth of artists made 50% of their income or more on their performing activities and only a little more than one tenth made 90% or more of their income from those activities.

4.7: Conclusion

This suggests, as the Circus Now survey from the previous chapter also showed, that most sector participants are not making the majority of their income from their participation. This fact at once represents how the circus sector is still emergent and there aren't enough opportunities for participants to make money on their participation, while also showing the importance of the upstream infrastructure of the sector. Participants need the support systems that upstream

infrastructure provides in any sector, but this is especially true of a sector with so many participants making money outside the sector. The insurance program provided by AYCO, for example, or the opportunities for continued connection and professional development facilitated by Circus Now go a long way to provide at least a foundation for the sector's estimated 10,000 participants. Still, the above tables reveal that there are important gaps in the development of the sector. The next chapter will examine what the sector lacks and how it should develop going into the future.

Chapter 5: General Public Infrastructure and Conclusions

The previous two chapters outlined the aspects of the circus sector that connect it with its markets (downstream infrastructure) as well as support its functioning and development (upstream infrastructure). However, there is a third, more external part of the creative sector: the general public infrastructure. Cherbo et al. (2008) define this infrastructure as “public funding, policy authority and legal regulations, advocacy, and professional and trade associations” (p. 16). This study has continually defined the United States circus sector as an emergent one, in spite of the fact that the circus arts not only have existed for millennia, but also have experienced eras of great sectorial activity in this country. The reason that the current circus sector is still emergent is due to this third level of infrastructure. Namely, it arises from the fact the United States circus sector is particularly unsupported by the general public infrastructure compared to other performing arts forms. This chapter will examine how these gaps manifest in the circus sector, what it means for the sector now and in the future, and other general conclusions.

5.1: Public Funding

As stated above, the first feature of general public infrastructure is public funding. Last chapter covered private funding for artists and organizations: money that comes from individuals or private foundations. Public funding, on the other hand, comes from governmental sources on the federal, state, regional, and local levels. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is the most recognized federal funding body for the arts.

Established by Congress in 1965, the NEA is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in

the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the NEA supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America. ("NEA About," 2016).

As their above mission statement outlines, the NEA provides funding to artists and organizations with the end goal of increasing the participation of Americans in the arts. Plus, funding at the state and local level often is framed by NEA policies and practices. Unfortunately, this funding often misses the circus sector for a variety of reasons. First of all, the NEA does not fund individual circus artists. In fact, there are no grants for individual performing artists of any kind at all. The only two grants for individuals that the NEA offers include a Creative Writing Fellowship and support for Translation Projects ("NEA Grants for Individuals," 2016). It should be noted that the NEA used to give grants to many types of individual artists until the politically-polarized climate of the early 1990s known as the "culture wars" resulted in the agency shifting its focus to specific project funding instead (Shockley & McNeely, 2009, p. 7). An in-depth analysis of the culture wars is not covered in the scope of this project.

Even though they do not fund individual artists, the NEA does offer funding opportunities that organizations can take advantage of. However, they make it clear that they only fund projects an organization might put on, instead of providing general operating support funding for that organization. "We fund projects. Projects may consist of one or more specific events or activities" ("NEA Grants," 2016). This is unfortunate for circus organizations, because they cannot receive long-term organizational capacity-building support on the federal level – they can only be

supported to produce projects that are more short-term. Examples of their project grants include Art Works, “To support the creation of art that meets the highest standards of excellence, public engagement with diverse and excellent art, lifelong learning in the arts, and the strengthening of communities through the arts;” Challenge America, “To support projects that extend the reach of the arts to underserved populations;” and Research: Art Works “to support research that investigates the value and/or impact of the arts, either as individual components of the U.S. arts ecology or as they interact with each other and/or with other domains of American life” (“NEA Grants for Organizations,” 2016).

There are a variety of circus projects that could fit into many of those categories, but unfortunately, there are further barriers facing the circus sector when it comes to federal funding. “Circus is not recognized as an art in its own category by the NEA,” says Elsie Smith of NECCA (Smith, March 21, 2016, personal communication). Indeed, the NEA defines “artistic fields”, such as dance, design, literature, museums, theater & musical theater, etc. that applicants must select when applying for grants, and circus is not included as its own artistic field (“NEA Artistic Fields,” 2016). Recently, on their Art Works Blog, the NEA published the transcript of an interview with Smithsonian Folklife Festival Director Sabrina Lynn Motley entitled “A Beginner’s Guide to the Circus Arts.” In this interview, Motley outlined how circus, according to the NEA, actually falls into the artistic field of “folk and traditional arts.”

Like so many others, including the NEA, I believe that folk and traditional arts speak to family and community, intergenerational transmission of knowledge, and shared language, culture, and history...If we agree that folk

and traditional arts include the qualities mentioned above then circus arts tick all the boxes. (Motley, as cited in Beete, 2015, p. 1).

This is all well and good, meaning that circus organizations are not prohibited from applying for NEA funding as they can tick the box of “folk and traditional arts,” but it still presents problems. For example, how would circus organizations know that they are members of that category if they had not read this interview? Many might think that they are ineligible to apply, or would apply under the dance or theater categories and be forced to shift the focus of their project to fit more with a narrative for those categories. Especially for new organizations working on contemporary circus, the label “folk and traditional arts” does not seem to fit – that label is more relevant to those who practice traditional circus than contemporary. And even then, the definitions listed for folk and traditional arts – “family and community, intergenerational transmission of knowledge, and shared language, culture, and history” – could apply to all sorts of art forms that have their own categories. Many forms of dance, for example, tick all of those boxes: ballet speaks to family and community, ballet dancers across the world share a language, culture, and history, and intergenerational transmission of knowledge is not uncommon as parents who are ballet dancers have kids who also end up practicing the form. Yet, any ballet organization would check off “dance” as their grant category without thinking twice. A deep exploration of how funding organizations define folk and traditional art practices and the connotations those designations can carry is unfortunately not included in the scope of the project. The major takeaway is that circus’s unclear position in the official funding categories sets up barriers to circus organizations even thinking that they are eligible to apply for these funds.

Another barrier to entry for circus organizations on the federal funding level is more logistical. NEA grants are notoriously competitive and require pages and pages of narrative to apply. That in itself does not prohibit circus organizations from applying, but that on top of the fact that the grants for organizations are matching grants makes it much more difficult for circus organizations, who might not have the fundraising infrastructure set up to handle such a commitment. A matching grant is one where the granting organization – the NEA in this case – will give successful applicants the grant money if the applicants can raise that same amount of money themselves. Organizations that apply for matching grants typically leverage that match to raise the money from their existing base of donors: “The NEA will give us \$25,000 if we can raise \$25,000 ourselves!” However, as the previous chapter demonstrated, there are a number of circus organizations that do not participate heavily in fundraising, and thus would not be able to get these sorts of grants. The minimum grant amount that the NEA offers is \$10,000, which must be matched. Again, this is not to say that there are no circus organizations that could apply for these grants, just that the matching requirement might discourage the smaller, newer, or less established organizations that proliferate in an emergent sector from applying.

Public funding does not only come from the federal level, though. On the state level, funding opportunities are more prevalent and relevant as they focus solely on the constituents of that state, rather than the whole country. The grants offered at the state level vary state by state based on the priorities of that state’s granting agency. For example, in Minnesota (one of the best-funded states for the arts),

organizations can apply both for general operating support grants and for project grants covering a wide range of focuses including arts access, arts learning, folk and traditional arts, cross-sector partnerships, and more (“Minnesota State Arts Board Grants for Organizations,” 2016). Individuals can also apply for grants in similar categories. In 2016, Circus Juventas, a well-known youth circus organization won both a general operating support grant and a Wells Fargo Foundation grant, distributed through the Minnesota State Arts Board (“FY 2016 General Operating Support Grantees,” 2016). Also in 2016, an individual named Lloyd W. Brant received an Artist Initiative grant to support the staging of the children’s story *The Land of the Clowns* (FY 2016 Artist Initiative Grantees,” 2016).

It must be noted, however, that the only circus organization listed as receiving any of the organizational grants in the past three cycles (fiscal years 2014-2016) was Circus Juventas, who has been in existence since 1998 and who boasted revenues in 2014 of over \$2.5 million (Internal Revenue Service, Circus Juventas Form 990, p. 1). This could demonstrate a bias toward well-established, larger organizations similar to that on the federal level. Indeed, the Minnesota State Arts Board even states that their general operating support grants are for “high quality, established arts organizations” (“Minnesota State Arts Board Grants for Organizations,” 2016). This means that smaller, more emergent organizations cannot receive the sort of investment from the public sphere that could help their organization grow and develop; they can only apply for project grants, if that even. Furthermore, Minnesota is an unusual case with its high level of arts funding – in 2014, they spent the most out of any state per capita on arts: \$6.31, with the next

highest spending coming from Hawaii, who spend \$3.68 (National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2014). As a counterpoint, in Indiana, which only spends \$0.44 per capita on arts, there were no mentions of any circus organization receiving funding from the Indiana Arts Commission in the previous three cycles (fiscal years 2014-2016) (“Indiana Arts Commission Grants Awarded,” 2016). Thus, it becomes clear that there are still gaps in state funding for circus, though it can be slightly more beneficial to some circus organizations. The exact reasons for these gaps are unknown, and could form an interesting future study, but they could result from a combination of many of the issues presented on the federal level: issues of categorization, lack of capacity to even apply or be considered for the grants, plus the possibility that circus organizations might not know these funding opportunities exist.

As the focus narrows to the regional and local levels, the funding continues to become more responsive and accessible to circus artists and organizations. Like state arts agencies, local arts agencies (that focus on one city or county) and regional arts agencies (that focus on a small group of counties) have varying funding priorities. Still, as they are the public funding agencies “closest” to the communities they serve, they tend to have the most accessible funding opportunities. In Oregon, the Regional Arts and Culture Council (RACC) provides a variety of grants for artists and individuals in the Portland metro area. In the previous five years, they provided general operating support to Pendulum Aerial Arts, project grants for Aerial Without Limits, Circus Cascadia, and The Circus Project, and in 2010, a circus artist named Robin Lane was awarded with their prestigious Individual Artist Fellowship

("RACC Past Grantees," 2016). Similarly, the San Francisco Arts Commission, which represents San Francisco county has provided funding for circus organizations including Circo Zero, Flyaway Dance Company, and the San Francisco Mime Troupe in the previous five years ("SFAC Grantees," 2016). These are just two examples, but they do still provide contrast to the (lack of) breadth in state and federal funding.

Still, there are barriers. RACC provides some guidelines for which organizations can apply for their general operating support grants including a minimum income of \$75,000 for at least three years, at least one paid professional administrative staff for at least a year, and having been in existence for a minimum of three years ("RACC General Operating Support," 2016). Again, this shuts out smaller and newer organizations that don't have the budget, staff capacity, or history to receive this sort of support. This is especially problematic in the circus sector where, as demonstrated last chapter, very few people are making significant income from their circus participation. These barriers to public funding, where such funding exists, discourages the growth, support, and development of emergent companies, which disproportionately affects the circus sector. Furthermore, the two above examples are located in urban areas. Opportunities for circus companies in less populated areas of the country are even harder to come across. So, while the circus sector is not completely shut out from the public funding sphere, there are significant barriers to entry that make the sector less supported than other performing art forms.

5.2 Policy Authority and Legal Regulations

The circus sector has an interesting relationship with policy and authority and legal regulations. Before getting into the policy and legal structures and standards that apply to the sector, it begs mentioning that this is an area heavily affected by the unofficial nature of many people's circus participation. That is to say that there is not a great deal of sweeping official regulation on something like safety standards. For example, an aerial silks student who has one year of experience could buy some extra fabrics, hang them from a particularly high ceiling in their house, and then offer "private instruction" on aerial silks. They might not have any insurance (though a discerning potential student would probably ask them about their insurance), and no real plan for handling medical emergencies or legal actions taken against them as a result thereof. Of course, this is uncommon, but because many circus disciplines are new and foreign to people, it would be easier for something like this to happen in circus than in something like ballet or modern dance.

Even where standards do exist, like in ACE's safety program, there is still a lack of hard authority over the standards. AYCO/ACE is not able to mandate that every circus studio complies with their standards, nor are they able to continually monitor the studios that go through their program over time. As mentioned in chapter 3, some of their programs require renewal every 6 years to assure that the organization maintains the standards, but again, there is no way to enforce the renewal. And for the companies that do complete the safety program, they are not then officially licensed as a complying company – even though they get the

legitimacy from having gone through the program, they are not in any different legal standing than a company that has not completed it. This is not to say that ACE's standards are lacking, in fact they are very good, but when they are not a legal requirement they don't carry as much weight as they could. Plus, there is the factor of visibility. There are probably a number of circus studios that would go through the ACE safety program if they knew that it existed. In that way, the lack of connections between sectorial players is hurting the sector in this area of regulations.

It should be noted also that some of the circus disciplines self-regulate almost by necessity. For example, there is no way that someone could rig a flying trapeze if they did not have the appropriate height of ceiling to do so. Similarly, a certain amount of open space is necessary for effectively juggling or doing prop manipulation and fire props. This makes it so that, in a way, the physical requirements of practicing circus regulate who can provide instruction in those disciplines and practice it. Unlike an unqualified acting teacher, who could set up a studio in their house and start their practice, a circus artist already has to find the right kind of space to be able to teach, which might help weed out people who aren't serious about and qualified for teaching their discipline.

However, when the circus sector begins interacting with other sectors, legal authority and regulations become much more prevalent and official. Last chapter mentioned that circus artists are mostly required to have insurance as a requisite for booking gigs and performing at most venues. Additionally, many venues themselves have liability insurance to help them in case anything happens to a

performer or audience member. Beyond that, a reputable venue has regulations on everything from rigging, work schedules, and food provided for workers and performers. In contracting with a venue, a circus artist then comes under the umbrella of many of those regulations and must comply like the venue must (Kau, *Legal Issues and Risk Management*, 2014).

And, of course, circus companies must comply with county, state, and federal laws that apply to them including things like minimum wage, paid sick time, proper work conditions, etc. Additionally, nonprofit circus companies are required to comply with the regulations governing the nonprofit sector including having a mission statement and a board, making sure organizational profit goes back to benefit the mission of the organization as opposed to going to shareholders, and refraining from extensive political lobbying (Berman, 2010, pp. 32-33). These are just some examples of requirements for nonprofits, and similar requirements exist in the for-profit sector including having an owner, generating a profit year by year, and a variety of tax requirements (pp. 22-23).

Still the fact that many of the “hard” regulations and standards come from outside the sector is worrying. When it comes to regulation, circus has a more difficult prospect than many other performing art forms because there is so much included under the umbrella of circus arts, and a wide range of different standards and regulations is needed. AYCO/ACE has a good model for these standards, but there is a palpable lack in the enforcement and regulation of these standards, which decreases their value. If studios are not required to comply with the set standards, then there is not much weight behind them. Venues and other outside entities

require compliance, but within the sector there is little such authority and regulation. Fortunately, with a higher-risk art form like circus, most common sense people know not to practice it without taking the correct safety and insurance precautions, but having stronger legal requirements would go a long way in making the sector safer.

5.3: Advocacy

Advocacy is a broad term that can designate a variety of different forms of civic engagement that includes everything from lobbying legislatures to conducting community-based education on relevant issues (Mason, Civic Engagement and Advocacy, 2015). The circus sector participates in some of these forms of advocacy, though it could do more work in others. On a broad level, one could argue that the mere presentation of circus performances to as large of a public as possible is a form of advocacy, in that it is educating the public about the circus arts and hopefully engendering an affinity for future support in the community. This is reflected in the latter part of the Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival's (CCCF) mission as explored in chapter three: "to elevate the perception of and promote the artistic view of circus performance in America" ("About CCCF," 2016). From that, it is clear that one of the goals of the festival is to get more people looking at circus so that more people have a positive "perception" of the art form, which definitely counts as issue education in a form. Circus Now has a similar issue education message on their mission statement: "We coordinate advocacy campaigns so that people know that the circus is a diverse, dynamic form of performance and practice, and that if they haven't experienced it already, they're missing out" ("About Circus Now," 2016).

They even use the word “advocacy” to categorize their work of spreading the image of the contemporary circus art form. This form of advocacy is the most common in the circus sector, probably because there are so many contemporary circus artists and companies that have to educate their audiences on the differences between contemporary circus and traditional circus (covered in chapter two) to make the public understand the artistic product the companies offer. Broad education vis-à-vis continual exposure to the artistic product is a logical way for the circus sector to inform the public about its offerings.

The general public is not the only group that can benefit from this sort of “issue education”. Circus Now’s CN-ICE festival, mentioned in chapter three, had the express purpose not only of exposing contemporary circus to a wider public, but also to international presenters in the hopes that these people would book more circus performances and create more work for the sector (“CN-ICE,” 2016). This could still count as issue education, but when it is directed to a group that could help bring even more circus performances to the public, it is on a different level than the education of the general public. Another way that Circus Now has engaged in a higher form of issue education is working with some members of the press to teach them about the circus generally and how to write about it (Wall, February 5, 2016, personal communication). Educating that group would hopefully embolden them to write more about the circus, which would help in spreading exposure to the wider public. It becomes clear, then, that the sector not only exposes the public to the art form, but it also helps other actors like presenters and journalists support the sector in that exposure.

Advocacy does not have to just benefit the circus sector. Social circus initiatives, for example, can be seen as a form of advocacy, in which circus is used to improve the community. As mentioned in chapter three, social circus programs use circus as a vehicle to address problems facing the community. Dealing with broad issues like homelessness or segregation takes a concerted effort from many different actors including governments, social service agencies, activists, and others. Social circus initiatives can absolutely be seen as actors that are helping to address and solve these societal issues. The form might be nontraditional, but the results are very real, as chapter three demonstrated, and many of these social circus organizations are led and staffed by people who care just as much about the issues facing their communities as those working for the social service and government agencies addressing the same problems.

The main area where the circus sector could conduct more advocacy relates to some of the issues mentioned in the funding section earlier this chapter. A large problem facing the growth and development of many circus organizations, and thus the whole sector, is the fact that many funding organizations and agencies do not recognize circus in their categories of funded art forms. Circus Now has done some work with the director of the New Orleans Arts Council to add circus to their grants category (Wall, February 5, 2016, personal communication). This sort of work needs to happen on a much broader scale, starting on the federal level with the National Endowment for the Arts. Many arts granting organizations and agencies take cues from the NEA when it comes to grant categories. While the recognition from the NEA in the form of the article regarding circus as a “folk and traditional” art form

gave good exposure to the circus sector, it still did not place circus arts in a category of its own for grants. The problems with this are mentioned above, including circus organizations not knowing what category to select, not thinking that they are eligible for certain funding streams, or not actually feeling represented by the category in which they have been placed. If the sector can advocate for its own category on the federal level, then many other agencies and organizations down the line would take note, and the direct representation of a circus arts category would increase.

Of course, this relates to the education advocacy that the sector already undertakes. Until sector participants can make enough of a case for themselves in the form of continual and growing exposure, they will continue to be seen as a “fringe” art form that does not have enough legitimacy to justify its own granting category. This will be covered more in depth later in this chapter.

5.4: Professional and Trade Associations

Professional and trade associations is another area of general public infrastructure in which circus is lagging behind other art forms. According to Harvey (2004), professional associations are “a group of people in a learned occupation who are entrusted with maintaining control or oversight of the legitimate practice of the occupation” (Analytic Quality Glossary, p. 1). Examples of these associations in the performing arts include Dance USA, Chorus America, The League of American Orchestras, Opera America, the International Association of Venue Managers, the Theatre Communications Group, and many others. The kind of work these associations do is multifold. For example, Chorus America has a five focus approach:

advocacy for the sector and research on the impact of choruses around the country; education and training for choral administrators and artistic workers; tools for management and governance of choral organizations including marketing, fundraising, and operations; master classes and information on performance trends for choral conductors and artistic directors; and tools for singers to improve their craft (“Chorus America About” 2016). Beyond those tools for their constituencies, professional associations usually convene an annual conference where sector workers can get together to talk about the issues facing the sector and strategies for approaching the ever-changing landscape of their art form. “For the arts managers the benefit of belonging to these associations and attending these conferences lies in expanding their knowledge of how other organizations are adapting to external forces” (Byrnes, 2015, p. 134).

Unfortunately, the circus sector does not boast such an association. This is not to say that organizations within the sector are not providing such opportunities; in fact, the opposite is true. As outlined in previous chapters, Circus Now provides services like advocacy, research, and professional development opportunities; AYCO/ACE provide professional development, educational resources, and safety standards; and the Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival (along with other festivals) provides master classes, professional development, and the space for sector participants to convene and discuss issues facing the sector. The main gap in the circus sector arises from the fact that these services do not arise from one centralized organization. There are a variety of associations that focus on one discipline such as the International Juggling Association or the World Clown

Association, but the sector could use one umbrella professional association that incorporates all of the discipline-based associations, while also providing broader support, resources, and advocacy. This could include much of what Circus Now and AYCO/ACE already produce, but all centralized under one organization.

When someone in the United States wants to start a choir, for example, they would know to go to Chorus America to find any resources necessary for that sort venture including how to raise initial funds, hold auditions, build a board, choose repertoire, etc. Furthermore, many of these professional associations maintain strong online presences either on their website or on sites like LinkedIn and Facebook, which means that there is an active online community that could answer any of the questions this choral entrepreneur might have. The circus sector also has such online communities, but someone wanting to start a juggling organization, for example, might not know if they should just become a member of the International Juggling Association or also participate in the ACE safety program or if Circus Now has anything to offer them. Having a single professional association for the circus would go a long way in helping define the sector both for people working within the sector and the general public outside of the sector.

5.5: Conclusions

This study's exploration of the circus sector in the United States has covered a large breadth of different areas. The history of the art form is rich and varied, weaving between prominence and irrelevance, regard and suspicion. Today's contemporary circus products are reaching wider and wider audiences with increasing numbers of performances, classes, and festivals. Social circus initiatives

are using the form to successfully address issues facing communities around the country. Organizations like Circus Now and AYCO/ACE are using their resources to support and grow the sector while vouching for its place in the greater United States creative sector. There is huge growth and increasing recognition and acclaim for the form.

However, something that has been implicit throughout the exploration of the circus sector's missing general public infrastructure in this chapter is the issue of the perceived legitimacy of the art form. The NEA does not recognize circus as its own granting category and the art form lacks its own professional association with a high profile like other performing art forms. Furthermore, contemporary circus is still a relatively unknown form to the general public, and the layperson is still probably more likely to think of Barnum & Bailey when they see the advertisement for a circus show than something with the contemporary aesthetic; there is not an awareness of the diversity of circus performance. Circus organizations are working hard to raise the profile of contemporary circus performance and aesthetics to the general public, but it is an uphill battle when there is an ingrained perception of the art form and when it is difficult for sector participants to devote themselves fully to the form because they cannot make a living just performing.

When exploring the difference between the United States circus sector and the circus sectors in Western European countries, it is important to remember the historical context of the circus in these different places. As chapter two outlined, the circus in the United States took on a very spectacle-based, commercially-focused image during the golden age of the circus, while the European circuses maintained a

one-ring, more artistically-based style. Because of this, today's European perspective on circus aligns much more with the contemporary circus aesthetic, while when Americans hear circus, they think of a large spectacle that is mostly aimed at children and families. While it is not even true that traditional circus lacks artistic value (there are a variety of artistically significant traditional circus shows), this difference in perceived artistic value in the circus has made Americans less likely to view the circus arts as a legitimate art form – for many it is still just a spectacle or a niche performance.

This not only negatively affects attendance to circus shows, but also can influence circus acts getting gigs from presenters and venues. Tony Micocci, who worked as a presenter for a decade outlines the presenter's dilemma when it comes to circus.

I think it safe to say that traditional presenters cannot routinely offer a "circus series" as they might a theater series, dance, classical music, etc. I suspect this is in part because there is not a reliable source of sufficient quality product at affordable cost, and partly as public taste treats this as an occasional novelty and not something to attend routinely as classical music fans might a symphony series. I might drop a circus in once on a season for variety...but would hesitate to do much more. (Micocci, January 29, 2016, personal communication).

Other performing arts, such as classical music, benefit from having a large fan base that is willing to see multiple symphonic performances every year. Circus, on the other hand, is not viewed as such and its potential audience does not regard it something that deserves a performance series (which is ironic, given the huge diversity of circus disciplines – a circus series could be incredibly varied and dynamic). Still, this means that circus faces an uphill battle not only in getting audiences but also in booking consistent gigs because presenters largely do not view

them as economically viable as other performances. Like Micocci outlines, it creates a sort of “circus quota” from presenters: one performance is probably enough for a presenting season, which creates high competition for the few gigs that a presenter might book. All of this, in the end, hinders the spread of circus to a larger public. Another facet of this is a mismatch of venue. As he points out, many performing arts presenters are required to program into their often proscenium-style venues, which does not always match with the space requirements of a circus act. A number contemporary circuses still perform in tents and other “non-traditional” spaces, which is impossible for a number of performing arts centers to accommodate (Micocci, May 23 2016, personal communication).

Micocci also brings up another interesting point about the United States circus that researchers and critics have discussed at length: the quality of the American circus output. As Cohen (2012) covers deeply in her study, due to the lack of a conservatory-style circus school in the United States, many serious circus students leave the country to study elsewhere and end up doing most of their work abroad. This results in fewer highly educated circus artists creating performances in the United States and the overall quality of the United States circus product goes down because of it. It also has the effect of encouraging the booking of higher quality, international circus companies for tours instead of domestic ones. Still, this does not mean that there is not circus being created in the United States that is valuable or of high quality, just that circus artists who have not had the intense training offered by the institutions Cohen highlights have a harder time meeting the

standards of technical precision and artistic mastery set by their internationally-educated counterparts.

The obvious fix to this is to create a circus school in the United States that matches the curriculum and quality of those abroad. Unfortunately, this circles back to the problem of perceived legitimacy of the art form. Until circus is viewed with as much legitimacy as forms like theatre, opera, symphonic performance, or a myriad forms of dance, it is unlikely that existent conservatories would be open to adding a rigorous circus program to their offerings, due to the costs of maintaining practice spaces, hiring qualified instructors (many of whom would have to come from abroad), and administrative expenses around running such a program. It becomes clear, then, that a circus conservatory has a better chance opening on its own, but that again runs into the above problems of financing. Investors and large donors who do not know about the art form might be hesitant to back such a large project. As mentioned earlier, NECCA is undergoing a capital campaign to expand their space to be more fit to offer such a program, and their goal is to develop a high-level professional program that competes with its peers internationally (Smith, March 21, 2016, personal communication).

However, having a high-level circus conservatory in the United States would still not go all the way in breaking down the barriers that the sector faces here. First of all, the United States is a large, spread out country, and circus students and artists do not have the access to a wide range of different circus performances that exists in smaller countries like France and circus-heavy cities like Montreal. There are more barriers, too. “Most American students start out down two counts compared to their

counterparts abroad,” says Elsie Smith of NECCA (Smith, March 21, 2016, personal communication). As she outlines, the reasons for this are a result of the differences in public programs offered in the United States versus many foreign countries. Namely, many American students graduate from higher education programs burdened by student debt, plus healthcare is not a guarantee here. Right from the beginning, this adds extra costs that an emerging United States circus artist has to reconcile, which many of her European, Canadian, and Australian peers do not have to face. Furthermore, once an artist is working, there is not the sort of support that exists in other countries. In France, for example, there is funding for artists while they take off time from performing to create new work, which encourages innovation and a continual stream of new artistic products. This sort of support does not exist in the United States, which means that circus artists working here must always supplement their artistic creation with time spent performing, teaching, training, or any other number of ways artists make a living in this country. This, in turn, leaves less time for artistic creation, which also negatively affects the quality of the final performance product. “When we create for Nimble Arts,” Elsie Smith recounts, “we work with eight people who also have full-time teaching jobs and kids and families. It’s very hard to get people together for the hours necessary to create a real, ensemble-based show” (Smith, March 21, 2016, personal communication).

Looking at all of these barriers facing the circus sector in the United States begins to become overwhelming. There is a lack of perceived legitimacy, so there should be more public exposure to circus products, but the lack of legitimacy makes

it harder to book gigs and bring audiences, so there should be a circus conservatory in the United States that graduates high-quality circus artists to increase the quality of the circus here, but the lack of legitimacy makes funding that sort of venture difficult, plus there are huge policy impediments facing United States artists of all strokes that their peers abroad just do not have to face. It all comes back to the question of legitimacy of the art form, which is probably why many circus sector participants are nervous about the growing popularity of the circus fitness movement, where people use a “reduced” version of aerial arts and other circus disciplines as a workout, much like how Zumba borrowed from dance. This circus fitness movement often markets their events as circus competitions or aerial competitions. “It is concerning that so many people are learning about circus from this very narrow perspective,” says Elsie Smith (Smith, March 21, 2016, personal communication). Whereas people already knew enough about dance and held it in high esteem, which made no one confuse Zumba with a professional dance show, the same cannot be said about the public knowledge of the circus arts. On the other hand, however, it might prompt people to gain deeper knowledge of the art form.

Luckily for the circus sector, the lack of perceived legitimacy is a variable that is by no means static. The very beginning of this project outlined the boom that the contemporary circus is experiencing all over the world, including in the United States. Circus Now, AYCO/ACE, the CCCF, and a variety of other circus organizations of all sizes and focuses are working tirelessly to bring national and international circus products to a wider public. “I would say the perception of circus in New York is starting to match the perception abroad now because of Circus Now,” says Josh

Aviner (Aviner, February 23, 2016, personal communication). This is great progress, and means that there is a fundamental shift in the perception of the art form beginning to take hold in the last three or four years. Such a shift is supported by circus performance beginning to bleed into other performance sectors. For example, internationally acclaimed circus company 7 Fingers of the Hand is performing on the Broadway revival and national tour of the musical *Pippin*, which has been bringing some of the world's best contemporary circus performers to a huge national audience (Halpern, American Theatre, 2016). Furthermore, other performance companies like symphonies, ballets, and choirs are beginning to collaborate with local circus companies to produce multi-disciplinary shows (Cohen, January 27, 2016, personal communication).

There is another important shift that some see as beginning to take hold. "This is very recent, but young American artists who have graduated from programs abroad have begun to show an interest in coming back to the states and starting companies here," says Adam Woolley of Circus Now (Woolley, February 6, 2016, personal communication). If such a return is indeed beginning to take hold, it could greatly help the sector have more, higher-quality performances consistently being created in the country.

The important takeaway from all of this is that the sector is beginning to grow its connections and come together to overcome many of the barriers facing it. "Everyone is looking to pitch in to make everything better," says Amy Cohen of AYCO/ACE (Cohen, January 27, 2016, personal communication). And even though it would take a concerted effort of a huge multitude of actors beyond the circus sector

to solve the more policy-based barriers facing artists in the United States (healthcare, student loans, etc.), it cannot be denied that circus has been growing and developing in the country in spite of the hardships facing it.

“7 Fingers [of the Hand] is founded and directed by two American women. Five of the top ten jugglers in the world are American. A lot of what international circus looks like is because of American artists” (Woolley, February 6, 2016, personal communication).

“Circus draws the audience to the edge of their seats. Life and death is happening right in front of their eyes. The human body is overcoming physical obstacles. Physical vocabulary overcomes language barriers...circus is a unifying language” (Cruz, March 28, 2016, personal communication).

What this all points to is that there is no lack of talent, potential, or gumption in United States circus artists or circus sector. With a growing sector with increasingly deep connections and networks, a body of American artists at home and abroad that are itching to help, and an art form that is truly singular, it seems that the contemporary circus sector in the United States is poised to create a manner of functioning that is uniquely American, which will raise the art form to the heights of its peers and, in so doing, make the creative sector in the United States all the more vibrant.

Appendix A: Circus Equipment Suppliers

RIGGING SUPPLIERS

Trapezes, fabrics, etc.

Nimble Arts: www.NimbleArts.org trapezes, fabrics (low & medium stretch), misc. rigging for aerials

Spitfire Forge: www.spitfireforge.com trapezes, lyras

Trapeze Rigging: www.trapezerigging.com

Custom Built Equipment: www.cbe-circus.com webs/hand loops/etc

Barry Cordage: www.barry.ca cable core trapezes, stretchy fabric, etc

Antoine Grenier: antoinegrenier@gmail.com trapezese w/ nylon core

Jackie Tan: jtcircus@yahoo.com lyra

Erik Newquist: erik.newquist@gmail.com lyra & invented apparatus

Air Cat Aerial Arts: www.aircat.net stretchy fabric

Rigging supplies

Nimble Arts: (rescue 8's/carabiners/round slings) www.NimbleArts.org

Sapsis Rigging: www.sapsis-rigging.com

Gear Express: (especially webbing/slings) www.gearexpress.com

Berkeley: (quicklinks/shackles) www.berkeleypoint.com

REI: (webbing/carabiners) www.rei.com (or any rock climbing store)

Mill Valley Splicing: (rope/round slings) (413) 323-6307

Free standing rigs

Standard upright: www.damnhot.com

Pyramid w/ room for two points: www.trapezerigging.com (our favorite – tell him we sent you!)

Pyramid w/ single point at top: www.angelsintheair.com

Mats: check for shipping costs, and pick them up if you can

Tiffin: www.Tiffinmats.com

Deary's Gymnastics Supply: www.Gymsupply.com

Misc Supplies:

Henry Schein: www.henryschein.com

Zonas Plain adh tape 555-1209

Tuf-Skin colorless 4 oz 134-7944

Chalk – Frank Endo www.frankendo.com and others: get a bag of broken chalk for less

Dry Rosin: purchase in bulk for discounts from dance supply stores/ try

www.discountdance.com

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