A PHENOMENOLOGY OF YOUTH CIRCUS TRAINING AT FERN STREET CIRCUS

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the lived experience of circus training in a youth circus program from the perspective of the young recipients of such training. The author provides historical contexts for youth circus training, focusing on activity in the United States. Literature relating to youth circus training is reviewed, beginning with a brief consideration of the large number of works dealing with circus in general, followed by a review of the few scholarly and practical sources pertaining directly to the phenomenon of youth circus training.

The author then goes on to employ qualitative methods to examine youth circus training at Fern Street Circus in San Diego, California, using data collected in interviews conducted with young participants in the Fern Street program. The results were transcribed, all statements given equal weight, and sorted for themes of meaning. Those themes that emerged in every interview became the basis for the phenomenological assertions in the findings. Multiple intelligences theory provided a conceptual framework for organizing these themes. The author conducted additional interviews late in the study to confirm and enrich findings.

Themes that developed within the data include engagement with interpersonal relationships including friendships and family dynamics, developing a sense of self-identity, balancing risk taking and risk management, economic considerations, athletic physical development, and learning the aesthetics of

circus performance. It is hoped that this rich set of ways in which the participants in the study reflected on their experience of youth circus training will support the rationales given by youth circus educators, and that this study will meaningfully add to the limited scholarly discourse regarding youth circus training.

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1. Introduction

In the spring of 2000 I began to investigate youth circus training programs at the Fern Street Community Arts organization in San Diego, California. I adopted qualitative research methods to study the case. Seeking to understand youth circus training from the perspective of children and adolescents, I focused the study with the question: "What is the meaning of youth circus training from the perspectives of child and adolescent participants?"

I made multiple visits to Fern Street Circus's training sessions in San Diego between 2000 and 2001. In the course of these visits I selected participants for the study, conducted multiple interviews with each participant, and observed their training sessions and performances. In the meantime, I began the process of writing out my own ideas about circus training as an instructor, performer, scholar, and student of circus arts in order to give some preliminary structure to the questions and to lay out my own preconceptions about the topic. In the time since I began my research, several academic and popular studies of circus and circus education have emerged, and these have helped immensely in limiting the scope of my study and allowing me to focus on the central question of my research.

The study that follows provides a description of a brief period when a small group of young circus artists responded to questions from an interviewer seeking to understand how they made meaning of the experience of circus training. I have sought to interpret and present their responses faithfully, even as I have myself wrestled with many of the questions I posed to them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is threefold. First, it adds significantly to the slim body of scholarly and theoretical work addressing circus education for young people. By illuminating what training in various circus disciplines means to a group of students, the study may provide useful information for circus educators to use in their work. The results of the study may provide insight, for example, into strategies to use in motivation and in facilitating meta-cognition about the training process. Second, by studying the Fern Street circus program I provide a scholarly description of a highly successful youth circus program that has been held up as a model community arts organization on a national level. This can inform my own work and that of others in the youth circus field as well as provide a historical document for future scholars. It may also provide useful information for circus organizations seeking funding for educational endeavors. Third, the study implicitly addresses the current trend in which theorists examine the effects of arts education from an empirical standpoint. All too often, arts programs in educational settings are justified based on their ability to create quantifiable improvements in test scores and the like. This study adds to the body of knowledge garnered through qualitative methods which foreground the experience of the learner.

Definitions

A number of terms need definition at the outset of this study, including the subject, youth circus training, and the method, phenomenology. I do so in a

limited way here to provide a general understanding of how I am using these terms. I shall define phenomenology in detail in my discussion of methodology. I shall also provide more definition of the subject, "youth circus training," throughout the course of the study, as phenomenological reduction involves a process of deep and extended definition.

Briefly stated, phenomenology is the study of the meaning an individual constructs from lived experience. According to Titchen and Hobson, "Phenomenology is the study of lived, human phenomena within the everyday social contexts in which the phenomena occur from the perspective of those who experience them" (121). In terms of qualitative research, this indicates approaching the phenomenon in question from the perspective of the participants' experience of it. As for example, van Manen notes, "A phenomenological interest in the reading experience of a child would be unlikely to involve experimentation with some hypothetical variables or testable skills" but would instead ask "what is the reading experience itself like for children? What is it like for a young child to read?" (Researching Lived Experience 40). This methodology has been used in researching nursing, teaching, and other service-oriented activities where the subjective experiences of those served and those serving may inform the practice of said activities. Van Manen notes that while his orientation is "pedagogic," others "may be oriented as a nurse, a psychologist, or a medical doctor" (40).

The subject of my study can be reduced to three nesting phenomena: circus arts, youth circus, and youth circus training. I consider "circus arts" (at the risk of tautological definition) as the performance and practice of those performance techniques generally employed within the context of a traditional western circus. These techniques often involve the highly refined skill and physical conditioning commonly associated with sport, coupled with aesthetic awareness in presentation. Circus may indicate the grouping of these techniques within a single performance unified by a place, time, and artistic intention—for example a performance of a set of acts under a tent ordered and directed by a ringmaster. Circus arts may also be construed as the practice of these techniques within other artistic forms, such as theatre and dance. The circus, like the opera, may be considered a synergistic combination of elements of other performing arts, including dance, music, and drama, but unlike opera, a circus performance does not always have a unified theme or plot. It may, but it often takes the form of a variety show that depends on performance elements involving all performers (such as parades and processionals), unique staging elements (in the round, in a tent), and recurring narrative elements (ringmaster and clowns) to unify the disparate elements into a synergistic whole. Like many authors, I include circus-like activity in my considerations of circus. This includes amateur activity, parades, carnivals, and much street theatre, as well as past performance activity that occurred before the eighteenth century origination of the term in Euro-American culture. Circus arts are commonly considered popular and/or

children's entertainment, and as such have been treated as unworthy of scholarship and critical discourse by many academics. This popularity has led political movements to seize on circus as art for the masses both in the early Soviet Union and in the counter-culture of the US and Europe in the 1960s (Schechter Durov's Pig). Finally, circus arts may be practiced recreationally, with no presentational intent, and some practitioners may exchange the terms "circus arts," "variety arts," and "circus skills" (Wiley).

"Youth circus" implies circus created and performed by youth, as opposed to an entertainment devised for youth. In this, the term is similar to general use of "youth theatre" as opposed to "children's theatre" or "theatre for young audiences," the latter phrases generally referring to theatrical presentations by adults for children; the former, presentations by children. Whereas in traditional circus performance, acts are often made up of families of performers, and children perform alongside their parents, the term "youth circus" indicates practice and performance of circus arts by a population made up primarily of children and adolescents. It generally indicates a break from traditional transmission of knowledge and skill along familial lines and in one-to-one apprenticeship, as youth circus participants generally learn from teachers and coaches in organized classes and workshops. Youth circus also generally indicates amateur status and often a recreational approach, although a youth circus may be part of a professional training program or community circus (as is the case with Fern Street) and generally does include performance. Finally,

youth circus, as designated here, is a relatively new phenomenon with historical roots in the early twentieth century, whereas circus in America dates back at least to the 1780s (Culhane xvii).

"Youth circus training," for the purposes of my study, designates the process of learning circus arts within the context of a youth circus program. In contextualizing the study I may extend this definition to include other arenas in which children and adolescents learn circus skills, such as self-instruction or workshops offered in schools or camps. It includes all incidental as well as formal elements of this activity including but not limited to: interaction with circus trainers and educators, time spent privately practicing skills, self-teaching, and interaction with both adults and other youth connected with the youth circus. It may or may not include performance activity. "Training" here indicates not only the transaction of knowledge between trainer and trainee, but also the development of that knowledge through repetition, unobserved private practice, and reflection. Note that I do limit the term to indicate training occurring under the auspices of a youth circus organization, rather than any circus training undergone by any "youth," which would of course include, for instance, the training activity of a young member of a professional circus family. While these phenomena may overlap somewhat, my intention is to study the training that occurs within a dedicated youth circus program.

Methodology

As qualitative research specialist van Manen notes, "it has been said that the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method" (Researching Lived Experience 29). By this he indicates that there is no authoritative, singly recognized method for phenomenology. Multiple methods exist, and different researchers have used them for different purposes. Tichen and Hobson (2005) have recently theorized two distinct models for qualitative phenomenology stemming from two different philosophical takes on phenomenology. While I designed my research using the ideas laid out in van Manen's 1997 book, Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy, subsequent publications, including later work by van Manen, influence the ways in which I have interpreted the data. The multiple perspectives and personal aspect of phenomenology require some discussion of phenomenology as a term and a method before describing the particulars of my methodology.

Methodologists have conceptualized phenomenology within the paradigm of qualitative research as the investigation of those everyday actions, practices and procedures by which individuals give meaning to and make sense of daily life experiences. According to Creswell's overview of qualitative research methods, "a phenomenological study describes the meaning of ***lived experiences*** for several individuals about a concept or ***the phenomenon***" [emphasis his] (51). The approach derives from the philosophical work of

Husserl and its subsequent development by Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Creswell 52). In fact, Titchen and Hobson see two distinct approaches to methodology as stemming from the distinct philosophies of Husserl and Heidegger:

> During the 1800s and reacting to ways of constructing the world only through empiricism, German philosophers began the search for a new interpretive science. Their ideas were based on the investigation of the life and social worlds through the study of context and individuals' own constructions and meanings within that context. This work led to the development of two philosophical frameworks that influence interpretive research methodologies today. (Titchen and Hobson 123)

They conceive of Husserl as having founded phenomenology "based on epistemological concerns." Husserl, in this reading, starts with a conscious subject in a world of objects. His student Heidegger's phenomenology, however, does not use epistemology as the starting point. "Rather, he saw that we are first and foremost rooted, immersed in the world and not separate from it. So the ultimate goal for Heidegger's phenomenology is to deepen our understanding of what it is to be. His concern is, therefore, ontological. The *indirect approach*, used to study the background of the phenomenon, grows from this root" (Titchen and Hobson 123). While I became aware of this discussion long after designing my research, in hindsight I recognize my methods and thought adhere more

closely to the epistemological approach Titchen and Hobson call a "direct approach" to phenomenological research.

Phenomenology assumes that the reality of an object (phenomenon) is inextricable from an individual's consciousness of that object. This assumption is termed *intentionality of consciousness.* From this assumption it follows that "the reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual" (Creswell 53). Phenomenology as a qualitative research methodology, then, undertakes to discover the structures of meaning a group of individuals construct in their experience of a phenomenon. The phenomenological researcher attempts to distil the meanings constructed by the individuals in the group to discover structures of meaning, sometimes termed "invariant structures" (53), which manifest in the statements of most if not all of the participants. Qualitative phenomenology seeks to understand "lived meaning" which refers to "the way that a person experiences and understands his or her world as real and meaningful" rather than meanings developed from extended reflection (van Manen, Researching Lived Experience 183). For example, "a teacher wants to understand how a child meaningfully experiences or lives a certain situation even though the child is not explicitly aware of these lived meanings" (van Manen 183). This implies a hermeneutic aspect of phenomenology, in that the teacher must interpret the words of the child. Further, the process of phenomenological research may lead to an iterative

process of making meaning as the child may engage in reflection on his or her experience in the process of responding to questions from the researcher.

Use of the term "meaning" presents a challenge for the researcher, as the meaning of "meaning" is not clear. Ask someone what the experience of a given phenomenon in their life "means" and they may have difficulty with the question. Asking about the phenomenon of a "birthday" for example, would likely yield answers such as "it means I'm a year older," or "it means I was born on that day of the year." The alternative to such self-defining answers is "nothing" or "I never thought about it." The researcher must adopt techniques and procedures that address this difficulty. For example, multiple interviews allow the researcher to restate questions in various ways and to check the veracity of structures of meaning that begin to emerge in the course of the research.

Also note that while phenomenology may seem a structuralist, positivist enterprise due to the stated goal of finding "universal meanings" or "invariant structures," current qualitative phenomenological practices are consistent with post-structuralist paradigms. First, the qualitative researcher does not attempt to describe generalizable theories, but rather to elucidate specific instances that may be unique to the case at hand. The "structures of meaning" I identify will of course be structures of my own interpretation based on the data I collect from the participants in the course of my research. Through the process of reduction I intend to identify my biases for the reader to the greatest extent possible and enable myself to approach the phenomenon from the point of view of the

participants. I realize, however, that another researcher working at the same time at the same site with the same participants and the same methods and questions would likely arrive at a different set of "structures of meaning," and any variance from my methods and case would only increase that difference. "A phenomenological description," writes van Manen, "is always *one* interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or potentially *richer* or *deeper* description" [emphasis his] (Researching Lived Experience 31). The point of the research is not to give an essentialist, "definitive" treatment of the phenomenon, but rather to open one clear window on the subject. In discussing hermeneutic methodologies of the constructivist paradigm, Guba and Lincoln note, "The final aim is to distill a consensus construction that is more informed and sophisticated than any of the predecessor constructions (including, of course, the etic construction of the investigator)" (24). In discussing the idea of essences, moreover, van Manen offers:

> On the one hand, someone who argues that there are no essences seems to be taking an extremist position. A poem differs from a short story, a flower differs from a tree, pain differs from comfort, trust differs from distrust. There is little controversy about this way of speaking about essences. . . . On the other hand, phenomenologists know that the notion of essence is highly complex and that the early Husserlian view tended toward simplifying the search for essences in some of his followers.

> Essence is not a single, fixed property by which we know something; rather, it is meaning constituted by a complex array of aspects, properties and qualities—some of which are incidental and some of which are more critical to the being of things ("Glossary" Phenomenology Online).

While essence is a problematic concept, the lack of essence is equally problematic.

Even in its early development as a philosophical method, before it was adopted as a qualitative research method, phenomenology shifted from its essentialist origins. Phenomenology as a philosophical method broke from its structuralist underpinnings with Heidegger's Being and Time. As Dreyfus notes in his analysis of Heidegger's work, "In Heidegger's hands, phenomenology becomes a way of letting something be shared that can never be totally articulated and for which there can be no indubitable evidence" (30). Rather than an essentialist activity, which attempts to present evidence for "the way things are," phenomenology constitutes an attempt to articulate the ineffable. While Husserl's phenomenology indeed attempts to provide evidence to establish universality, Dreyfus holds that, according to Heidegger:

> Our understanding of being is so pervasive in everything we think and do that we can never arrive at a clear presentation of it. Moreover, since it is not a belief system but is embodied in our skills, it is not the sort of thing we could ever get clear about. (33)

At its philosophical core, then, phenomenology acknowledges the potential for multiple "essential," interpreted structures of meaning for a given phenomenon.

Developing a research method from this methodology requires that I, as the researcher, select protocols that fit the specific case in question. The range of possible techniques is broad and potentially amorphous. As Gray comments, "Phenomenology is a theoretical perspective that uses relatively unstructured methods of data collection" (28). The field of phenomenology seemingly launches the qualitative researcher toward the pragmatic research orientation adopted by Saldaña, my first mentor in qualitative research, who states that his approach is "Whatever works" (Saldaña xi). Recent studies (2004) have gone so far as to combine qualitative phenomenological methodologies with quantitative analysis (Tolman and Szalacha 97-129).

While, as I have noted, van Manen states that "there is no method" (Researching Lived Experience 29), there are generally accepted activities that constitute phenomenology. These center on Merleau-Ponty's four-step philosophical method, termed "reduction" (van Manen Researching Lived Experience 185). Reduction begins with a "questioning of the meaning of the experience of the world"(185). Next, "one needs to overcome one's subjective or private feelings, preferences, inclinations, or expectations that would prevent one from coming to terms with a phenomenon or experience as it is lived through" (185). One also "needs to strip away the theories or scientific conceptions and thematizations which overlay the phenomenon one wishes to study" (185).

Finally, the researcher attempts to "see past or through the particularity of lived experience toward the universal, essence or *eidos* that lies on the other side of the concreteness of lived meaning" (185). Alvesson and Sköldberg describe eidetic reduction as follows: "The goal here is to leave the individual phenomenon behind and to reach the so-called 'essence.' By this term the phenomenologists seem to be referring to what are otherwise generally called 'universals' – for example, the concept of the table rather than the table itself " (Alvesson and Sköldberg 37). Reduction is not the end in and of itself, but serves to bring the researcher to the point where the phenomenon in question can be understood in a concentrated fashion.

Phenomenology has, of course, had approximately a century as a philosophical method in which to develop, and changes and refinements at this point occur and gain acceptance very rarely and slowly. As a departure point for social research, however, phenomenology has only been in use for less than half that time, since the late 1960s (Chapoulie 60-61), and refinements to methodology are more frequent. Since designing my research five years ago, I have become aware of two major new ways of using qualitative phenomenology.

First, the combining of quantitative and qualitative research methods has begun to gain more currency as qualitative methods have gained wider acceptance in academic circles. This melding has allowed researchers to access the advantages of each form of research, and has also been employed in order to gain greater acceptance in fields perceived as resistant to accepting qualitative

methods. Such concerns fueled Tolman and Szalacha's teaming of qualitative and quantitative elements in a phenomenological study. Their feminist standpoint also contributed to their melding of methods (99). This combination of paradigms has had little influence on my continuing research, as the research fields of youth circus and circus training in general are so new that the results of singular approaches should prove quite valid and useful. I note the method here as a direction future research might take.

Another development in phenomenological practice, the conceptualization of two distinct styles of qualitative phenomenology, has had more influence on my thought, primarily as a clarification of my personal approach to phenomenology. In Somekh and Lewin's 2005 overview of qualitative research methods, Angie Titchen and Dawn Hobson's chapter on phenomenology details two distinct approaches to phenomenological research, the *direct* approach of phenomenological sociology and the *indirect* approach of existential phenomenology. To distinguish between these approaches Titchen and Hobson employ the concept of a foreground and background of a phenomenon. They explain that "Phenomena can be *directly* researched by exploring human *knowing*, and *indirectly* by investigating human *being*, through accessing the senses and shared background meanings and practices" [emphasis theirs] (121). What they refer to as the "direct approach," or "Phenomenological Sociology" (124) represents phenomenology as qualitative researchers have generally practiced it. In this model, the researcher attends to the phenomenon directly

through interviews that direct the attention of the participants toward the phenomenon. He or she then draws up findings based upon how participants speak directly about the phenomenon.

The indirect approach, on the other hand, attempts to bring out the "background," the unspoken, possibly subconscious, experience of the phenomenon. In this approach, "Researchers adopt an involved, connected observer stance and immerse themselves, literally, in the concrete, everyday world they are studying, so that they can better understand participants' intuitions, shared looks of unarticulated understanding and undisclosed, shared meanings between the words in the practices" (Titchen and Hobson 123). This approach returns to the roots of phenomenological practice, wherein the philosopher reflects on personal lived experience of a phenomenon. The difference is that the researcher intentionally "immerses" herself in a phenomenon in order to explore it rather than reflecting on something already experienced. Titchen and Hobson admit that the indirect approach, which they ally with "existential phenomenology" (126), may limit transferability to other situations, and that identification with the participants may impede the researcher's critical thinking. Hobson refers to these issues in her study of nurses' engagement with ethical decision-making: "I saw that I was becoming too immersed in the surroundings to be able to function effectively as a researcher" (128). Conversely, she felt that her method had allowed her to elicit "unarticulated concerns hidden in the everyday" (128).

The "indirect" approach holds what I believe an insurmountable problem in researching the experience of any youth population, in that no adult can ever effectively "immerse" in the world of children due to the simple and obvious physical and psychological differences between children and adults. The discussion of different approaches has, however, helped me articulate that one of my philosophical reasons for choosing phenomenology was to foreground and validate the words and perceptions of the young people in my study, rather than to presume to interpret their actions or "measure" their activity in the ways that other approaches would require.

Data Gathering and Analysis

In spring 2000 I made a series of site visits to the Fern Street Circus training program in San Diego, California. I made four visits during the process of data gathering, beginning in February and ending in October 2000. The first served to familiarize me with the program, staff, and location, to begin participant recruitment, and to help formulate questions for the interview process. In the subsequent visits I observed training sessions, rehearsals, performances, and social events; built up a document archive; and, most important, conducted interviews with participants. I visited Fern Street again in December 2004 to reconnect with as many of the participants as possible and to see how they and the program in general had evolved. I was able to observe a practice session and speak with the current artistic director, who provided insight and information about the current work of the study's participants. In October 2005 I conducted

brief telephone interviews with three of the older participants to check their impressions of my findings from the earlier data and to see how the perspectives of age and time had affected their reflections on circus training. I also made a draft of this dissertation as well as a two-page digest of my findings available to participants in the study to allow them to respond.

Before and during the data gathering and analysis I continually wrote out my own ideas and experiences of youth circus training in an attempt to bracket my ideas so that both the reader and I could identify ways in which my own ideas, theories, knowledge base, and preconceptions may have flavored my research from the framing of the questions to my findings based on the data I collected. This bracketing includes definitions of terms, review of literature, and personal experiences and ideas. I interviewed eleven children and teenagers as primary participants as well as various trainers, parents, and founder/artistic director John Highkin. I recruited primary participants with a range of ages and skill levels who would provide a broad cross section of experience of circus training. I attempted to recruit a group that would show a wide distribution of age and experiences, with a balance of male and female participants in all areas. (I outline the particulars of the participants in the section titled "Participant Description.") I interviewed each participant using a semi-structured interviewing format. "Semi-structured interviews are non-standardized and are often used in qualitative research. The interviewer has a list of questions to be covered, but may not deal with all of them in each interview" (Gray 215-6). I employed a

uniform preliminary interview schedule that I embellished with follow-up questions to clarify responses and encourage in-depth responses. After transcribing the first interviews, I conducted secondary interviews to clarify responses and pose questions inspired by the initial data, and transcribed the secondary interviews in turn. Following the transcriptions, I equalized the weight I would give the data by stripping the responses first of my own voice, and then of the participants names, leaving a body of data consisting of statements made by the participants in the study as a group. This process horizontalized the data, allowing me to treat all statements with equal weight. I then generated recurring themes of meaning from the data to provide a starting point for data analysis. I then took these themes and looked for them in each individual participant's responses and discarded those themes that did not readily emerge from the words of every participant. My methodology for data analysis resonates with the qualitative approach used by Deborah L. Tolman and Laura Szalacha in "Dimensions of Desire: Bridging Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in a Study of Female Adolescent Sexuality" (Chapter 5 of Hesse-Biber and Levy), who write:

> . . . there is no single way to understand any given narrative. Therefore, each narrative is read or 'listened to' several distinct times; for each listening, the researcher focuses on or 'listens for' a given aspect of the experience under study, underlining with a colored pencil the parts of the narrative in which the identified 'voice' is expressed. (104)

While I used fluorescent highlighters rather than pencils, I did "listen" to each interview repeatedly for different aspects of the experience of circus training. In some cases, I was able to construct meta-themes that encompassed a number of themes initially discarded in this process. Other themes remained anomalous and were finally excluded as such (a permissible tactic in phenomenological analysis). I then considered the themes of meaning that I could in good faith construe as applicable to all participants and folded them into a single cohesive statement of the meaning of youth circus training at Fern Street Circus. As a final analysis of the data, I cross-referenced these meanings with the ideas I bracketed at the outset and in the course of the research in an attempt to identify ways in which my own experiences, preconceptions, and knowledge base might have influenced my findings, and I enumerated these as well as listing implications of and further research suggested by my work.

In the next chapter, I will discuss my own relationship to youth circus training, provide a brief account of the history of youth circus in the United States, and discuss the literature relating to the topic. In addition to providing context for the specific considerations of Fern Street Circus that follow, this chapter will serve to "bracket" my own preconceptions and understandings of youth circus training for later comparison with my findings.

2. Bracketing

I have attempted to write out my own ideas regarding youth circus training to provide myself and the reader with a map of my own preconceptions. In phenomenological parlance this process is known as bracketing, "in which the researcher brackets the rest of the world and any presuppositions with which she approaches the subject of the study" (Marshall and Rossman 82). The researcher attempts to put his or her own perspective in brackets so that it may have less effect on the findings, and so that when it inevitably does affect the research, the researcher and reader may be more aware of the extent and nature of the effect. My process of bracketing has produced copious notes, journals, and bibliographical material, which I attempt to distill for my readers and myself. I have attempted to be brief, as a full account of my own perspectives and their implications for this study could fill several volumes.

I will begin with a statement of my personal experiences and biases regarding youth circus training. I will then provide a brief review of literature relevant to the study that has informed my work. I will then give a review of youth circus training that attempts to position the phenomenon in relation to the history of youth circus and theatre for youth. Finally, I will outline the categories of meaning that I posited as I began my research.

Personal Statement

My own perspective on youth circus training has multiple facets constructed from my personal experience of circus training. To begin, I am a circus performer, instructor, and theorist, and as such I engage in continuous

circus training. As an artist, educator, and scholar in the field of theatre and arts education, I come to this research with a developed set of techniques for looking at youth arts programs. In addition, before starting and in the course of this research, I have had the good fortune to observe a number of youth circus programs, as well as many professional circus productions. Finally, I work with a knowledge base garnered from extensive reading on circus with an eye on circus training and youth.

Before and during the course of this research, I have been employed continuously as a performer and teacher of circus arts. I have performed as a clown, juggler, and aerialist independently, in the context of dinner theatres and gala fundraisers, and with a professional circus company. I have taught circus skills in schools and after-school programs through such organizations as YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, and in circus education programs such as Make*A*Circus, Acrosports, and Splash Circus Theatre. In addition, I have served as the program director of Make*A*Circus, a non-profit circus company based in San Francisco, California, and as artistic director of Splash Circus Theatre in Emeryville, California. These activities have meant that I have been continuously engaged in adopting, developing, and implementing pedagogy and curriculum for youth circus training. In addition and perhaps more importantly, it means that I have been undergoing my own ongoing training in circus skills even as I have been examining circus training as experienced by a group in a youth circus. In terms of this investigation, this position as a trainer, trainee, and performer has many

implications. First, it means that I have always had multiple agendas in conducting interviews. While I always kept in mind my primary goal of wanting to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants in my study, I have always had the ulterior motive of increasing my own efficacy as a circus trainer and even my own skill as a performer. My status as a practitioner has, on the one hand, given me an insider status that perhaps helped me conduct effective interviews and rapidly gain rapport with the participants. On the other hand it has meant that I have been looking for methods of training to use myself and teach others, and even that I have at times compared my own ability and progress with my participants. Subsequent to my data gathering I have even shared classes with some of the participants who have grown to young adulthood and have visited the facilities in which I train. I believe that I have done well in pursuing the goal of understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of the interviewees, and that my personal experience of the phenomenon has allowed me greater understanding of their responses. Nonetheless, I am certain that the study would have come up with different but equally valid information had a researcher with no personal experience of circus training conducted it.

My understanding of the phenomenon is also influenced and informed by my positioning as a theatre artist, scholar, and educator with a particular interest in theatre for and by youth and by my multidisciplinary approach to the arts in general. As such, I tend to look at circus primarily as an art related to theatre, dance, and other performance fields. As a scholar in the field of theatre for youth

and arts education, I position youth circus training in relation to the history and practice of youth theatre and arts education in general. While I believe that circus is an art form separate from drama, and that youth circus is by extension a separate phenomenon rather than a subset of youth theatre, I believe that the interests and practices involved in each are similar and complementary. I also see the historical backgrounds of youth circus and theatre for youth as strongly parallel and based in the same socio-economic milieu. My background in arts education and my philosophy of teaching influenced my choice of a qualitative research method and of phenomenology in particular. I believe that an individual learner's experience of an educational program is the starting point for understanding what the program in question actually teaches.

In addition to my professional perspectives, I am also an aficionado of the circus. As is the case for many people currently interested in circus, I loved the circus as a child and was reawakened to the possibilities of circus arts by a performance of Cirque du Soleil during their first tour of the United States. During the course of this study I have seen more than one hundred performances by circuses and circus artists in the United States and Europe. These have ranged from professional circus productions, to amateur and community circus groups, to class and workshop presentations. Many of these performances have fallen into the youth circus category. Each performance has informed my perspective on the possibilities of circus arts and, by extension, circus training. They have given me an understanding of various vocabularies of

circus performance and have helped me develop an eye for the ways talent, skill, creativity, and training manifest in circus performance.

Finally, I have immersed myself in whatever literature I could find pertaining to circus history, performance, and training. These readings have helped me develop a knowledge base with which to construct the study and interpret my findings. I lay out some of the perspectives I have developed in the course of my reading in my review of literature.

Youth Circus Contexts

Before dealing specifically with Fern Street Circus, I will provide some contextualization of youth circus as a phenomenon. I will give an overview of youth circus activity, focusing on the twentieth century as the beginning of youth circus in the United States. I draw on international and pre-twentieth century examples occasionally in order to provide a necessary framing, but I leave an exhaustive discussion of these areas to future study. I will begin with a brief historical overview of early youth circus activity and the cultural milieu which gave rise to it, and then discuss a number of ways in which youth circus activity has manifested. I classify these manifestations as formal youth circus training, circus in education, and circus play. I deal with each of these classifications (which are arbitrary and often overlap) as they arise. Circus Scholar Robert Sugarman's book, Circus for Everyone, provides an inclusive overview of current circus training programs in the United States and abroad, and I build on his work here

by providing my own theoretical framework for classifying different types of circus training activities.

There are a number of notable early instances of youth circus activity. For instance, "the town council of Nuremburg engaged a full time 'ball-master' in the 1680s who not only demonstrated his own abilities but taught the town youth to juggle and walk tightrope. Indeed, juggling and ropewalking were often performed together at that time as they are in circuses today" (Ziethen and Allen 11). Even earlier, the Chinese Tang Dynasty (712-755 CE) established the "Pear Garden" as a school to train children in juggling, acrobatics and other skills of what has come to be called the Chinese Opera (Hoh). For the most part, however, training in circus skills prior to the establishment of circus as a recognized set of performance activities took the form of individualized instruction usually within families or master/apprentice arrangements (Albrecht 19). In addition, it is arguable that "youth circus training" requires the establishment of circus as a phenomenon in order to exist. It is worth noting that Astley established the first modern circus as an outgrowth of his riding school in Britain. Thus, circus as we know it had its origins in a pedagogical institution. Two major aspects of youth circus may be seen in these early forerunners of youth circus. In the case of Nuremburg's "ball master," the emphasis appears to have been on recreation and fitness, whereas the Pear Garden appears to have been analogous to a professional training facility.

Youth circus in the contemporary sense, however, with its goals of fitness, community, recreation, and professional training, could not develop until several developments in the circus and its society provided a context for it. First, obviously, circus had to develop as a performance form. Second, it required the construction of youth as a protected class during the Victorian era and early twentieth century. Finally, society had begun to perceive circus as a fit entertainment and activity for youth.

Soon after its inception in the late 1700s, the circus came to be identified with the dance hall, theatre, and other performance locations of questionable repute. In an attempt to get access to a larger (and wealthier) audience in the mid-1800s, P. T. Barnum and other prominent circus proprietors began to court family audiences. As Janet Davis notes:

> The diversity of the audience at the turn-of-the-century circus was amplified by the presence of children. This development was especially striking because the antebellum circus had been primarily an adult entertainment. In the 1880's P. T. Barnum called himself "the Children's Friend" and welcomed "children of all ages." Barnum and many social purity reformers argued that the circus offered all Americans--especially impressionable children--great moral lessons about courage, discipline, and bodily fortitude. (35)

Note that this rationale presages the fitness rationale of many youth circus programs in the twentieth century. The association of circus with children was

not only driven by the efforts of the circus owners. By the turn of the twentieth century, "contemporary magazines, children's books, and newspapers depicted the circuses' seminude bodies as 'wholesome' fun for 'children of all ages.' These media presented the circus as a fanciful, adventurous part of the childhood imagination" (Davis 140). The perception of circus as a positive role-model for fitness was further driven by fears "that modern industrial life had made men of the middle and upper classes 'soft'" and effeminate, resulting in a demand for sport and athletics, particularly for men and boys (Davis 144). These changes in the status of circus from adult-oriented, somewhat illicit entertainment to wholesome demonstration of fitness and character for children laid the groundwork for the rise of youth circus activity.

Among the earliest forms of youth circus activities that arose in the United States as the circus became child-friendly was what I term "circus play." Circus play consists of participation in mimetic play in which the participants take the parts of performers, animals, and spectators associated with circus. Such play may be completely unstructured and participant initiated; or instigated by books, toys or other physical catalysts; or led by an adult in an educational or recreational context. I see circus play as a precursor to youth circus training, both historically and developmentally. That is, circus play preceded more formal youth circus activity historically, and it also characterizes the earliest youth circus activity in which most children participate. Circus play relates to the "total play of the circus" posited by Carmeli, in which the signification of the circus overtook all

aspects of circus life in the eyes of spectators, creating "a totality for which the spectators in the fragmentary, industrial order nostalgically yearn" (157). "If play free of ritual, or what Turner called the liminoid, first emerged with the rise of the industrial individualized world," writes Carmeli, "then the total play of the circus, which was crystallized in the late 18th and early 19th century, is typical of the same era" (157). Evidence of circus play from this era takes many forms.

An early Norman Rockwell painting for the cover of the Saturday Evening Post depicts a group of children putting on a circus for other children. This may document something Rockwell had seen, or it may have been inspired by the story of the Ringling Brothers. The Ringlings "were inspired in 1869 to start a circus when they saw the John Stowe & Company circus and its unusual (for its day) Appaloosa horses." After the Ringlings' father, August Ringling, repaired a circus performer's leather props for free because he was a local, the family received a free pass to his performance. "The Ringling boys quickly fashioned a 'concert company' comprising panoramic (pictorial) comedy sketches and charged their youthful audiences 'ten pins' (literally straight pins) instead of cash" (Davis 60). This story of circus play by the young Ringlings gives a "pure" example in which the play was inspired directly by contact with an actual circus performance, and it, presumably alongside other undocumented examples, entered the cultural consciousness and was manifested in forms of popular culture such as Rockwell's magazine covers.

Circus play was also instigated and supported by the burgeoning children's consumer culture. Shannon posits: "in the 19th century, the American circus is further reshaped ('spectacularized') when circus plays into the cultural construction of the 'priceless' child, who emerges when family is further severed from marketplace" (1258A). This cultural construction included the commodification of circus for children. "Circus novels for children were common at the turn of the century, as were circus toys" (Davis 35). A 1918 book provides a fine example of the commodification of circus play. Entitled Let's Play Circus, the book is part of a series of "Let's Make Believe and Play" books by Lilian C. Garis. The book, in the form of a novel, simultaneously tells the story of a group of children playing circus and provides a blueprint for the reader to imitate them. Commercially produced toys and costume pieces also supported circus play. This commodity-driven aspect of circus play has continued, with varying popularity. In the 1950s huge numbers of circus toys were produced, home magazines ran columns showing how to decorate circus-themed birthday cakes and throw circus birthday parties, and juggling toys began to be commercially produced and marketed to children. In 1977, a company called Klutz began marketing a booklet showing how to juggle, packaged with a set of beanbags with which to practice. The book, Juggling for the Complete Klutz by Cassidy and Rimbeaux, has remained in print for 27 years and formed the cornerstone for a multi-million dollar company producing how-to book and toy combinations.

Adults in educational or recreational settings have often harnessed the popularity of circus play into more structured activity. These experiences maintain some of the flavor of circus play but often involve an overtly "educational" aspect. One manifestation of this directed circus play is circus pageantry. A 1923 manual titled How to Put On an Amateur Circus was created for the junior department of a Chautauqua bureau. The publishers of this booklet claim in a preface that the authors staged circuses based on the model provided in their book "in 500 Chautauqua towns in twenty states during a three year period before being published" (Hacker and Eames 6). A similar book titled The Big Time Circus Book by Sheldon was published later in 1939. Both books are designed to guide teachers and other youth leaders in presenting circus-themed pageants with youth groups. Such pageants were typical of youth activities on the Chautauqua circuits, and provided something for children to do while their parents were attending the lectures and other activities of the Chautauqua. These pageants bridge a gap between circus play and skill-based circus training provided by youth circuses and circus schools. Neither book provides any provision for teaching even basic skilled circus performance techniques (such as juggling, tumbling, or acrobatics). Both focus instead on unskilled performance methods such as circus-themed camp skits and simple costumes to create "animal acts" and circus "freaks." Rather than building circus skills with their commensurate benefits, the stated purpose of the authors is to provide

wholesome play activities for children. Hacker and Eames, in the earlier book, write:

> The circus as here outlined has three aims in view: First: to develop originality, taste, and ability for constructive rather than destructive play; second, to provide an unique entertainment, suited to any number of participants of varied ages; third, to make money." [their punctuation] (9)

Sheldon has similar aims for his Big Time Circus Book where he states that "The main idea with this type of circus is to keep the children occupied with something definite during the vacation months of summer, to keep them out of mischief" (10). In both cases the emphasis is on wholesome leisure activity for large groups of young people. I consider the activities described by these books as directed circus play, but the performative and economic emphasis of Eames in particular bring the Chautauqua youth circus pageants more closely into line with more formal youth circus activities. Indeed, Reg Bolton, an important figure in youth circus in the UK and Australia, includes similar pageant-like activities in his Circus in a Suitcase (1982) as ways to include very young children and absolute beginners in a community youth circus.

Circus play, obviously, has much in common with other forms of mimetic play. Its attraction, however, particularly in the first part of the twentieth century, may have been due to the circus as a locus of the "exotic" in American culture. "The modern child often first glimpsed the exotic Other through circuses and toys, a formative encounter that helped make colonial power relations part of the

unconscious, 'natural' world of child's play"(Davis 36). Davis notes that "Youthful counterparts to the back-to-nature movement" of the turn of the century such as "the Boy Scouts of America, the Sons of Daniel Boone, and the Woodcraft Indians, enabled white boys to assume a temporary non-white identity as they dressed up as Native Americans and learned indigenous crafts and camping and survival skills" (146). While not nearly as widespread as these sites for "playing Indian," youth circus activity had similar potential for construction of children's whiteness by allowing them to temporarily take on the identity of cultural others. Like "playing Indian," playing circus was formalized by youth leaders associated with the Chautauqua circuit. Hacker and Eames, in their circus pageant booklet published by the Chautauqua, include as suggestions for "side show" characters the "Wild Man," the "Hawaiian Beauties," "Madame Fatima" (described as "Girl dressed in oriental costume") "Negro Minstrals [sic]," and the "Siamese Twins" (61-68). Their chapter on greasepaint includes specific suggestions for "Indians and similar complexions," "Gypsies," "Chinese," and "the negroes and the African attendants of the animals" (72). Reg Bolton's Circus in a Suitcase provides for a similar, albeit more currently socially acceptable donning of the mantle of the "other" in suggesting a "cowboy" act. For the disadvantaged Edinborough youths with whom he worked prior to writing his book, the idea of the American cowboy would have been nearly as exotic as the various "exotic" characters suggested in the earlier books. The transgressive exoticism of "playing circus" may have added to the allure of circus play in early twentieth century America and still

provides children with a rich way to explore identity through role play as the "other."

When adults direct circus play in the service of pedagogical objectives, I call it circus in education. I think of this as an umbrella for circus-based activities undertaken by educators in school settings for primarily educational purposes. Such activities may take the form of circus units, directed reading, field trips, and the development of circus pageants of the sort pioneered by the Chautauqua youth leaders. One might also include residencies by circus artists and physical education programs, although for the purposes of this contextualization I will consider these separately as they tend to involve actual training in circus arts. This sort of activity tends to take place within individual classrooms and is therefore localized and largely undocumented. I have assisted teachers in directing such activities in schools in Arizona and California, and others have called on my colleagues and me to enrich existing traditions of circus-themed learning. Circus-related teaching materials have been developed by many organizations to assist teachers in circus-themed learning. The Circus Fans of America offer bibliographies of circus-related juvenile literature. Both commercial and non-profit circuses, including Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey, Big Apple, and Cirque du Soliel, have developed teachers' guides for school use. The online study guide from Big Apple Circus is one example, offering material for using circus as a base for teaching vocabulary, writing, history, and mathematics. In addition to materials of circus organizations, education oriented

publishers have printed books for teachers interested in teaching a circus unit in the classroom. Circus programs that serve as physical education in schools bridge the area between circus in education and formal circus training.

Numerous schools in the United States include at least some aspects of circus training as part of the physical education curriculum. One such program, lead by Physical Education Specialist Jerry Berkhalter, began in the early 1990s and has become the mainstay of the physical education program at Cascade Elementary School in Renton, Washington (Sugarman 161). Waldorf Schools, which base their teaching on the work of Rudolf Steiner, include circus skills in the "Spatial Dynamics" curriculum for middle school adolescents. Jackie Davis, a circus and movement specialist at the Pine Hill Waldorf School in Wilton, New Hampshire says of Spatial Dynamics training: "There are circus components in it. Juggling, diabolo [a yo-yo-like top that spins on a string manipulated by a juggler], tumbling, acrobatics, pyramids and club twirling [a rhythmic gymnastics skill] " (quoted in Sugarman 168). The curriculum also includes a form of gymnastics created by an associate of Steiner's named Fritz von Bothmer. Davis developed the circus curriculum at Pine Hill into a performing youth circus and has become something of an activist for circus training in the curriculum of private and public schools in New Hampshire and beyond. While circus as part of Waldorf Education of course varies according to the interest and abilities of individual Waldorf teachers, its inclusion in the curriculum exemplifies the impulse to offer circus training for fitness. I will mention other examples of circus-

based physical education programs that have developed into larger youth circus programs in my discussion of youth circus training.

Circus play and circus-themed learning set the ground for the more formal youth circus training on which this study focuses. Youth circus training has taken place in a number of different contexts in the U.S. I classify these contexts as physical education and recreational programs, community or amateur circuses, and professional and pre-professional training programs. As with my other classifications these often overlap. Many programs have aspects of all three, and groups calling themselves youth circuses may belong primarily to any one or to all. It is also important to note that youth circuses are often part of a larger organization. Fern Street Circus, for instance, lies right on the edge of amateur and professional, in that some of its performers consider themselves professional and others are more motivated by the community aspects of the organization. Further, it is officially a recreational community program for purposes of funding, and during the course of my research it began to differentiate its youth circus program from its primary circus troupe, largely due to a growth in the size of its programs. An important sub-category of circus training that has arisen from many groups that fit into disparate classifications is the use of circus training for social change, or social circus. The philosophy that circus training can affect positive social change motivates some circus programs. Programs with this approach take many forms, require varying degrees of special techniques, and do not always focus exclusively on youth populations. As circus for social change was

not a primary concern of Fern Street at the time of my research I will deal with it only briefly here.

If one were to ascribe a historical or causal hierarchy to these various manifestations of youth circus training, it might be said that the phenomenon has tended to move from recreational and fitness-oriented programs to community and amateur circus and finally to formal circus schools with a professional bent. Aside from the circus pageants organized by the Chautauqua bureaus, the earliest instance of organized youth circus training in the United States seems to have been in the YMCA. Robert Sugarman writes that "The YMCA in Bloomington, Illinois gave its first circus performance in the spring of 1910. As the YMCA Circus included professional flying acts that trained in the area, young amateurs had the opportunity to observe and work with the professionals" (106). He states that this program produced several professional trapeze artists and "important figures in Ringling management," although the actual age of the "young amateurs" is uncertain, they may have been young adults. Another YMCA program "was founded in 1929 by Roy Coble, Director of the Redlands, California YMCA, who had been a performer with the Ringling show" (116). Now called The Great All American Youth Circus, this program is still associated with the YMCA and co-sponsored by the non-profit Community Arts Organization. According to their website, the Circus is the longest running youth circus in the country, having been suspended only once for two years during World War II. The site further states, "Students work hard in their circus classes at the YMCA throughout the

year and follow the YMCA philosophy of building body, mind, and spirit" (The Great all American Youth Circus). As the YMCA affiliation and philosophy might suggest, and as my experience of viewing a Great All American Youth Circus performance in spring of 1998 attests, this program is based in fitness and recreation. Gymnastics, acrobatics, aerial skills, and unicycling take precedence over dance, clowning, and theatrical presentation (although these elements are certainly present, and are focused on to a larger extent by the program's touring troupe). Circus training fits well with the YMCA philosophy, and numerous YMCA chapters have offered circus programs since the founding of the Redlands circus, including Fresno, California, in the 1950s (Wiley 20) and the Wenatchee Youth Circus (formerly the Wenatchee YMCA Circus) started in 1952-53 (Sugarman 96). The Wenatchee Youth Circus's history is typical of the fitness and recreation circus programs in that "It started as an after-school tumbling program" lead by Junior High teacher Paul Pugh (Sugarman 95) and has developed into a full circus performance program. Many youth circus organizations that have grown to be more than recreation or fitness programs similarly began as primarily gymnastics programs.

Significantly, many of the fitness-based circus training programs began around the middle of the century. The Sailor Circus of Sarasota Florida began in 1948 as part of the physical education program at Sarasota High School led by Bill Rutland (Sugarman 117). This date is significant in that it predates the "New Circus" era theorized by Earnest Albrecht, who mentions the existence of non-

traditional sites for the acquisition of circus skills as a factor that led to the rise of the "new circus." The rise in youth circus programs in the mid-twentieth century fits with the cultural context of the times, with the postwar baby boom and its attendant rise in the need for recreational activities for the burgeoning population of children. In addition, the fifties and early sixties were the period when Hovey Burgess, largely credited for the New Circus revival, was young and scouring the US and Europe for ways he could learn circus skills. In some ways, the youth circus programs of the fifties set the cultural ground for Hovey's later work in circus education and revival. As Albrecht relates, Hovey made Florida State University's Flying High Circus "one of the stops in his quest to learn everything he could about the circus in 1960-61" (Albrecht 161). During this time he taught circus to children in Florida State University's outreach programs. Ray Jason, a key figure in the street performance and new vaudeville scene on the West coast in the 1970s, recalls that as a teenager he first learned to juggle from "Hovey Burgess who was teaching in a Florida State University outreach program" (Ott 20). These physical education based programs helped to lay the ground for the new circus, and also for the more artistic youth circus training programs that followed.

The fitness-based programs of the mid-twentieth century (and subsequent programs) provided training in circus performance skills. The cultural climate of the late sixties into the seventies produced youth circus programs with a different philosophical bent. As Albrecht recounts in The New American Circus, Hovey

Burgess, Larry Pisoni (who with Peggy Snider and others founded the Pickle Family Circus) and Paul Binder (founder of the Big Apple Circus) came from outside the circus. They found training in circus skills as young adults, and following Burgess' example, taught others as they learned. This marked a significant shift in how circus skills were transmitted. "The tradition of family training prevailed in the noncommunist world until the 1970s and, significantly, the start of the new circus movement. Before that the only organized training in circus arts in the United States was intended as a recreational activity, designed more for the amateur than for the professionally minded" (Albrecht 160). Another thing that Albrecht sees in common among the New Circus founders of the 1970s is their counterculture ideals. He writes that:

> All of them, too, are in one way or another highly political. And the turbulent era of the 1970's, time during which these people were finding their way to the circus was, at least for people of their age or sympathies, as politically volatile as postrevolutionary Russia. Professionalism and money making were suspect. Activism had become a way of life. Traditional forms in all the arts were being rejected. It seems doubtful that the New American Circus could have grown out of any other period of our history. (20)

The paradigm shift of the New Circus led to a growth in two major, often interwoven, threads of youth circus training: the community circus and the professional circus training program.

Community youth circuses have often arisen out of the impulse of performing artists to create some kind of social impact through their art. They sought to create community and to empower people to create for themselves. This motivation influenced the methods used in these early community circuses. Geoff Hoyle, a member of Make*A*Circus in its early days in the U.K., remembers that, at first, there was little in the way of acts or skills training to what Make*A*Circus did: "We would go to a park and put on a little parade to attract attention, and then get the people there to put on a show." The philosophy was that if performers did something "too good, too skilled" it would shut down the people they were trying to reach. "The idea was to lift them up, not lift us up" (Hoyle interview). This desire to lift others is a major reason that community circus programs began to emerge in larger numbers beginning in the mid-seventies. In addition to Make*A*Circus' programs, which moved to San Francisco and evolved and continued to offer free circus training to disadvantaged youth and to children with developmental disabilities until 2002, community circuses have arisen throughout the US and in many other parts of the world. The Everyday Circus in St. Louis, Circus Smirkus in Vermont, and the Circus of the Star in Minnesota all have community building as a major goal. Fern Street Circus was also founded as a community-based circus program. "Community-based" and "community-building" appear frequently in the mission statements of these organizations.

In addition to simply "creating community," community circuses have increasingly come to see themselves and their programs as tools for social change. The keynote speech of the first American Youth Circus Organization convention in 2001, given by Reg Bolton, was titled "Circus to Save the World" (American Youth Circus Organization). In some cases the social change is assumed to come in the form of empowering individuals with self-confidence, teamwork, and other presumed "meta-lessons" of circus training. Many programs, however, have targeted precise populations and attempt to provide circus training that directly addresses the needs of those populations. Make*A*Circus's clown therapy program, for example, provided clown classes for severely emotionally disabled children, giving them tools to harness the laughter they may otherwise endure unintentionally while simultaneously giving them physical skills to do things they may have thought impossible. Prominent psychologist Sam Keen describes leading trapeze workshops for women who had experienced domestic violence and finding that they were able to use the trapeze as a catalyst for discussing issues of "fear, trust and joy" (Keen 159). Other programs offered by organizations of many types simply offer circus training to poverty-stricken youth as an enrichment opportunity, which in some cases may lead to employment. Circus Flora, for example, offered such programming, and it produced a professional tumbling act called the Saint Louis Arches, which performed regularly in Circus Flora's summer tours.

Finally, in discussing community circus it must be mentioned that a number of "community" circuses arose much earlier than the counter culture impulses of the 1960s and the expansion of circus arts that followed the "New Circus" movement of the 1980s. Some of these, such as the Peru Youth Circus of Peru, Indiana, and the Sailor Circus of Sarasota, Florida, arose out of communities that were rich in, if not primarily made up of, professional circus families. Both Peru and Sarasota have served as home bases for large touring circus troupes. The large number of circus people in these communities made the establishment of community circus groups highly likely. Circus performers who went into youth work originated others, such as the Great American YMCA Youth Circus.

A final aspect of youth circus, and to a large degree the most recent development in the United States, is the professional circus training program or pre-professional youth circus. This aspect of youth circus has grown out of the new paradigm for circus training in which training is available commercially rather than taking place solely in family units and apprenticeships. While such training is now available, it is still a fact that circus, like music or some dance forms, is an art form that is best started at a young age. The best performers typically train continuously from an early age and, like dancers and athletes, often reach the peak of their abilities at a relatively young age, perhaps as young as early teens to mid twenties. The larger circus training programs have come to reflect this situation, and many offer higher levels of training and more intense performance

opportunities to elite students. The San Francisco Youth Circus for example, a program of Circus Center in San Francisco, boasts professional and near-professional quality performers, many of whom may go on to specialized training as adults at the circus center, the National Circus School of Montreal, or one of the degree-granting circus programs abroad, or simply continue their training professionally as they begin to work for professional circuses. Currently, few programs other than Circus Center and Montreal are large enough to boast (or need) special programs for professionally oriented children and adolescents. However, many of the more well established youth circus programs of various types have at least a few participants of professional talent and temperament, and many have at least informal structures in place to nourish these individuals. Circus Smircus, for example, provides increasing levels of responsibility and creative input as its members progress, and the fact that it is a functioning tent show tour provides unique experience in some aspects of circus life. Some programs that have adult or mixed age performance troupes allow advanced youth to work with the adults. In many cases, youth in these pre-professional situations receive pay or scholarships for their work. The development of professional level circus training programs for youth brings circus training full circle, so that the early childhood learning found in traditional circus dynasties may now be experienced by children not born to the circus, and some of these children may reach the top of their craft thanks to the availability of this early training.

To summarize, youth circus activity stems back at least to the roots of the circus in the European riding schools. The activity may be as simple as unstructured, impromptu play by children, or as formal as professional performance training. It often takes place under the aegis of community organizations, commercial or non-profit circuses, and even schools and recreational programs. Fern Street Circus, the site of my research for this study, includes a broad range of the types of youth circus activity I have outlined here, and occupies a number of sites. It is simultaneously a community program and professional training ground, a recreational circus and an arts program that seeks social change, as a more thorough description of the organization later in this study will show.

Review of Circus Literature

I consulted a large number of books, periodicals and digital sources in the course of my research. I put forth a brief review of them here to help elucidate my frames of reference. This review is by no means exhaustive, but is weighted to those works that most inform my current thinking about youth circus training. It also demonstrates ways in which I think about the literature on the subject.

I originally conceptualized the phenomenon in question as a subset of youth circus, which in turn would be a subset of circus as a whole. This idea of nesting phenomena quickly fell away as I began to see complex and non-hierarchical relationships between circus, youth circus, circus training, and youth circus training. I could make a case for each of these as a distinct category, but

any separation is in the end arbitrary and permeable, as the literature about circus reveals. Nonetheless, these concepts are useful as categories with which to organize my review of literature and other information sources.

Texts on Circus

There is an enormous amount of written material related to circus. The Toole-Stott Circus Collection owned by the University of California Library boasts a catalogue of 1300 items, many of which are catalogued in Toole-Stott's A Bibliography of Books on the Circus in English From 1773-1964. Comparatively few of the works, however, are scholarly in nature, and fewer still have direct bearing on a current qualitative study such as mine.

One large category of books is general histories of circus. These tend to construct historical narratives, to focus on western circuses in general and American circus in particular, and to include some discussion of social and aesthetic dimensions of circus arts. They also often include numerous illustrations, such as images of historical documents, playbills and promotional materials, photographs of circuses and circus performers, and/or artistic interpretations of circus performances from the fine arts. Two such works that have aided me in broad contextual understanding of circus are LaVahn Hoh's Step Right Up! The Adventure of Circus in America, written as a college textbook, and Albrecht's New American Circus. In addition, there are numerous books more specifically directed toward circus history, usually more scholarly in content and style, and most often dealing with specific aspects or events in the

history of circus. Examples include O'Nan's The Circus Fire: A True Story of an American Tragedy, and Schechter's books on clowning, such as Durov's Pig: Clowns, Politics and Theatre and The Pickle Family Clowns: New American Circus Comedy.

Related to the historical works, but a large enough body of texts to deserve a separate category, are biographies, autobiographies and memoirs. These predictably tend to focus on a few of the most famous individuals from circus history. Circus owners and proprietors such as P. T. Barnum and Dan Rice, and important or famous performers such as clown Emmett Kelly or the Wallenda family, have many titles devoted to them. There are also, however, a number of works by and about less famous circus people which form their own subset, the "my summer with the circus" genre. These tend more toward journalism and popular nonfiction, and often deal with performers and circus organizations still working. While perhaps less historically accurate, these accounts do much to let the reader enter the day-to-day world of circus workers, and as such resonate with the aims of phenomenology. Examples include: Chace's Chautauqua Summer: Adventures of a Late 20th Century Vaudevillian, Feiler's Under the Bigtop: A Season with the Circus, and Hickman's A Trip to the Light Fantastic: Travels with a Mexican Circus.

Two other genres of circus writing are more artistic in nature: fiction about circus and circus performers, and art books dealing with circus-related visual arts. Both genres have influenced my ideas about the circus. In fact, the art and

writings of Chagall and other painters who have created representations of circus performance have greatly influenced my perceptions of circus training. Visual and literary artists, drawing on circus imagery for symbolism, metaphor, and sensuality, provide clues as to the lived experience of circus performance, and so suggest themes which may resonate with the experience of those currently involved in circus training and performance. This influence is all the stronger because artistic renderings create and sustain the cultural milieu of circus in which participants in a study such as mine work. Literature dealing with circus themes includes Henry Miller's The Smile At The Foot Of The Ladder (clowning), Angela Carter's Nights at the Circus (trapeze), Ray Bradbury's Something Wicked This Way Comes, and a host of works by Hemingway, e. e. cummings, and other lesser known authors and poets. Visual artists include Chagall, Lautrec, Picasso, and more recently Michael Parkes to name just a few. The catalogue titled Images from the World Between (Gustafson) documents and offers critique of a museum exhibition of circus art. Stoddart's Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation positions circus in the realm of film criticism in its examination of representations of circus and especially of female aerialists in film. Shannon's 2003 dissertation, Severing Skin From Cultural Kin: The Gothic Mode Of Circus In Culture, Texts, And Films, also investigates circus in relation to film criticism: "my dissertation argues that circus, as an embodied Other to Western culture's textual hegemony, problematizes gender and racial relations in real circuses, texts, and films" (abstract).

Circus has only begun to gain credibility as a topic for serious research and criticism over the past thirty years. Until recently, the majority of scholarly articles dealing with circus in the United States were published in the Journal of Popular Culture or in trade or fan-based periodicals lacking peer review, such as The White Tops: Official Publication of the Circus Fans of America. Many of the works dealing directly with the circus or with related topics are of dubious scholarship. As Hoh notes, the commercial forces within which the circus has operated, particularly in the United States, tend to obfuscate factual accounts of the circus. The industry since at least the nineteenth century has been driven by claims of extremes; attractions at the circus were (and are) billed as the biggest, the best, or the first. These claims on the part of circus promoters tend to cast suspicion on much of the primary historical material relating to circus performance. In addition, aficionados, circus folk, or other writers lacking in critical distance or inclination have written much of the literature dealing with circus. Carmeli calls attention to the problematic aspects of circus writing:

> People write about circus (in local newspapers, children's books, fans' books) in a style that discloses its own exaggerations, a writing that represents yet plays its own signs, a writing that clowns, that plays signification itself. As such, this writing plays the reading, it plays the reader; it makes the reader faced by the circus; it imposes a presence of the absent circus, avoiding the disclosure of the illusionary and reified nature of the world conjured through the circus. (162)

This is not to say that these works have no standing in scholarship, rather, they present a multi-layered terrain for historiographical research.

Much of the academic historical work and criticism that does exist could be categorized in similar ways to other forms of circus literature. The notable exceptions are the small but growing number of works dealing with the aesthetic and social realms of circus performance. In an early (1937) example, Irving Kane Pond, an architect by trade, attempted to analyze the aesthetics of circus performance in his Big Top Rhythms: A Study In Life and Art. More recently,  Circus and Culture: A Semiotic Approach by semiotician Paul Bouissac treats circus performance as a linguistic system. Skidmore's dissertation analyzing Cirque du Soliel's performances employs Bouissac's approach (Bouissac served as Skidmore's dissertation advisor). Wilson's dissertation, also examining Cirque du Soliel, likewise employs a semiotic approach in treating "circus as a language" (abstract). Shannon's aforementioned dissertation responds to this semiotic approach. She interrogates his "implied notion of circus as a 'universal' expression that offers 'transcendence' from the material world, and maintains that the semiotic approach's "ahistoricity ironically privileges textuality over multi-sensory modes of knowing when the circus genre emerges in the 18th century partly in response to textual hegemony" (abstract). In her critique, she notes that as semiotic approaches look for quasi-linguistic structures in circus performance, they may miss the importance of the direct sensory experience of circus performance. As these recent dissertations show, the semiotic approach to circus

criticism has maintained its currency.

Other scholars have employed the field of cultural studies to examine circus, many of them employing a feminist perspective. Janet Davis' The Circus Age: Culture & Society Under the American Big Top is a major example. Davis examines circus in the United States as a historical and cultural process, and considers its impact on and reflection of gender and racial identities. Stoddard's Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation lays out a well-developed set of aesthetic lenses for looking at circus performance with an eye toward representations of circus and circus performers (female aerialists in particular) in film. Australian circus theorist Peta Tait employs lenses of cultural criticism, feminism, and queer studies in her work such as, "Fleshed, Muscular Phenomenologies: Across Sexed and Queer Circus Bodies." The cultural theory approach represents the main alternative to the historical and semiotic approaches that dominated discourse around circus until the mid 1990s.

Most of the recent dissertations dealing with circus could be grouped into the categories I have already outlined for circus literature in general. Julia Lynn Offen's Beyond the Ring: The Traveling European Circus, for instance, is an ethnographic study of a traveling European circus researched while Offen worked as a stable hand for the circus she studied. As such, her work, while exhibiting scholarly rigor, reads very much like other texts of the "my day/year/life with the circus" memoir variety. Other scholarly works include several bibliographies of circus literature and articles written for various scholarly

publications, including Performing Arts Journal, Theatre Journal, The Journal of Popular Culture, and Australian Drama Studies. It should also be noted that many of the works I include in the first genre I discussed, general and historical circus texts, have high scholarly standards.

I must also mention the few circus periodicals available to the researcher. These tend to present historiographical challenges similar to the body of circus literature as a whole. Billboard magazine began as a trade paper for circus artists and producers before evolving into a popular music magazine. Early editions provide interesting primary source material about the business side of American circus, including names of shows, touring schedules, and hiring information. As a trade publication for professionals, however, Billboard has little direct impact on this study. The White Tops: Official Publication of the Circus Fans of America is, as the name implies, a magazine written by and for enthusiasts, and as such provides a combination of circus schedules, history, and current events in the circus world. It has a "traditionalist" bent, and, due to the orientation of its writers and readership, its articles tend to be enthusiastic rather than critical in tone. Spectacle, a relatively new (since 1997) quarterly journal of circus arts edited by Earnest Albrecht, is the most scholarly of the periodicals dealing with circus, and has dedicated several issues to community circus organizations in addition to reporting on the activities of the American Youth Circus Organization. In addition to these, a number of periodicals dedicated to juggling occasionally offer historical and current information about

circus and juggling; and of course journals dealing with the fields of dance, drama, performance, and popular culture have occasional articles relevant to circus. None of these circus periodicals has the peer review of a formal academic journal.

Texts on Circus Training

Relatively fewer texts deal specifically with circus training. I attribute this lack to a number of reasons. First, circus arts have, until recently, been largely treated as trade secrets and as such were passed directly from performer to performer, often within family lines. Because of this, both how-to or self-instruction texts and written material dealing with pedagogy for teaching circus skills have been rare. In addition, the athleticism, risk, and equipment requirements of circus skills tend to limit the value of written material as opposed to direct physical instruction. Heller explicitly states: "I advise you NOT to try any of these tricks without first taking classes or a workshop with an experienced Aerial instructor" (8). There are, however, certain circus-related skills, such as juggling and gymnastics, which provide exceptions to this scarcity and boast large amounts of written information. Some of the books on these subjects also touch on youth circus and youth circus training.

General circus skills texts form one category of circus training books. Pioneering circus educator Hovey Burgess, who began teaching circus skills in the 1960s in New York colleges and cultural institutions has written several how-to books, starting with his 1976 Circus Techniques, that provide guidelines for

self-instruction and coaching circus skills including solo and partner acrobatics, juggling, balance skills such as unicycling, and basic trapeze moves. Jack Wiley wrote a similar book, Basic Circus Skills (1974), with a particular focus on unicycling. These two titles represent the bulk of the instructional literature in circus skills, and as their copyrights indicate, they date from very early in the current boom in circus instruction. Despite their age, they are still the books most often referred to by the circus instructors with whom I have come into contact. A singular and significant recent addition to the literature is Carrie Heller's 2004 Aerial Circus Training and Safety Manual, which provides a brief introduction followed by nearly three hundred pages of images breaking down basic tricks on trapeze, rope, aerial hoop, and aerial fabric. While most of the tricks presented and information given is basic from the standpoint of an experienced performer, the work is invaluable to the circus community as a primer and visual aid for instructors and as a baseline for spotting and other safety practices for aerialists.

A few texts also deal with pedagogy, history, and trends in circus training. Circus For Everyone: Circus Learning Around the World by Robert Sugarman provides a comprehensive overview of circus training programs in the U.S. and beyond. Sections of larger texts deal with circus training. General circus books, notably Albrecht's New American Circus and Stoddart's Rings of Desire, both have chapters about circus training. Both of these books were written in the 1990s after circus training had shifted from a traditional family-centered activity to a recreational and school-based phenomenon. Contemporary Circus in Australia,

a 1995 master's thesis by Glen Ryman, gives an overview of circus training in Australia. More texts dealing with all aspects of training are likely to be published as circus arts continue to gain more acceptance in professional studies programs in conservatories and universities.

A number of texts dealing with circus training have a quasi-phenomenological approach. The Women's Circus: Leaping Off the Edge, edited by Beissbarth and Turner, provides a collection of writing, artwork, and interviews by and with the women who took part in the Women's circus project in Australia in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Philippe Petit's tracts on funambulism, On the Highwire and To Reach the Clouds, both reveal a great deal of this artist's reflection on the experience of training and performing on the tight wire. Learning to Fly gives a similar, reflective account of training in flying trapeze by noted philosopher and psychologist Sam Keen. These works, while providing little or no instruction on the actual methods of training, provide excellent narratives about the process and meaning of training for the respective authors.

Another genre of circus training texts might be labeled "self-help through circus arts." Keen's book just mentioned could fall into this category, as it treats trapeze as a vehicle for confronting fear and personal limitations. Two books on juggling, Lessons from the Art of Juggling: How to Achieve Your Full Potential in Business, Learning, and Life by Gelb and Bussan, and The Zen of Juggling: A Philosophical Exploration by Dave Finnegan, take similar albeit more instructional takes on juggling.

These last titles lead into one area of profusion in the otherwise limited area of texts on circus training: the juggling book. The rising popularity of juggling over the last third of the twentieth century has led to a huge number of books about how to juggle, There is, in fact, an inversion of the frequency of books dealing with other areas of circus arts. Whereas there are many books about circus but relatively few that provide instruction in performance skills, there are huge numbers of instructional books, articles and other resources dealing with how to juggle and relatively few treating the history and aesthetics of object manipulation. I construe this profusion of instructional books to both the low risk and relative ease of self-teaching juggling from a book (in comparison with other circus skills) and to the commercial success of Juggling for the Complete Klutz, one of the first modern juggling instruction books. It must be noted that the commercial potential of juggling how-to tracts has been noticed since at least the late 1800s when a number of jugglers published tracts on how to juggle (Juggling Information Service). The popularity of recreational juggling has also led to copious materials online such as the Juggling Information Service and the International Juggler's Association website, as well as a number of juggling periodicals, such as Juggler's World (recently changed to Juggle) and Kascade: European Juggling Magazine.

There are also large numbers of texts on the teaching of gymnastics, acrobatics, and equestrian skills. These potentially circus-related activities have had the benefit of being recognized as sports, recreational, and fitness activities

in their own right. As such, they have developed a more extensive body of pedagogy than circus arts per se. While the skills they cover may be transferable to circus performance, however, the sports orientation leads to differences in both the theory and practice of these skills.

Texts on Youth Circus and Youth Circus Training

I conceptualize youth circus literature in three categories. The first is teachers' resources. Second, there are a large number of books written for juvenile readers. A third category, history and theoretical sources, comprises the small but growing amount of scholarly literature on youth circus and training as well as publications of practicing youth circus programs which provide organizational histories, philosophies, and mission statements. Much of the available information is online, as the internet has fostered communication between previously isolated teachers and organizations. I will briefly touch on youth circus literature here and will provide more comprehensive information in the course of outlining the history and my scholarly framework for youth circus training.

First, teacher's resources, as the designation indicates, are written to provide practical information and advice to instructors and artists planning to teach or currently teaching circus arts to youth. Two older resources, How to Put on an Amateur Circus by Hacker and Eames and The Big-Time Circus Book by Sheldon, provide valuable historiographical clues to early youth circus activities in America. These early twentieth century books are how-to guides for teachers

and youth group leaders to produce circus-themed pageants with children. As resources for current circus educators, however, they are of little use, both because their pedagogy and perspective is so dated, and because they offer little skill-based circus. In effect these early books, as templates for children's pageants, are as closely aligned with classroom drama resources as with youth circus training manuals. The training books of Wiley and Burgess I mentioned earlier also contribute to this category of the literature. Reg Bolton's Circus in a Suitcase (1982) provided the first practical guide for starting and running a youth circus. The book contains three sections. The first provides information and context for starting a youth circus program, and draws heavily on Bolton's experiences of doing so in England, Scotland, and Wales. The second section (about two-thirds of the book) provides basic technical instructions in performing and teaching a range of circus skills. These include, solo and partner acrobatics, unicycling, juggling, clowning, and stilt walking, as well as a number of skits performable by the youngest children (trained "animal" acts with children playing the animals, for example). While some of the descriptions of skills, particularly in the "Acrobatics" section, are brief enough that they would require extensive outside information and knowledge to teach or perform safely, the book contains good information on many of the skills it covers, including directions for constructing basic equipment, such as juggling balls and stilts. Bolton wrote for both adults and youth participants, and the book has illustrations and a simple writing style making it accessible to young readers. Paoli Lacy's Clown Therapy

Handbook provides a theoretical framework and practical curriculum for teaching clowning and circus to special populations such as the severely emotionally disabled. Like Heller's aerial handbook, however, it is intended as a resource for performers with a working knowledge of clowning and as a supplement to training to work with populations with special needs. Nellie McCaslin includes a chapter on circus and clowning in her Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond, sixth edition, and notes that "circus arts and creative drama share many of the same goals" (372). A subset of teaching resources is curriculum materials for involving circus arts across the curriculum in theme-based learning. There are several bibliographies of circus books for young readers, such as that compiled by Joseph Rogers for the Circus Fans of America. In addition, many professional circuses and circus education groups have created curriculum materials and teacher's guides to accompany their performances and programs. Big Apple Circus and Ringling Brother's Barnum and Bailey both have comprehensive online study guides with vocabulary, historical information, and classroom writing and art exercises. Predictably, these resources foreground the history and style of circus of the organizations sponsoring them, but they do contain some good information and engaging classroom activities. Circus of the Kids offers a similar guide to schools that hire them to come in and do a circus training program.

Second, a number of youth circus books have been written for juvenile readers. Most could be fit into the categories I have established for circus

literature in general. There are for instance, overwhelming numbers of books of juvenile fiction relating to circus. Likewise there are numerous "how-to" books and, like the literature in general, these almost exclusively offer instruction in juggling or clowning. Such books include Meyer's How to be a Clown: A Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Book, and generally offer the same selections of basic juggling instruction and classic clown gags. The more ambitious titles include sections on clown make-up (usually of the heavy variety employed by three-ring clowns and birthday party performers) and tips on prop and costume construction. There are also juvenile equivalents of the "my summer with the circus genre," such as Jill Krementz' A Very Young Circus Flyer, which provides an account of one girl's experiences at a circus school. Finally, there are a number of books, such as Klayer and Kuhn's Circus Time! How to Put On Your Own Show, aimed at juvenile readers, which offer ideas for children to put on their own circus. These tend to offer the sorts of circus-themed skits as Bolton and Hacker and Eames provide in their books.

As for the third category, little published theoretical writing about youth circus training exists. As Reg Bolton notes in the review of literature in his dissertation on youth circus: "This thesis is proudly eclectic. It has to be given the lack of scholarship in the field of circus in education" ("Why Circus Works" 6). Most of the scholarly writing on the topic takes the form of surveys and minor sections of larger works. Albrecht and Stoddart both include short chapters on circus training in their histories of circus, with a particular eye toward recent

developments in the field, and these chapters include, by necessity, some mention of youth circus training. Similarly, Ryman includes a mention of youth circus training in Australia in his master's thesis. Wiley's Basic Circus Skills likewise includes scattered theoretical statements, all drawing on his practical experience. Robert Sugarman's Circus Learning provides a book length survey of circus training programs in the U.S. and includes some information about programs in other countries. In his miniature case studies, Sugarman includes many mission statements and philosophical statements from artistic directors and circus trainers, but provides little synthesis of this data. The exception to this scarcity is the work of Australian scholars. Researchers Geoff Danaher and P. A. Danaher have helped establish circus within the realm of educational theory with their work on the education of children in traveling circuses. Their work examines traditional traveling circus in Australia, rather than youth and community circuses, which appear to have even less crossover of personnel and aesthetic than their counterparts in the U.S. (Ryman). They posit circus as an authentic model of cooperative life-long learning on which educators in other fields can draw in their efforts to foster similar learning structures.

The websites of individual youth circus programs and umbrella organizations provide a growing source of information about youth circus. These online sources provide emergent information and archival sources, including transcriptions of speeches and lectures, articles, and unpublished studies. In particular, umbrella organizations such as the American Youth Circus

Organization (AYCO) and its counterparts abroad, such as the Australian Association for Circus and Physical Theatre and the National Association of Youth Circus, provide useful information and links. Online circus listserves such as CircusNews.com and the U.K.'s Circus Arts Forum also yield useful information and communication with the youth circus community.

Three recent full-length academic studies on youth circus also provide material directly relating to my topic. Amy Seay's masters thesis, The Effects of a Circus of the Kids Program on the Psychosocial Functioning of Middle School Youth (2004) is, to my knowledge, the only quantitative report on the effects of a youth circus program. Seay employed questionnaires administered three times over three months to a control group, an exposure group, and a participant group of middle school children (totaling one hundred and fifty seven participants) to test the influence of the Circus of the Kids program on "self esteem, body image, physical activity, locus of control, and participation" (iv). The study failed to find any significant increase in psychosocial functioning, a finding Seay hypothesizes may be due in part to the high pretest functioning of the participants. Aside from the broad similarity of topic, this study has relevance to mine in that it may validate my methodology as more fruitful for the study of youth circus training.

Two Australian studies offer windows on "The theory of how and why circus works in an educational framework" (McCutcheon 125). Sharon McCutcheon's master's thesis, Negotiating Identity through Risk: A Community Circus Model for Evoking Change and Empowering Youth (2003), provides

comparative case studies of several Australian youth circus training programs. She describes five youth circus programs and focuses on the methodologies and objectives of their directors, and offers her own observation and some interviews with participants to determine "reactions to" and "effects of" these programs (McCutcheon 39). Reg Bolton, a prominent figure in youth circus training whose early book Circus in a Suitcase I have already cited, has just completed his doctoral dissertation titled Why Circus Works: How the Values And Structures of Circus Make it a Significant Developmental Experience for Young People (2004). His study provides a formal, academically supported statement of his own theories of how circus training works with youth populations, based on his own thirty plus years of experience as a facilitator of youth circus training. He posits that youth circus participation may provide the type of experiences that are essential to personal development and that life in the industrialized world often denies them. In his words:

> My contention is that caring adults, who may not necessarily be trained counselors or psychologists, by offering the circus experience to children and teenagers, can provide them an opportunity to make good those deficits, giving them more chance to advance to adulthood without gaping holes in their psycho-social personae. (15)

In the course of the dissertation, Bolton identifies six experiential deficits he sees as common in modern childhood. He examines representations of circus in literature, culture, communications media, music, cinema, and visual art. He then

explores manifestations of circus ranging from historical and contemporary professional performance to various forms of amateur and youth circus activity. He concludes by identifying ways in which participation in circus may shore up the childhood deficits he identified early on. The childhood needs he theorizes circus training may meet include: "constructive physical risk, aspiration, trust, fun, self-individuation and hard work" (iii). In terms of validity, Bolton notes in his discussion of childhood:

> At this stage I must admit that this claim is not scientifically verifiable. This dissertation is not offered through a school of education or psychology but, by choice, through the English department at a progressive university. The work does not claim to prove a truth, but to offer a suggestion. (18)

The breadth of Bolton's exploration, his position as a circus educator with decades of experience, and the presence of his dissertation in a field with otherwise negligible scholarly research give significant weight and credence to his "suggestion."

In short, there is scant literature concerning youth circus and youth circus training. The literature is mostly practical in nature, offering either concrete instruction in teaching circus and creating a circus program, or an overview of existing programs. There are also a number of works written as juvenile literature, which offer either fictional or biographical accounts of young people in circus. However, individual programs and fledgling umbrella organizations seeking to foster youth circus have begun to generate a growing body of online

information pertaining to youth circus training. In addition, a few, mostly unpublished or self-published, theses and dissertations have begun to address youth circus training in critical and theoretical ways.

This chapter has addressed my own relation to youth circus training. I have tried to provide both historical and critical contexts for circus in general and youth circus training in particular. In the next chapter, I will describe Fern Street Circus, the particular case on which I focused this study. I will also introduce the young circus artists who participated in the study.

3. Fern Street Circus: A Case Description

Before turning to interviews and other data, I shall provide a description of the participants in the study and of the Fern Street Community Arts organization, the site of the research. First, I introduce the participants and provide an update on their current activities. I then provide a description of Fern Street Circus' programs, noting some of the changes that have taken place during the course of my research and writing. The names of youth participants have been changed throughout, while the actual names of adult trainers and administrators have been retained as they requested. Ages of participants in the study are accurate for the time of the initial research. Ages given of other children in the program (those for whom no name is given) are approximate. I have omitted some details that would serve to make the participants too readily identifiable.

Participant Description

My primary participants in the study were eleven young people who took part in the Fern Street Circus after-school program. They ranged in age from eight to eighteen at the start of the study in spring 2000. They had participated in the program for anywhere from three months to nine years. Seven were male and four were female. Of the eleven, six had no previous circus skills, and the remaining five had either gymnastics training or self-taught juggling prior to participation in Fern Street. Primary circus skills practiced in the group were Spanish web (a vertical rope hung for climbing and performing aerial tricks), juggling, tightwire, acrobatics, tumbling, yo-yo, clowning, trampoline, and contortion. Two performed in the circus band as well. Four attended private

school or were home schooled, and one attended a public high school for the performing arts. All but two had siblings in the program, and three sets of siblings took part in my study (see Table 1). Two had a parent working for Fern Street as a performer and instructor. All participants are Caucasian, although several have Hispanic or Latino step-parents. Secondary participants in the study, interviewed for context and for triangulation, included the artistic director, an instructor, and parents of the primary participants.

Table 1

Participant Chart

Name (common surnames indicated by initial)	Age in Dec 2000/Age in March 2005	M/ F	Time with Fern St. prior to 1st interview	Circus skills before Fern St. training	Circus Skills practiced in 2001	2005 or last known activity
Giles	11/16	M	3 mos.	Gymnastic training	Tumbling & trampoline	Left Fern Street, remained in theatre
Sally M.	8/12	F	8 years (life)	none	Clown & trampoline	With Fern St
Sarah M.	10/14	F	7 years (life)	none	Spanish web (aerial rope)	Killed in car accident
Lionel K.	12/17	M	1year	Juggling	Juggle	Semipro. Sings in choir.
Celeste K.	15/19	F	1 year, 2 mos	none	Spanish web (rope)	With Fern Street
Brad K.	18/22	M	1 year	Juggling	Yoyo, juggling, acrobatics	Car salesman
Stan S.	14/18	M	7 years	none	Clown, Juggling & Yoyo	Circus performer
Archer S.	15/19	M	7 yrs	none	Tightwire	Circus performer
Dean S.	16/21	M	9 years	Show choir	Acrobatics	Con-struction worker
Joshua S.	11/15	M	6 years	none	Acrobatics & contortion	Music studies/ with Fern Street
Jenna	17/21	F	9 years	Dance/dra ma	Spanish web	Circus performer

Participant Update

My original interviews took place in 2000-2001. Since then, enough time has passed for the participants in the study to grow and change in many ways. While I have not conducted additional interviews, I have had informal conversations with some, and kept track of others through Fern Street's administration. Of the original eleven participants, eight remain significantly involved with the performing arts, and seven of them with circus. Of these six, three continue their involvement with Fern Street, and three perform professionally. What follows is a brief description of the participants' current activities.

To begin, three of the original participants have begun professional careers in circus entertainment. Two brothers continued to train, taught for Fern Street, and have toured as professional circus artists with Billy Martin's Circus out of New York State. One continues to perform full time as an independent circus artist. Aerialist Jenna, who had boasted of an offer to work for Ringling Brothers in her interviews, left San Diego to work professionally and, when last contacted, was working as an aerialist at the Busch Gardens theme park in Tampa, Florida.

Three more of the participants continue to be directly involved in circus through Fern Street's programs. Sally continued to train and perform with Fern Street until leaving to study at another school. Celeste also continues to train with Fern Street, and appeared as an aerialist in the 2004 edition of Fern Street Circus. Celeste's younger brother, Lionel, continued to be active with Fern Street

as a juggler until a recent series of medical problems forced him to take a break from training in December 2004. Lionel merits special notice in that he achieved a goal he mentioned several times in his interviews. He recently took second place in the juniors category of the International Juggling Association's Stage Competitions, and went on to compete successfully in the first World Juggling Federation championships in November of the same year. A medical condition caused him to stop training immediately after the latter competition, and he has most recently started performing with a barbershop singing group.

Two of the participants, Joshua and Giles, continued their involvement in the arts. Giles stopped training with Fern Street but continued his involvement in the performing arts through theatre programs. Joshua continues to work with Fern Street, although he has shifted his focus to music and hopes to become a professional musician, a logical enough transition given that Fern Street's founding director was himself a professional musician and music educator.

Only two of the original participants seem to have dropped circus and performing arts altogether. Brad dropped his circus training in order to work full time, and currently works as an automotive salesman. Dean, the eldest of the brothers, has married, works in construction, and, inspired by the community service aspects of Fern Street, works with inner city youth.

Finally, Sarah, one of the youngest participants in the study, died in the summer of 2004. She was riding in a car on her way home from one of Fern Street's summer camp programs, where she had been working as a junior

counselor, when a reckless driver killed her. The newspaper coverage of her death was sent out on several circus listserves. She was involved in the circus her entire life.

While these bits of information have little bearing on the central findings of this study in that phenomenology deals with the words of the participants, they provide important context and, taken as a whole, they form a meaningful picture. The fact that nearly a third have taken their experience of a recreational youth arts program and spun that experience into a first career of professional performance seems exceptional, particularly when combined with the fact that another third remain involved with the program and may in turn choose to perform professionally. Add to this the fact that over ninety percent of the participants either remained with the program until the age of majority or continue to be involved, and a picture emerges of an exceptional group of individuals in an exceptional arts program.

In terms of my phenomenological study, this picture suggests a high level of validity to the statements made by the participants in that most were deeply involved in the phenomenon of youth circus training. This deep involvement may have enabled them to reflect on their lived experience of that phenomenon in a rich way. Also, while qualitative research in general and phenomenology in particular do not seek to imply transfer of findings to other sites, the development of these individuals' involvement in circus over time suggests further research

both longitudinally within this group and comparatively with other cases to further examine the phenomenon of youth circus training.

Site description

Having introduced the participants, I shall now describe Fern Street Circus' programs, performances and organizational structures. To begin, I outline the group's programming during the period of my research. Next, I describe Fern Street's mission and vision as articulated both by its published statements and by verbal statements of its director and staff. Finally, I provide a brief chronological history of the organization. During the course of my writing the organization changed in significant ways, due largely to funding cutbacks and the subsequent departure of the founding artistic director, and I will discuss how this transition has affected Fern Street Circus.

Fern Street Community Arts is a non-profit arts organization located in San Diego, California. Founding artistic director John Highkin and his partner Cindy Zimmerman founded the group as a community arts center for the Golden Hill neighborhood in 1990. The organization as conceived by Mr. Highkin maintained strong commitments to both high level artistic production and to education, commitments upheld by the current staff. The name itself suggests the centrality of community to the organization--Highkin started the organization from his home on Fern Street and, during my site research, rented rehearsal space only a few blocks away. Programming also reflects this community

orientation. The organization's website divides its programming into two broad categories: "performance" and "education."

Fern Street's performance program has three major aspects. First, the circus produces a yearly outdoor circus show featuring the organization's professional circus performers, children and teens from the after-school program, a live band, and theatrical sets and costumes. In 2001 the website boasted that 2000 was its second season to include evening shows with theatrical lighting. This main production generally took place on two weekends ending with Memorial Day, and sometimes included appearances by internationally known circus stars in addition to the local troupe. In addition to the main show, the circus also "provides entertainment throughout the year for a variety of community programs and corporate events tailored to the visitor industry; often performance takes the form of a mini-show or sampler of what is offered in the larger show" (Fern Street Circus 2001). These "mini-shows" often provide testing grounds for new performers, new acts, and new bits. They also provide an important source of revenue for the organization and the individual performers (all performers over sixteen years old were paid at least a stipend per show at the onset of my research, this practice has changed over the years due to the difficult issues involved in hiring and insuring minors). Perhaps more importantly, they allow the circus to serve the broader San Diego community and maintain a high profile in the local arts scene. In some cases these performances actually draw larger audiences than the "main" shows, as in the case of the circus's

participation in Escondido's First Night New Year's Eve celebrations and the perennial performances at Street Scene, an annual three-day street festival in downtown San Diego. A third aspect of Fern Street's performance program is the annual Fern Street Junior Circus mounted in the late summer by all interested participants in the after-school program, and attended primarily by families of the performers.

The Junior Circus grew out of the "Education & Outreach" aspect of Fern Street Circus's programming. The education program has been officially in place since 1993, although the organization had had an educational focus since its inception. At its heart is a tuition-free After-School Circus Skills Program that was designated as a model program by the California Arts Council. The program meets for two hours each Monday and Friday at the Golden Hill Recreation Center. Monday afternoons are open to all interested children and teenagers, while the Friday time slot is by invitation only for more advanced and focused youth. The program takes place in a gymnasium just large enough to house a single full-size basketball court. It provides training in trapeze, acrobatics, juggling, clowning, Spanish web, and wire-walking. Other circus skills, ranging from unicycling to fire-eating, might be taught depending on the interest of participants and instructors. In addition to the after-school program, Fern Street directs extended in-school residencies in circus skills, and also runs summer camps in conjunction with the YMCA and Boys and Girls Clubs.

The mission and vision statements orient the organization toward education and community. According to the mission statement, which has remained constant throughout my research;

> Founded in 1990, FERN STREET CIRCUS is a theatrical and educational circus ensemble which exists to:
>
> 1. Explore circus arts as a narrative form
> 2. Utilize circus arts performance and instruction as means of community-making in our own central San Diego neighborhood of Golden Hill and beyond.
> 3. Create a humane workplace and collaborative atmosphere for artists of the many disciplines which comprise the circus arts: circus, theater, dance, music and the visual arts. We are committed to creating the finest original circus performance possible, providing quality entertainment at affordable rates to under-served neighborhoods, and teaching children motor skills, discipline, self-worth and the joy of learning. (Fern Street Circus 2001)

In practice the company, under Highkin, both focused on and was more successful in carrying out the second and third points of the statement than the first. While the organization remains committed to producing high quality circus performance, the use of performance as a "narrative form" was de-emphasized to a large degree (Highkin interview). The vision statement (also constant)

shows the educational, youth-oriented bent of the organization even more clearly:

> The Vision:
>
> Children need visible community, where they and their families interact with each other and other families in a context of public, civic life, where boundaries of language and economic power are erased, where witness is borne to our sameness and respect is held for our differences. Children need memorable occasions, on which passage of time and seasonal change are marked with celebration, and on which traditional forms of cultural expression are remounted, reinvented and transmitted. Children need uplifting of the human spirit, communicating verbally and nonverbally, honoring the human body and its extraordinary capabilities, discovering their own capabilities through emulation and participation. (Fern Street Circus 2001).

Each aspect of the organization's stated vision begins with "children," and children are omnipresent in Fern Street's programs. Children so define the work of Fern Street that older participants sometimes felt the need to define themselves as "not just about kids" by pointing out adult-oriented work such as night club performances and corporate convention appearances (C. Lindley interview). Such assertions underscore the centrality of children to Fern Street's work—the instances where children are absent seem to be remarkable for that very fact.

Founding artistic director John Highkin created Fern Street Circus in 1990 with a $15,360 grant from the San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture. A theatre director and musician, Highkin credits a 1987 Cirque du Soleil performance in Los Angeles with inspiring his interest in the narrative possibilities of circus performance. He subsequently worked for Circus Flora and other American circuses. In 1991, Fern Street Circus gave its premier performance, a show titled "Pino the Barber" which featured a parade and a "narrative loosely based on California history as taken from Carey McWilliams' Southern California, an Island on the Land" (Fern Street Circus website). The show had a run of twelve performances over two weeks at Grape Street Park. The following year, Highkin hired the Canestrelli family, a multigenerational Italian circus family. 1993 saw three important developments in the programming. First, on March 16 of that year Fern Street began its after school program at Golden Hill Recreation Center. This led to the inclusion of some twenty-five children as performers in the summer production. Second, after its performances in the Golden Hill neighborhood, the summer show moved into Balboa Park for Labor Day Weekend, marking a shift from small neighborhood organization to metropolitan cultural institution. Finally, in December 1993 Fern Street Circus incorporated as a non-profit California corporation, paving the way for additional funding and support.

The years from 1994 to 1997 saw continual growth and expansion of the programs and consolidation of administrative aspects of the organization. The

offices were moved from Highkin's home, which had served as the administrative center (and training ground) for the first years of the organization. After a brief stint in a cubicle at the Greater Golden Hill Community Development Corporation, the group found office space in the Art Union Building in Golden Hill, which houses galleries and studios as well as non-profit arts offices. During the same period, funding from San Diego's Social Services program and other sources enabled Fern Street to pay Highkin a full-time salary and hire a part-time administrative assistant and a part-time production manager. In addition, the circus established itself in the San Diego arts scene, with additional performances at street fairs such as the Linda Vista Multi-cultural Fair, Escondido's First Night festival, and Street Scene, San Diego's annual three-day downtown street fair. These have all become annual events for the organization. Also during this time, commercial and industrial performances became a major source of income and exposure for the organization. Other local arts organizations began to make use of circus performers in their work, as in a 1997 production of Turandot by the San Diego Opera and an award-winning series of portraits of performers by a local photographer. Finally, Highkin and Zimmerman consulted with social worker Kevin Brooks to re-define the structure and mission of the organization. As a result, the organization changed its corporate name to Fern Street Community Arts "to better articulate the breadth of its mission and practice," (Fern Street Circus 2001), and Zimmerman was able to retire from daily administrative duties.

From 1998 to 2001, the period of my initial site visits and interviews, Fern Street solidified its position in the local arts community, and began to establish itself on the state and national levels. During this period, the California Arts Commission designated Fern Street a model arts education program. In addition, in 1998 the company sponsored performances and residencies by the San Francisco Mime Troupe. A grant from the National Endowment for the Arts allowed the circus to tour outside the San Diego area for the first time, and in 2000 it performed at the Luther Burbank Center in Santa Rosa. Cheryl Lindley, who has variously served as a trainer, performer, and costume designer since 1993, and who briefly served as artistic director in 2004-2005, described Fern Street Community Arts as "sort of a teenager as an institution, so sometimes we look great and sometimes our ears grow too big and we're all gangly" (Interview 2001).

One way the organization dealt with its success was the 1998 institution of the Fern Street Junior Circus, which both allows all of the after-school program participants to perform while simultaneously allowing the more advanced and adult performers to create more polished shows. Other ways of dealing with the program's growth included the 1999 hire of a full-time administrative director and the employment of participants as instructors in the after school program who had grown up with the organization. Challenges included finding dedicated rehearsal and performance space and keeping the community spirit of the organization alive while accommodating the increasing skill and professionalism

of the company as a whole. During my first site visit, the circus had just begun to use a rented storefront close to the house where Highkin started the program. Highkin expressed appreciation that the storefront would maintain the community-based feel of the group both through its location and the open-to-the-public feel generated by its corner five-and-dime store architecture. It also allowed the luxury of leaving equipment and props set up and ready to use, rather than "having to move them to make way for basketball" each time, as is the case at the community center. At the same time, the space lacked the height and infrastructure required for aerial apparatus, particularly for the flying trapeze rig which was recently donated to the company. As with most non-profit companies, space and funding continue to be constant challenges for the Fern Street Community Arts organization.

Budget constraints since 2001 have caused a scaling back of Fern Street's programming and a major restructuring of its management, due in large part to the current realities of public arts funding in California. On March 19, 2003, an article in The San Diego Union-Tribune celebrated the tenth anniversary of Fern Street's free after-school program at Golden Hill (Ensor). On July 31 of the same year, another article mentioned Fern Street as one of the organizations being hard-hit by cutbacks in funding for the arts:

> "It's pretty frightening," said John Highkin, artistic director of the Fern Street Circus, as he added up his group's recent losses in government

funding, which include cuts in city, county and state support of $75,000. (Turegano)

On September 23, the Union-Tribune announced Highkin's resignation as artistic director, describing him as "one of the first high-profile casualties here of the budget crunch afflicting the national and state arts scenes," and citing a drop in funding as well as a desire to pursue other artistic endeavors as his reason for leaving. "'When you add together cutbacks from the California Arts Council, the San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture, and a drop in city money from one of their social services programs which funded us for seven years, it adds up to $76,000,' said Highkin, 'or more than 20 percent of our $374,000 budget'" (Welsh). Highkin also noted, "'Several people have come forward who know the organization and have a vision of its educational and performance aspects to carry on.'" According to 2004 board member Rogelio Lopez, Highkin and the board nearly dissolved the non-profit, an action that was avoided by several board members and members of the staff who stepped forward with a proposal to run the organization (Lopez Interview). Fern Street now has a core staff of five including executive, education program, and administrative directors, a production manager, and a head coach, and has begun the process of looking for a new artistic director, beginning with internal discussions about the scope of the job, according to executive director Laura Stansell (Interview).

It should be noted that while the financial cutbacks have lead to the elimination or downscaling of several of Fern Street's programs, the organization

has continued to remain solvent. Administrative director Don Covington explains that a "fiscal crisis" of the city of San Diego has lead to the loss of an annual $25,000 matching grant from the city. In an e-mail he explains:

> When it was eliminated, we were forced to stop our classes at two centers and consolidate all after-school programs at the Golden Hill Recreation Center. At the moment, approximately 75 children, aged 6 to 18 take part in the Golden Hill program. We also provide instructors and equipment to an extracurricular program at Roosevelt Middle School. We have 40 participants at that location. (Covington email)

Fern Street currently employs one supervisor and five instructors in the after school program. The performance programs of Fern Street circus seem to have absorbed the financial cutbacks well, and Fern Street has maintained strong production values for its summer and First Night performances. Cheryl Lindley, who worked as a clown and occasional costume designer with Fern Street since its inception, succeeded Highkin as artistic director. She worked to instill a new sense of discipline and professionalism in the performance programs over the course of the 2004 and 2005 summer performance seasons, and then left Fern Street to open her own circus academy. Long-time Fern Street clown Garry Irvingwhite, a veteran of Ringling and of Universoul Circus, has been appointed to direct the 2006 show.

The Training Program

The following description of Fern Street's training programs from 1999-2000, during the period of my preliminary research and interviews, will provide context for the descriptions and comments given in the interviews. Aside from changes in staffing, this core program has changed little in the intervening years.

The after-school circus training program meets for two hours every Monday and Friday at the Golden Hill Recreation Center in San Diego. During my visits, Mondays were open to all interested children, while Fridays were reserved for the more advanced and/or focused participants. The Monday and Friday sessions shared the same basic format, differing primarily in the trainer/trainee ratio and the wait time to use a particular piece of equipment.

The Golden Hill Recreation Center adjoins a golf course overlooking San Diego. The center consists of an aging but well maintained gymnasium just large enough for a single basketball court, attached offices and restrooms, with tennis courts and athletics fields outside. Most of the training took place inside the gymnasium. Prior to each training session staff and older (teenaged) participants set and checked rigging and mats, which they put in the same place for each session. Two static trapezes and a Spanish web occupied one end of the space, to the right as one entered from the street. The center of the space had tumbling mats and a crash pad and mini-trampoline (used for tumbling) lined up for drill. To one side a space was set aside for the clowning workshop, with its own tumbling mat. Near the entrance, a table and chairs served as the administrative

post where participants checked in, newsletters and other materials were disseminated, and permission forms were filed. A trampoline filled one corner of the space to the left of the entrance. The other corner had a safety rig to aid senior trainer "Pop" Canestrelli in working with small groups on partner acrobatics such as the three high and other stunts. A door in this corner leads to a long, narrow outdoor patio containing a tightwire rig. Staff members piled juggling equipment between the trampoline and acrobatics rig, but in practice jugglers found space to practice wherever they could. The children arrived singly and in small groups, and checked in at a table staffed by then-program director (now executive director) Laura Stansell, who recorded their attendance and made sure that they had signed waivers on file. Many parents checked their children in and stayed to watch the activities. The practices I saw had around 30 participants ranging in age from 7 to 18. Most were white or Hispanic (at least one was a Mexican citizen), and few appeared to be of other ethnic origins.

Each afternoon session began with a group warm-up led by one of the staff. The warm-up lasted for approximately fifteen minutes and consisted of a variety of stretches, yoga, light conditioning, and breathing and facial exercises common in theatre warm-ups. During the warm-up students lined up in rows facing the instructor, who called out encouragement to some, chided others for slacking, and greeted latecomers as they arrived. Occasionally one of the other trainers joined in the warm-up alongside the participants, or gave individual attention to newcomers to the program. After the warm-up, the staff made any

necessary announcements, which ranged from safety precautions and rehearsal reminders to introductions and birthday greetings. The trainers then went to their stations and the participants chose what they wanted to work on. Most spent time at more than one station during the two hours, and spent a good deal of time socializing as well. Some activities, such as clowning and tumbling, took on a formal training mode in which the trainers presented concepts, drills, games, and exercises, and the participants stayed and worked for a solid block of time. Other activities, such as tightrope and juggling, tended toward more individual work and instruction, resulting in the free-flow participation that characterized the after-school program in general. The tone became more social during the second hour as the more formal training groups broke up into free training time, and the less athletic participants got fatigued. During this second hour, staff sometimes started a workshop on a specific skill or worked with individuals on skills, conditioning, or showmanship. More motivated participants took advantage of the smaller lines for equipment, and the informal atmosphere fostered a dynamic in which participants learned from each other as much as from the staff.

Parents were encouraged to play an active role in the circus program, and many sat on the benches lining the gymnasium during the after-school sessions. They read, chatted, watched, and attended to their children. Many also assisted in costuming, running concessions, and other aspects of the circus.

As I noted before, the Friday sessions differed primarily in the level of skill and involvement of the participants. Friday participants focused on developing showmanship and creating acts, and tended to stay with one or two skills for longer periods of time. Participants socialized just as much on Mondays, but seemed to do so in a rhythm that allowed them to recover their breath or wait for a turn on equipment, rather than leaving the circus activity to socialize. Prior to performances, the Friday sessions intensified, as trainers demanded a higher level of discipline to hone the various acts, and dedicated time to developing and rehearsing production numbers involving all participants.

The children who performed with the community circus attended occasional evening rehearsals in addition to the after school sessions. One that I observed took place on a Friday in a newly rented storefront space. It had essentially the same tone as any theatre rehearsal, with drill and repetition interspersed with periods of waiting while the director worked out specific problems. Participants of all ages gave input into the process. Some used the waiting time to practice individual skills, some to socialize, and most, a combination of the two. During breaks, the cast snacked on pizza and drinks left over from a surprise birthday party for one of the older boys, which had taken place between the after-school session and the evening rehearsal.

Performance

I attended three performances of the circus on two different occasions. The first was a two-show appearance of the Fern Street Circus at a multi-cultural

street fair in a suburb of San Diego and involved adult and child performers. The second was the 2000 edition of the Fern Street Junior Circus, presented at the Golden Hill community center sports field next to the gymnasium where the after-school program takes place. Each event featured performances by my primary research participants and helped me ascertain that studying circus training meant dealing with circus performance. In describing these performances, I use pseudonyms for the participants, and refer to adult performers and trainers by actual name (as they requested).

The first performances I saw took place on April 29, 2000 at the Linda Vista Multi-cultural Street Fair. The circus gave two performances, at 2:00 and 4:30 p.m., but the open-air nature of the performance space made it so that the "performance" really started with the 9:00 a.m. set-up and lasted until the early evening strike. The initial set up started with unloading the truck. A mix of staff, parent volunteers, and three or four of the older teenage boys began setting up columns with a painted backdrop between them and an awning immediately in front of it to shade the band. They unrolled and laid out a round painted tarp, set the ring curbs (wooden sections of a circle which define the ring), and roped off a "back lot" behind and to the side of the backdrops. The next phase of set-up involved placing and testing rigging and sound equipment and setting up the backstage area including costume racks, make-up tables, and chairs. At this point the set-up began to take on truly performative aspects. As soon as he set and tested the sound system the sound operator, a teen-age boy, started playing

circus music recorded by the band for previous shows. Passersby began to stop and watch the proceedings expectantly and to interact with members of the circus. They asked when the show would begin, applauded a musician warming up her flute, and asked questions as Archer, 15, set up the low-wire (a tight-wire set at about 6' high). Crowds began to form as performers started to warm-up and get into costume and make-up. The curious watched the open–air backstage scene, where some of the younger circus members, mostly eight to ten-year-old boys, played and did flips into the port-a-pit; an older boy (perhaps 13) juggled, and five other boys and girls ages 10-16 simply stretched. Meanwhile, the wirewalkers' warm-up gathered a crowd around the ring and drew applause. When the funambulists (wire-walkers)--an adult, Archer, and two younger girls--finished, one of the adult performers took a microphone and, in both Spanish and English, invited the crowd to come back for the two and four-o'clock shows. The circus members helped each other with hair, make-up, and other personal preparations. By the time the show itself began, the audience had become a crowd, and I was fortunate to have found a seat early.

The performance began with the band playing for fifteen minutes to draw the crowd and set the tone for the performance. The band had a core of four, a keyboard player, a guitarist, a drummer, and artistic director John Highkin playing bass. Highkin often improvised on the instrument during lulls before the show or breaks in rehearsals. The band grew and shrank throughout the show as performers joined or left for one number or another, and played in a variety of

styles ranging from rock to jazz to more traditional circus waltzes. A bilingual ringmaster introduced the circus, the band, and the show in Spanish and English. The opening number was a company dance number involving all twenty-one performers, not counting the band. The dance consisted of eccentric chorus line moves interspersed with an episodic clown gag in which one of the clowns was "knocked out" and revived, and with exhibitions of basic gymnastics and tumbling skills. The first act was the only solo by an adult performer. Annetta, the head gymnastics and tumbling instructor for the after-school program, who had turned down a contract with Cirque du Soleil to settle in San Diego, demonstrated her award-winning skill as a baton-twirling rhythmic gymnast. The next act was more typical of Fern Street's performances, in which one adult performer partnered with one or more children or adolescent performers from the after-school program. The ringmaster introduced the "strongest family in the world" and the "strongman" (an adult clown) entered with Joshua (age 11), one of the smaller boys in the circus. Each did a series of "feats of strength" such as lifting large barbells, breaking chains, and bending bars. The strong woman, the "mother" of the family then entered, scolded the pair, and exited with them in tow after a small girl, the "daughter," showed them both up by easily repeating and topping their feats. Next came a trampoline act featuring the trampoline trainer as a clown swimmer and a teenage girl (perhaps 14) as a lifeguard, utilizing the trampoline as the "pool." Each took a solo turn, and they ended with a duet on the trampoline. Jenna, at age 17 one of the older girls in the program, did a

rhythmic gymnastic solo with a ribbon. Longtime Fern Street performer Cheryl Lindley, as the clown Columbina, performed an act featuring audience participation in which she directed the audience in playing improvised "instruments." While she performed, members of the cast and crew set up the tightrope. The low-wire act again featured an adult performer teamed with three of the kids. In this case, Archer gave one the most artistically and technically impressive performances, with an act featuring jumping rope, blindfolded walking, and unicycling on the wire. An adult/child clown act covered the strike of the tightrope. The adult (Garry Irvingwhite, the clown who will direct the 2006 show) attempted to take the younger clown's portrait with a large-old fashioned camera, and ended up getting it stuck on his head, at which point it became a mask with features that the clown within could move to express emotion, including squirting streams of tears into the audience. A tumbling exhibition featuring seven boys and girls ranging from 10 to 16 years of age followed, after which came another clown turn featuring a single clown in a body puppet which created the illusion of an elderly couple dancing ballroom style. The show concluded with a percussive dance number, in which several performers played trashcans, while others juggled. Lionel, 12, did a five-ball routine during this number, and Brad, 18, finished with a demonstration of poi (a traditional Maori dance prop in which balls attached to short lengths of rope or chain are spun from the hands at high speed).

The second show was substantially the same as the first. During both, the sense of family in the circus was clearly visible to the audience, as parents watched from backstage, and children not onstage, and, in some cases, not even performing that day, played on a large mat while it was not in use. The audiences were enthusiastic and appreciative, and several asked how they or their children could get involved. Between the shows, the performers rested, took in the street fair, and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the first performance.

I also observed the spring 2000 performance of "Fern Street Junior Circus." This program, while slightly more informal in tone than the performances given by Fern Street Community Circus, still employed all the technical elements and the same backdrop and equipment as the Linda Vista shows. Also, like the circus' other performances, the local papers listed the show in their arts calendar sections. The show took place in the athletics field adjoining the Golden Hill Community center where the after-school program meets. In addition to the low-wire and trampoline used at the Linda Vista event, an aerial rig was placed over the ring to allow trapeze, Spanish web, and aerial ring acts to perform. Archer strung a second lower wire (about two feet high) parallel to and slightly in front of the first for the less experienced funambulists. In addition to the added equipment, bleachers, usually located behind the baseball backstop, were dragged over to provide seating in front of the ring.

Other than some of the crew and several members of the band, the children and teenagers of the after-school program ran the entire show. Unlike the other performances given by Fern Street, in which the directors selected performers for their skills to create the acts desired for the show, the Fern Street Jr. performance included all after-school participants who desired to perform. Skill and length of involvement with the program mattered less than desire to perform. The junior circus used the same basic set I observed at Linda Vista. A corner of the field provided a chain link fence to define the backstage area (with the addition of painted tarps to provide visual blocks and shade), and tables set up near the gate served as ticket booth and concessions and souvenir stand. Parents staffed the tables, which offered t-shirts featuring logos from Fern Street's past shows, along with cheap plastic toys such as squirt guns and Chinese yo-yos. They also sold the popcorn, sodas, and snow-cones offered by small circuses throughout the U.S.

The inclusiveness of this performance meant a larger number of performers (thirty-eight) and a longer show. The set-up and warm-up periods took on a performative aspect similar to that in the Linda Vista site, with an audience of family members, neighborhood children, and the public who had arrived early due to a mistake in the performance time announced in one of the newspapers. As circus members warmed up and practiced bits of routines, a handful of observing children imitated them in their play. The younger members of the circus spent time playing as well. Giles, (the ten-year old gymnast), and a

friend were fascinated by the snow-cone machine and spent part of the morning examining and playing with it. In fact, the entire scene was one of play, with zones of calm around the musicians' instruments, the aerial and tightwire rigging, and the trampoline where more than once one of the adults had to say "Don't play on that."

Participants in the after-school program ran the show wherever possible. Dean, 16, served as ringmaster. Highkin, bass in hand, introduced the show as the "Fern Street Junior Circus," and added that the group has been performing in the Golden Hill Neighborhood since 1993. The band launched into a five-minute overture, and the show began. The opening act featured three clowns doing a rolling globe act with a classic status-based structure. One of the clowns tried to walk on the globe and failed, another mounted and walked easily, and a third generally got in the way. The three entrances and exits of their act were interspersed with a seven-girl baton twirling routine and a four-girl routine done with tall flags. Ringmaster Dean then introduced an act called "Elastique," which was a six-girl contortion tumbling act done by performers in harem pants over unitards. The technical level of the girls ranged from basic, with some performing backbends and back walkovers, to more advanced moves such as contortion elbow stands and "pretzels"(an extreme backbend allowing the contortionist to look through her own legs) performed by the more proficient performers. A static trapeze act followed, after which Dean introduced his brother Stan, age 14, in a solo diablo act that Highkin had requested he put together at the last moment to

cover a change of rigging. The next act was an aerial ring act (a large steel hoop hung from one point so it can swing and spin, thus serving as a trapeze). Following the ring act Dean talked about the non-profit status of the organization as an introduction to a humorous soft-sell of the refreshments and t-shirts, adding: "If you buy one for double the normal price you get the second one free." Again Dean introduced one of his brothers, this time Archer, as part of a tightrope act. The act consisted of Archer's near-professional level performance on the wire, interspersed with basic skills demonstrated with varying degrees of success by three other children, at least one of whom had less than one month's experience on the apparatus. Archer took advantage of the low-pressure performance to try new and more difficult stunts, including a back tuck on the wire and a leap from the high-wire to the low-wire. A nine-person acrobatic act featuring pyramids and other partner acrobatics concluded the first act forty-five minutes into the show.

During intermission, the performers mingled freely with the audience. Parents praised and encouraged their children with hugs. A teenage aerialist flirted with a group of boys who had shown up to see her, and several boys tossed a Frisbee out in the field. Some of the many small children in the audience (at least twenty in an ethnically diverse audience of around sixty) played circus while others talked with their parents about the show. I heard one girl telling her father the things she would like to learn to do, and a father

promising his son that he would get to join the program in a year: "when you're old enough."

After the intermission, two stilt walkers entered, each "manipulating" two human "puppets," while a third figure in mask and sorcerer's robe "conjured" them into the ring. With dramatic movement suggesting hypnotic power, the sorcerer (the trampoline instructor) cut the "strings" and summoned them one by one to the trampoline where each in turn did a basic routine in a safety harness belayed by their trainer. The fourth and final of the performers was able to perform off-harness. A clown "war" followed, in which an aggressor with flag in hand tried to claim more and more of the ring before finally being deposed in a comic tug-of-war over the flag. This act involved a good deal of gymnastic ability, including Giles doing back handsprings and pratfalls. Dean covered a rigging change by telling jokes. Two girls aged 10 and 12 performed in a double trapeze act (two performers on one long bar separated by a third rope). The next act, announced as "The Tumbleweeds," gave seven beginning-level boys and girls ranging in age from 8-12 an opportunity to show their tumbling skills. Three jugglers then took the stage in an act structured around one-upmanship starting with three and going to five balls. One of the jugglers, Lionel (age 12), pulled his brother Brad (age 18) from the band to do a seven-club passing routine standing on rola-bolas (a board balanced across a pipe). For their finale the jugglers recruited two of the older boys from the band for a five-person club passing routine. Three girls ranging from 9 to 12 years old then performed aerial acts on

the Spanish web. Trainer Cheryl set and spun the rope for her daughter Sarah (age 10) and two other girls. The web act ended with Celeste hanging inverted from the spinning rope by her feet and Sarah doing trapeze moves hanging from her arms. The last act was the Salmon Brothers, Joshua, Archer, and Dean, brothers aged 11, 15, and 16, who had worked up a classic comic tumbling and acrobatic act in which they slide and tumble over, under, around, and off a small table. Dean concluded the show by calling the company out for a final bow. After exiting and getting out of costumes the performers greeted their friends and families for a few minutes, and then set about striking the set and rigging.

A third performance I saw, though not a performance of Fern Street Circus per se, deserves mention here because it involved three of my primary research participants. Technomania circus was an informal adult performance group that developed out of a group of San Diego participants in the Burning Man festival—an annual desert art happening. On the night of the Linda Vista performances, Technomania gave two evening performances in which Brad (18), Celeste (15), and Jenna (17) took part at the invitation of trainer Cheryl Lindley. The performance took place in a downtown art space, and featured a variety of circus acts, most of which played up the erotic aspects of the acts in a campy, burlesque style. The resulting show, while no more titillating than the average sitcom, had an air of transgressiveness (one act involved two men trying to get the audience to shout profanities as a form of celebration). The "adult" theme made it a departure from performing with the "little kids' circus," as one of the

young performers characterized Fern Street. The performances of the Fern Street members were substantially the same as those they had given earlier in the day. Brad juggled and offered the same poi act with which he ended the Linda Vista show, this time with chemical glow-sticks attached to the poi for visual effect. Jenna did both her rhythmic gymnastic ribbon routine, and a web routine. Celeste did a web act as well. The different atmosphere allowed them to perform as "adults." This "adultness" was reflected in less concealing costuming, more overt flirtation with audience members, and in one case openly showing affection for a performing partner during an act. This performance both shows the role of the youth circus as a doorway into performing with other circuses, and serves as contrast to the youth circus' performance style, both of which play a role in forming the meanings youth circus training at Fern Street holds for its participants.

Having provided a description of Fern Street Circus' organization, performances, and training sessions, and some specifics about the participants in the study, I will now go on to discuss the findings of the study and how I organize them. Anyone wishing to peruse the collected data in a rawer form before reading the findings I drew from it may want to consult Appendix II, Composite Interview, before continuing to the next chapter.

4. Findings

I frame my findings in terms of Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. I employ Gardner's theory for a number of reasons. First I have a strong familiarity with multiple intelligences theory, and have employed it in curriculum design and assessment for over ten years. I also believe that using a familiar and widely accepted framework may help in making the findings accessible to the many people familiar with multiple intelligences but unfamiliar with the practices of youth circus programs. Finally, multiple intelligences provides a well accepted theory able to envelop the diverse artistic, social, and physical aspects of youth circus training revealed by my research. I initially coded the data and let themes arise from the interviews, and subsequently chose Gardner's theory as a frame, and while I believe Gardner's theory provides a useful way to organize my findings, it does not necessarily fit perfectly in every case. The frame was not made for the data, nor the data for the frame, but the frame nonetheless provides a useful way to organize the emergent themes in the data.

Briefly stated, Gardner argues that individuals possess and employ a number of distinct types of intelligence. The theory reacts to and contrasts with the dualistic linguistic/mathematical model that has dominated western thought. In his words, "It is a pluralistic view of mind, recognizing many different and discrete facets of cognition, acknowledging that people have different cognitive strengths and contrasting cognitive styles" (Multiple Intelligences 6). The intelligences that frame most of my findings are the interpersonal, intrapersonal,

bodily/kinesthetic, and artistic intelligences (the creative aspects of musical, spatial, kinesthetic, linguistic and other intelligences taken as a whole). Notably, the intelligences that seem to frame the majority of the data are those that offer the largest departure from the previous linguistic/mathematical models of intelligence. As Gardner notes in Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century, "in the original list the final two intelligences, which I call the personal intelligences, raised the most eyebrows" (43). It is also important to note that Gardner defines an "intelligence" as a "biopsychological potential" (Multiple Intelligences 36). He distinguishes between an intelligence per se and a "*domain* as the discipline or craft as it is practiced in our society" (37). While, as he points out, he considers musical ability a form of intelligence, the practicing musician may need to draw on many other intelligences simultaneously in order to successfully practice her art. Thus, the framing of my findings in terms of multiple intelligence theory in no way claims that the participants in the study possess these intelligences to a greater or lesser degree, or that they have developed them in the course of their experience of circus training. Rather, multiple intelligences theory provides a useful way for me to think about the findings and perhaps indicates that they employ these specific intelligences in their practice of circus, and thus serves as a conceptual framework for this study.

Many psychologists, education theorists, and others from a wide range of academic disciplines have employed and developed multiple intelligences theory in various ways. Many researchers have sought to validate or falsify Gardner's

theories through various quantitative and qualitative means. An even larger number have conducted studies to examine the impact and implications of multiple intelligences on teaching methods and curriculum development. Nancy A. Dome's 2004 dissertation, "Making The Connection Between Technology And Multiple Intelligences: The Effect Of Instructional Strategy On Course Completion Rate And Motivation Of At-Risk Students," for example, examines ways in which technological instructional aids appeal to various intelligences in at-risk youth populations. Other studies have focused on ways to either capitalize on or stimulate specific individual intelligences.

I, however, use multiple intelligences as a lens, a focusing and sorting device for themes of meaning. I did not seek to find evidence of multiple intelligences at work in youth circus training. Rather, having found a number of disparate themes in the data generated by my research, I sought an umbrella theory that could organize the emergent themes of meaning. Others have used multiple intelligences theory in similar ways, as a lens or framing device, in a number of publications. Schulte, for instance, uses multiple intelligences to create a visual "Mind Model" to examine and conceptualize the creativity of her research subject in her 2002 feminist investigation of creativity. Others have taken this "organizational" use of multiple intelligences theory even farther. Cahill's dissertation, Shakespeare's Multiple Intelligences: Howard Gardner's Theory Of Multiple Intelligences As Reflected In Shakespeare's Plays, and Willson-Metzger and Metzger's article "But Is He Really Smart? Gardner's

Multiple Intelligences Theory in the World of Harry Potter," both employ multiple intelligences theory as an organizational lens for literary and cultural criticism. Both of these literary applications of multiple intelligences theory look for themes in a text and organize these themes in terms of the theory. I employ multiple intelligences in a similar way--as an organizational tool and a set of frames for the themes that emerge from the data of my study. Before discussing my findings in detail, I will provide brief definitions of the intelligences I employ as a frame for discussion.

Interpersonal intelligence provides one useful frame for my findings. "Interpersonal intelligence builds on a core capacity to notice distinctions among others, in particular, to contrast their moods, temperaments, motivations and intentions. In more advanced forms, this intelligence permits a skilled adult to read the intentions and desires of others, even when these have been hidden" (Multiple Intelligences 23). I use interpersonal intelligence to frame findings regarding personal relationships and also the economic aspects of circus training.

The concept of intrapersonal intelligence frames other findings of my study. Gardner defines intrapersonal intelligence as "knowledge of the internal aspects of a person: access to one's own feeling life, one's range of emotions, the capacity to effect discriminations among these emotions and eventually to label them and to draw upon them as a means of understanding and guiding one's own behavior" (Multiple Intelligences 25). Intrapersonal intelligence

provides a useful frame for findings about personal identity, goal-setting, the element of risk, and the role of economics in circus training.

My findings, unsurprisingly, also included many references to the athletic aspects of youth circus training. Gardner's concept of bodily/kinesthetic intelligence provides a useful frame for these findings. "Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence entails the potential of using one's whole body or parts of the body (like the hand or the mouth) to solve problems or fashion products" (Intelligence Reframed 42).

One major group of findings does not fit neatly into the frames of multiple intelligences. As Fern Street Circus is an arts agency and the participants in the study were all engaged in training the art of circus (and as I am an arts educator looking for artistic experience in the findings), many of the responses include reference to the artistic aspects of youth circus training. Gardner has written that, strictly speaking, no artistic intelligence exists, "Rather, intelligences function artistically—or nonartistically—to the extent that they exploit certain properties of a symbol system" (Intelligence Reframed 108). Artistic expression then, is a "domain" for his purposes, in which several intelligences may be drawn upon. As he later states, "Whether an intelligence is deployed for aesthetic purposes represents personal and cultural decisions" (109). However, he goes on to say that "informally, it is perfectly all right to speak of artistic intelligences" (109). As I use all of Gardner's terms here informally, as a framing device, I have chosen to frame findings concerning aesthetics with the term "artistic intelligence." While it

may be tempting to somehow privilege or otherwise distinguish these findings from those more easily framed by proper intelligences, we must remember that phenomenological research requires horizontalization of data. In short, all statements must have equal weight within the data, and all themes universally present in the data must be given due considerations in the findings of phenomenological study.

Interpersonal Intelligence

Youth circus training means learning to navigate a complex milieu of interpersonal relationships. The theme of interpersonal relationships emerged across the board as an essential part of youth circus training, a theme that fits directly into the framework of interpersonal intelligence. The language of some of my questions in interviews, such as "What's your relationship like with the people you perform with?" "What do kids at school think about what you do?" and "What's it like to perform with members of your family?" prompted these responses to some degree. The fact that many of my interview participants had family members in the circus also made it likely that interpersonal relationships would also be an issue in their responses. However, a significant number of these responses arose from questions such as "What would you miss most if you left the circus?" and "What's the most important thing about being in the circus or circus training?" These questions are sufficiently open to support the validity of these responses as a theme. Of course, simple friendship occurs in most elective activities in which youth engage, and had the language of the responses

stopped at friendship I might have excluded it as unremarkable. However, interviews revealed a higher level of relationship present in Fern Street Circus, in that the youth and adults all spoke of the circus as a "family." While people experiencing other types of phenomena also express similar sentiments, I believe that the finding is significant, particularly given the importance of family in traditional circus culture.

Friendship

Youth circus training means developing and strengthening friendships. Participants' responses that deal with friendship break down into two main categories: friendships within the circus, and the impact of circus training on relationships outside of the circus. Friendship among trainees further breaks down into two categories. Some mention friendship as an enjoyable *benefit of* circus training, while others indicated that friendship is the major *reason for* participating in circus training.

Friendship appears to arise from participation in youth circus for most participants in my study. One respondent reported that for him friendships arose quickly from his involvement in the circus. Describing his early experience of training, he said: "I was really happy when I got there and then we started warming up and I thought it was kind of weird but after a while I got used to it and I made some new friends and just had fun." Another participant, who considers circus training as primarily an artistic and physical activity, said "and it's also like a social thing, I mean I've met a lot of friends." Friendship appears to be an

important part of circus for younger participants in the study as well. Though they do not explicitly use the word "friendship," the two youngest participants noted that "Well, a lot of people are nice," and "you get to do a lot of fun stuff with other people." These responses indicate that for these young participants friendship and socialization is a notable part of circus training.

For some respondents, friendship appears so intrinsic to circus training as to constitute their prime reason for taking part in the circus. Asked to identify "the most important part of training," one responded, "The friendship I guess. Um, the most important I'd have to say would probably be the atmosphere, the friendship and the way you feel there." Another expressed similar feelings when asked what aspect of circus training she would miss most if she had to quit: "Um, I'd probably miss most probably the friendship that I've gained with others there. Yeah, definitely that 'cause I've definitely gained a lot of relationship with others." Yet another explicitly stated the importance of friendship as a reason for taking part in circus training: "You get to be in shows and you meet a lot of new friends so whenever you feel down and you go there your spirits just lift again." These responses show friendships as at least a part of the phenomenon of circus training and in many cases the reason for it.

An impact on relationships outside of the circus is also intrinsic to circus training. Participants reported the effect of circus training on outside relationships as beneficial. They often expressed this benefit in terms of the circus providing something that makes its practitioners unique or interesting to

outsiders, as I will discuss in findings dealing with issues of personal identity. Circus training also helps participants build relationships outside the circus by providing an activity in which they can invite others to take part. Relevant responses here often arose from the questions: "What do people at school think of what you do in the circus?" and "What impact has circus training had on the rest of your life?"

Participants felt that circus training had a positive effect on their social lives outside the circus, particularly as something that distinguished them or made them appear unique, and thus increased their status. As one put it, "They think it's cool, they, a lot of them haven't seen it and a lot--well all of them don't know anybody in the circus so it's a cool thing for them. They go, um, most people go 'that's cool.'" The belief that others find participation in circus training "cool" is widely held by respondents. A few of the older participants balance this belief with an acknowledgement that some might not deem circus training "cool." As one put it, "Once they find out that I'm not a clown or anything silly, like I have all my toes and stuff they think it's pretty cool and they don't really believe me until they see it kind of thing." Younger participants also expressed the idea that circus training benefited relationships with friends: ". . . I can be more funny to my friends and to my school."

The fact that virtually all participants in the study report inviting others to join the circus bears up the acceptance and interest of school friends. As one related, "one girl that didn't really believe me but that I could tell was interested in

it started coming to circus class, and she ended up being a crew person for the circus class and also doing lots of aerial acts so she of course goes back to our friends and says its amazing." Another, asked about circus training's effect on other areas of his life simply said, "I told Rodney who already signed up and I told Tony about it too."

As these responses suggest, *circus training means participating in a social activity that allows participants to make and strengthen friendships within and outside of the training group, in which such relationships may provide the primary motivation for training. It means having activity that increases the participant's status among outside peer groups by providing valued social skills and an activity in which to invite others to participate.*

Family

Youth circus training means exploring family relationships and expanding the meaning and scope of "family." As mentioned before, my interviews revealed a social dimension that goes beyond friendship and into family dynamics and development. In many cases the family aspect of Fern Street circus stemmed from the fact that many sets of siblings trained together, and some parents took part with their children as performers. Many other parents who didn't directly take part in the circus were still present at many of the training sessions and took an active role in the life of the circus. These factors made family an inevitable part of circus training within this organization. The sense of family within the circus went farther than literal family relationships, however. Many interviewees

spoke of the circus community as a metaphorical family, and/or attributed family dynamics to it.

Circus training at Fern Street means having family relations play an important role in training. To begin, there were numerous actual family relationships among members of the circus. These came up as a matter of course throughout the interviews, which reveal family relationships woven throughout the process of training. The matter-of-fact nature of the presence of siblings in the circus shows itself in many parts of the interviews but most frequently in response to questions about what acts the participants performed. For example, one interviewee reported, "lately I think I'm liking juggling on something or doing multiple things at once, like juggling on rolling globe or juggling on my brother or you know something like that." Another related "...also with my brothers a comedy routine, um, doing things such as a three man high and comedy such as using tables and chairs and just those types of things." A third respondent spoke of training she did with her brothers but made a point of not doing everything together with them:

> Me and my two brothers Brad and Lionel do a lot of acrobat stuff we're working on, you know, three person tricks and a lot of two person tricks with me and my older brother Brad. And I was doing juggling when I first came 'cause it's what my brothers do, but then I kinda got, kinda decided that I wanted to do my own thing.

In many instances family relationships played a role in participants' reasons for starting circus training. In an extreme example, a parent working as a trainer brought her children into the circus as infants. These two participants were literally born into the circus. Others began training as a result of having to accompany siblings to training sessions: "My little brother found out about it somehow and I had to go to a few of the rehearsals and I thought it was neat so I started." Still other sets of siblings began training at more or less the same time, as one reported: "Um, most of my brothers went about a week before me and then I heard about it and it was cool so I went and checked it out and we all together checked it out." In a few cases, an interviewee took responsibility for bringing brothers and sisters to train with them. One said:

> I went and came back and was like hey guys hey guys hey guys, I was there and I was juggling five balls and no one cared, [laugh] and then my brother started going and he started working with David the juggling instructor, . . . and then he got really interested in yo-yos and he started working at the yo-yo house and started instructing yo-yos for little kids and that really drew him in with a good hold. Then my sister started going "Hey! Hey where'd they go? Come back here!" And we told her, "Hey, just come to circus and there'll be a million things going on at once and pick one just pick one that's all that matters pick one" and she went off and saw this big Spanish web and took after it.

In one way or another, family was a major factor in how most of the study participants came to train with Fern Street Circus.

Similarly, most of the interviews revealed that siblings had a major impact on their experience of circus training. For some, the presence of family members added a level of comfort and security to training. As one member of an act made up of brothers related, "Um, well, when we do an act I'm more trusting 'cause in there's like tricks that are really dangerous and I'm more trusting in my brothers than I would be in someone else so it's easier to do my act." Participants in the study perceived the presence of family as a factor that allowed them to achieve higher levels of performance and skill. The presence of family members also created a consistency over time, which allowed siblings to reach higher skill levels in partner acts:

> Yeah um my youngest brother Joseph and my brother Derek who's a year older than me, we've been working on a routine--the Salmon Brothers for I think three years now I think three or four years. And it's really developed a lot . . . umm actually we're working on some new tricks for the Balboa show in May, things such as the chair and the three man high. We've done the three man high last year before but we've got it really solid and by ourselves, and um, we're definitely more focused on what we're doing and we've definitely developed a lot in our relationship in that area and with others.

Another respondent stated the impact of family on her training much more succinctly. Asked her favorite thing about circus training, she simply said, "Having my mom in the circus too." This importance of having other family in the circus, while simply stated, should not be under-emphasized as it recurs so often in the interview transcripts. This young performer's appreciation of having her mother in the circus training with her leads to another aspect of family relations that came up many times in talking with study participants: family relationships with and among trainers.

Circus training at Fern Street means having intergenerational family legacies play an important role in training. Family relations of several types play an important role in the level of training, the continuity of training partners, and in trainer/student relationships. The participants in the study found family relationships among their trainers noteworthy, and some are related to one or another of their trainers. Older interviewees valued highly the presence of a multigenerational circus family as trainers. One reported: "we really owe a lot of it to Pop Canestrelli. He's our teacher. He's a sixth generation circus performer and um, we've really developed because of him and it's really been fun performing with him and having him teach us. And you know we're really grateful." The name "Pop" underscores the importance of the family dynamics in training at Fern Street. Not only is Mr. Canestrelli the actual patriarch of a circus family, he is also the metaphorical father of all of his circus students. As the patriarch, he served as the source of a wealth of circus knowledge, which he

imparted to the participants not only directly, but also through his children Ottavio and Ilona. One participant's memory of his first training day at Fern Street was of "Being taught by Otavio Canestrelli, he was my first tumbling teacher and his sister Ilona, um, Canestrelli she taught me the wire." Another said his favorite thing about the circus training was "Pop Canestrelli," because "He's a seventh generation circus performer," again revealing the importance of Pop and the multigenerational aspect of training.

Several of the participants in the study had parents who performed with the circus and worked as trainers. The presence of a parent as a trainer had a significant effect on the experience of training for these individuals. One said, "I know there's somebody that like if I feel or get hurt I have my mom there to help me and if I made a mistake she helps me train 'cause she's a clown and she helps me be a clown 'cause she knows more." This child's assessment of having her mother as a trainer shows an effect similar to that of having siblings in the circus to train with—it gives her a sense of trust and safety in an activity that is inherently risky.

The noteworthy family relationships and sense of family legacy implicit in training at Fern Street mirrors (and stems from) the family lineages traditionally found in circus. While the presence of multiple siblings is perhaps common in educational arts organizations, given the family history of some of the trainers at least one aspect is rare--few arts organizations (or organizations of any kind for that matter) can boast of six or seven generations of experience in what they do.

However, the aspect of family relations that clinches the importance of family in understanding what it means to take part in circus training at Fern Street is the metaphorical sense of family experienced by those who train there.

Youth circus training at this site means expanding the use of the term "family." Interviewees repeatedly used the word "family" to describe their relationship with others in the circus. Some viewed this as a mixed blessing: "there's still ups and downs you know just like I would have with my family." One mentioned that, as with her family, "you never know when to break away." Others saw the family metaphor as mostly positive: "as far as relationship with people who are commonly and routinely perform at the circus we have a pretty good relationship. That's just sort of a family relationship." One participant in the study used the family metaphor most clearly when asked to define circus: "Circus, um, circus to me is people having fun. And it's a real--I don't know how to put this into words, but you feel like family there, I guess, in the circus." *For the participants in my study, youth circus training means exploring family relationships through training and performing with family members, with acts and training cadres made up of families, and further, means entering into an extended, metaphorical family with the attendant pros and cons that the word implies.*

Youth circus training, then, means learning to navigate a complex milieu of interpersonal relationships. Participation in circus training affects and is affected by these relationships. Friendships arise from and are enhanced by circus

training both among trainees and between members of the circus and their peers outside it. In some cases, these friendships provide a major reason for participating in circus training. Family relationships come into play as well, as many members of the circus, both trainers and students, have blood ties to others in the circus. This rich web of interpersonal relationships produces an experience of extended or metaphorical family that leads many who participate in circus training to describe Fern Street circus as a family.

Intrapersonal Intelligence

Youth circus training means developing one's personal inner life, self-awareness, and identity in an activity rich with opportunity for self-exploration. The largest portion of my findings fit well under the concept of intrapersonal intelligence. Intrapersonal intelligence "involves the capacity to understand oneself--including one's own desires, fears, and capacities--and to use such information in regulating one's life" (Gardner, Intelligence Reframed 43). This intelligence provides a way to categorize themes of personal identity, goal-setting, the element of risk, and even the economics of circus training. These themes occurred in each of the interviews in various ways.

Identity

Youth circus training means taking part in an activity that fosters personal identity. Intrapersonal intelligence provides the faculty to understand oneself--one employs intrapersonal intelligence to develop one's sense of identity. For the participants in the study, circus training both helps define them and allows them

to express themselves more freely than other aspects of their lives. For many, Fern Street circus is a place where "I can be myself." It also provides a sense of belonging and an insider status. For some it is a site that helps define the process of growing up. For others it fosters self-confidence.

Circus training means having a site that simultaneously allows the extraordinary to be unremarkable and the ordinary to become remarkable. A common thread in the interviews is the perception that the circus provides a site where participants can express themselves fully and freely. One young participant defined circus as a place "where a whole bunch of people get together and they act, and they just be theirselves [sic]." Several experienced competitive gymnasts found in the circus a freedom from the regimen of sports. For one of the youngest participants, the freedom took the form of role-playing: "It's fun and I can go out on stage and perform and dress up like a clown and be a clown." In dressing up like a clown, she tried on a new identity, an identity made richer for her by the fact that her mother was a professional clown. The ability to be "oneself" whether in or out of performance underlies many of the responses that reveal how circus training fosters a sense of personal identity for participants in the study.

For some, the circus provided space where their extraordinary skills were unremarkable, giving them a chance to focus on their training. An accomplished juggler recalled that when he first attended the program, "It was really cool; it was the first place I'd ever gone to where kids don't stop and say, 'Hey do this do this

oh that's really cool can I see this,' run off with it you know." He found it refreshing to have a place to work on his craft without attracting the attention of bystanders and feeling a subsequent pressure to perform. "My favorite part of training in the circus program" he continued, "is how I can do you know these talents that are going to send me to the world championships the summer and no one cares—'Oh, Hi. Juggling seven huh? Hi, yeah, oh really? Too bad.' Just no one seems to stop. It's ordinary." In training at Fern Street, he could indulge his differentness and do what makes him special and still fit in. For this particular participant, the circus provided a place where the extraordinary was ordinary.

For others, circus training allowed them to be seen as special or extraordinary. They valued the feeling that what they do makes them unusual. "Unusual," in fact, is one of the more common descriptors used by several interviewees. One aerialist used it repeatedly to describe why she chose her act:

> Um, Spanish web—I don't know I think it's probably the most unusual and it's--I mean it's the one I wanted to do first when I first started—I do a little juggling too, but not much. Probably because it [Spanish web] takes so much strength and energy and it's so unusual, like everyone's very impressed by it

She enjoyed the fact that the art she practiced was "unusual," and that, by extension, so was she. For another, this sense of difference was central to the meaning of circus. When asked what circus training meant to her, she responded:

> It's different. I've always been way different from the crowd I've always been kinda strange and kind of out there, on my own planet. But it means, uh, meeting fun people.

She went on to talk about performance and other aspects of training, but her initial response is telling. Circus rewarded her for her difference, for being "kind of out there." Another respondent spoke about this sense of difference when speaking of the importance of performance. She said, "performing helps in your everyday life 'cause it makes you outgoing and it makes you not as shy 'cause I used to be really shy 'cause you can't help but be crazy in the circus." For these participants, circus allowed them to be special, to be extraordinary.

For some long-term members of the circus, circus training meant having a site for growing up and marking milestones in that growth. Some had been training long enough that the circus was simply part of their lives. One's earliest memory of the circus was, "When I was a baby, umm, that's all I remember really, when I was a baby my mom carried me out. I was dressed like a clown and we still have a picture of it." Whether she actually remembered the event or had constructed a memory around the picture, the point is that the circus had been a constant in her life. Her sister's interview shows a similar pervasiveness of circus. She told me she had been in the circus for "My whole, no, no, since I was three, er, for seven years,"--in other words, for as long as she could remember. For these participants, long-term, early training made circus a part of their identities. Fern Street held equal importance to an older long-time member,

who started late in elementary school. He said that if he had to quit he would miss "Everything about it." He went on to say: "It's just it's become a major part of my life 'cause I've done it so long, it'd just be like a complete absence. There'd be this big hole there." He then reflected on some of the personal growth that he experienced through training at Fern Street:

> Um, it's given me a better understanding of people and how different people operate and how different people think. And how many different varieties of personalities there are out there, I mean you come and you watch other people and you can see different characters or personalities in each person as they perform with their own style their own thing that they do and it kinda trademarks their personality and it's kinda taught me about people. When I was younger I wasn't really around a whole lot. I wasn't really into doing big group things but then this was like a really cool thing. So it's kinda taught me a lot about people about how to relate to people; different races, different ages, different backgrounds, religious backgrounds. It's just taught me a lot just about different varieties.

For him, circus training had been a site of broadening social awareness, of building identity by incorporating and rejecting aspects of various people's personalities and points of view.

For one of the oldest participants in the study, Fern Street Circus had begun to provide a milestone in her process of growing up by giving her something to outgrow, in a sense. She noted that, in contrast to some circus

performances she had recently become involved with, "Fern Street Circus, it's like really geared toward kids and I understand it like I have to hide my belly button ring and not show so much cleavage or whatever." She "understands" Fern Street's juvenile orientation and aesthetic from the standpoint of one who had grown into young adulthood and felt ready to perform for and with adult sensibilities. Fern Street provided her, like the others, with benchmarks for the process of growing up.

Youth circus training also means developing identity by experiencing a sense of belonging. Several participants responded that this sense of belonging was the "most important" or "valuable" thing about circus training. For one, the most valuable part of circus training was "I think being part of it." Another participant recalled that in another circus group, "We all wanted to be there so bad and to make it a success that it just went so smoothly and it was like by far one of the most fun shows I've ever done just 'cause I was among friends." This sense of belonging resonates with the sense of family and friendship that I've dealt with in another section. That friendship and belonging works with the freedom of expression and sense of difference and accomplishment participants experienced in circus training to demonstrate how circus training fosters a sense of personal identity.

The sense of accomplishment I just mentioned came up in several interviews. One said that he liked working with yo-yos. His reason: "Because it's just, I guess since I'm good at it, I learned it really fast, and its just fun..." For

another: "Um performing is saying 'I can do this and not mess up and if I do it's going to be funny' and its saying 'look I can let you have a good time and have a good time myself doing it.'" The reactions of audiences fed this sense of accomplishment. One said that her favorite thing was "Probably getting applause and entertaining people." For these individuals a sense of accomplishment and the accompanying sense of self-esteem was part of how circus training fostered identity.

Circus training, further, means dealing with the perceptions of outsiders. An awareness of how outsiders perceive members of the circus also created a sense of identity. Asked what her friends think about what she does one said: "They think it's really cool. They think it's so unusual and, um, they find it very entertaining [laugh]." Another said friends "think it's interesting that I'm in a circus." For these participants, the opinions of others reinforced the sense that circus training made them special. Other participants echoed these responses. One said: "[clowning with the circus] doesn't really affect my friends because they like they think I'm funny. So that's kinda good." Another reported: "a lot of people like to just talk with me" as a result of participation in the circus. It must be noted that some of the perceptions of how others see circus performers contain traces of defensiveness. One performer said, "Nobody really makes fun as some people might think." Others echoed this sense that some might "make fun" of circus performers or see them as unusual in a bad way. One said, "Well not many people think it's dumb." These responses seem to indicate a presumption

on the part of participants that others might deride what they do, or an awareness that the world sees circus folk as outsiders. In the end, however, even these responses that betray concern over the impressions of others reinforce the way in which circus training fostered a sense of identity for participants in the study.

Youth circus training, then, means developing self-knowledge in an environment that provides a safe zone for personal exploration and expression, where the ordinary can be extraordinary and the extraordinary finds acceptance as normal. Long-term participation means having a constant backdrop against which to measure and mark one's personal growth. It means having a sense of self fostered by accomplishment and belonging to a close group, and building an identity by accepting or rejecting values, points of view and behavior of individuals with whom one must work closely. It means likewise accepting or rejecting the perceptions of outsiders and, ultimately, transcending the limitations of the training organization itself.

Goal Setting

To participate in youth circus training means adopting a lifestyle of training and setting and working toward goals. This practice strongly relates to intrapersonal intelligence. Gardner writes: "I continue to view emotional life as a key ingredient of intrapersonal intelligence, but now I stress the vital role of intrapersonal intelligence in a person's life-course decisions" (Intelligence Reframed 43). Interviews reveal patterns of delayed gratification, dealing with frustration, and planning and practice for future skills, acts, and life choices.

Interviewees also discussed their enjoyment and sense of accomplishment on achieving their goals. In short, these members of Fern Street Circus demonstrated that goal-setting skills and long term learning patterns were part of their circus training.

Interviewees' thoughts relating to goals recur in response to a range of questions in which I asked:

What is hardest about circus training?

What does training mean?

How do you learn a new trick?

How do you practice?

How does it feel when you first land a trick?

A number of individualized questions about particular acts and experiences also elicited responses related to setting goals. I will show these goal-setting behaviors first by recounting some of the goals, both concrete and implicit, which participants shared with me. I will then discuss how they spoke about achieving those goals, and end with a discussion of feelings associated with working toward and achieving these goals.

Participation in circus training means establishing both short-term, immediate goals and longer-term goals and aspirations. Goals participants shared with me included learning specific tricks, creating acts, life plans, and long-term personal development. The words of one teen epitomize the importance of goal setting to the experience of these young people in the circus.

Asked to define circus training he said: "I would define it a perfecting, for most people it's perfecting what you like to do or choose to do and making everything better making things fit." While this quote is rich with various ideas about circus training, it shines with the implied goal of always getting better, with discovering how to make a choice of what to work on and "perfecting" that skill or act. Trainers reinforced goal setting by example and by rewarding achievement, as one participant's early experience of training shows: "The first time I got across the wire it was at John Highkin's house and Ilona, my teacher, there was a group of kids there she was teaching and she said, 'for the first person that can make it across the wire um, I'll buy 'em a slurpy afterwards,' and so I was the first person and it was my goal to get the slurpy I guess." The tangible goal of the slurpy helped spur him to take on the goal of walking the wire, an act that he made his primary skill with the circus.

As I will discuss in considering the economic meanings of youth circus training, *training means considering and setting goals of careers in, or at least long-term involvement with, the circus.* The aerialist who planned to join Ringling Bros. when she turned eighteen recalled a coach leaving to study at the Canadian National Circus School. She said, " I hope someday I can go to that same trainer," revealing the career goals she harbored. Another was explicit in voicing his career goals in circus performance: "I'd like to enter a few yo-yo competitions and maybe start a career in that later in life to be able to travel a lot." Many more examples of these career and commercial goals appear in my

discussion of the economic meanings of circus training. Some, while not yet sure of making a career of circus, expressed similar goals of staying involved in circus training into adulthood.

Many of the goals expressed by the participants also centered on accomplishing particularly difficult or advanced tricks. Often the goal centered not just on accomplishing a trick but on perfecting it: "The three man high, we've done the three man high last year before but we've got it really solid and by ourselves." Long term goals are required to learn new acts or skill sets as well. As one participant reported: "I did trapeze; the first act I ever did with the circus was the trapeze and I did that for a year. And then from that I went to learning the wire and then a few years later I started to build up to do Salmon Brothers with my two brothers Dean and Joshua." The long time periods involved in developing each new set of circus skills requires setting and working toward long-term goals. One goal often leads into another, particularly when the goal is the accomplishment of a trick. These goals can shift rapidly because the amount of time required to reach a goal may be unpredictable. One participant said that in working on new stunts with Pop:

> . . . he'll just say, "I remember doing this trick. You wanna learn it?" And I'll say, "Yeah let's go for it." And we'll just start building and building and usually he says we learn really quick. Usually we'll have it in a couple months. Sometimes he'll say, "Ah, it'll take you a year to learn this trick," and we'll have it, you know, two weeks later or something.

Such unexpectedly quick attainment of a goal drives continual goal setting. Goals also change because performance skills can always be improved or another skill learned. This continual drive to learn the next trick or further perfect skills shows throughout the interviews.

Circus training means setting goals not just to accomplish a particular trick, but to create and perform a polished circus act. As one reported: "We've been working really hard to get a new routine together." The routine and not just skill becomes the goal. Some had more concrete performance goals. One looked forward to creating an act for Technomania, a fledgling circus company with which she had recently started. Another performer, a juggler, said: "Since I'll be competing internationally in the International Jugglers Association in the juniors competition, my instructor just told me, 'Hey let's make that show.' So we started working on it." For these performers, the goal was an act for a specific setting. For others the goal was to improve an existing act. One said: "my brothers and I are coming up with a table act and we haven't really done that yet so we'll probably be doing it then. And that's added into our normal act I think it'll be a lot better--the act." Here the participants expressed their goal as the desire to reformulate the older act into "something different," as another said, with a strong eye to the act's effect on an audience. For some just working up to performance level was a goal that required dedication to attain. An aerialist told of a friend who was "working her way up to performing, which is not a fast

process, " and concluded, "so she's doing pretty well." Simply joining the circus implied starting to work toward a goal.

These explicit and implied goals are significant to an understanding of the meaning of youth circus training. *But circus training, perhaps more importantly, means struggling to achieve those goals through discipline and practice.* The key word in these responses is "practice." As one young participant put it, "when the shows are coming all we do is we practice the shows and when they're not we practice and we stretch and we learn new moves and stuff." Constant practice was central to reaching the goals these performers set for themselves. For one, practice was a response to the question, "What does training mean?" She responded, "Well you go practice something and until you get good at it you keep training and you try your hardest." Asked how she learned new tricks, another said: "I practice until I get it right."

For at least one, practice was among the most important things about circus training:

> *What's the most important thing about being in the circus and training*? [Repeats question], um, I think, um, the wire mostly. It takes a lot of practice and training and, you know, that also takes up a lot of my time. And that certain act in that area that's what takes up a lot my time away from my friends, you know, and school and so I practice that Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays. And so that's definitely the wire 'cause you know every day you need to practice trick after trick after trick, and get better at

> those tricks you know so you become solid and it takes a lot of your time actually and dedication. A lot of dedication.

This response reveals the importance of practice to achieving goals and also the level and amount of practice required. An aerialist reported, "I usually try to do it at least half an hour a day, you know." Others talked about the importance of practicing "every day" as well.

Jugglers and acrobats added that practice involves breaking skills down and working on individual aspects as well as repetition. A juggler discussed in detail how he broke down a trick to work on it:

> Um, for example behind the back with a club took me a long time to learn; I always give it a shot--full on juggle three clubs, put one behind my back. Then since maybe I discovered I wasn't doing it fast enough then I'll throw a double flip and then do it, to give me more time–and then I put down the other two clubs and just work on the one behind my back to give it accuracy and then I picked up a second club and threw it first and then did it to make sure I was getting my hand back in time, and then I threw it--the behind the back--first to make sure that I could get the club out of my hand and then catch the behind the back, and then I put in the third club and then got fluent at throwing it and then at throwing it while doing something else. And then put it into a pattern.

Learning to break down the large goal into smaller ones allowed him to perfect the trick. He acknowledged that there was also a need to just try the whole thing

repeatedly: "Some tricks you can't break it down, its just working on it and it depends on the person and I'm kinda the one who does half and half—some tricks I'll break it down and some I'll just work on it until I get it." This quote shows the need for more than one way of practicing, and more importantly reveals a degree of self-knowledge regarding how he approached working toward his goals.

An acrobat also spoke of a balance between breaking a trick down and "just working on it":

> . . . sometimes it's just as far as tumbling and sports tumbling my coach Anetta will say "Do you want to go for it?" And I'll say, "Sure," and she'll say, "Do this" and I'll know what it is but I've never tried it before. And she'll say, "Go for it." And she'll spot and I'll do it, and if I land it, I land it, and great, I get to move on from there; and if I don't then we'll build up and figure out "Ok what did I do wrong to not land it?"

His coach assisted him by challenging him to "go for it" and, if needed, helped him "build up" to the goal. The wirewalker of the group expressed a similar need to break down tricks in practice, and he also relied on coaching and added the need to see the trick done correctly. He explained that he was "working on back tucks on the wire" when I interviewed him. He said: "once going to a show, I seen a guy do it on the wire just once. But, and then I seen it on a video, um, of Circus du Soleil and I watched him and I watched in slow motion to see how he did it to see how to do it correctly for me and um Pop taught me how to do it and

it just takes a lot of focus on the wire." The video assisted him in breaking the trick down and provided modeling (along with the live performance) so that he could learn the trick. These quotes show the tools that participants mention repeatedly in describing how they work toward their skill and performance goals: practice, dedication, focus, modeling, breaking tricks down, and "going for it." The practice of setting, working toward, and attaining goals is a significant finding in and of itself. It holds still more significance for the lived experience of circus training in that it served as catalysts for a wide range of emotional responses and reflections on the process of attaining goals.

Circus training means experiencing and dealing with the pleasure, frustration, and other emotions that arise when working toward goals, as the words participants used to describe the process reveal. The frustration that accompanies circus training is well captured in the words of one of the youngest participants:

> *What's the hardest thing you've ever done with the circus?*
>
> I think trying to do all the tricks that I want to do and I can't because they're too hard.
>
> *What does that feel like when you can't do a trick or you're not ready yet?*
>
> It kinda makes me sad and mad 'cause I wanna do it right away and learn how.
>
> *How do you deal with that?*
>
> I try to I go and do another thing so I won't get that sad or mad.

"Sad or mad" distills the feelings of frustration shared by many of the participants, whatever their skill level. An older participant who had performed extensively shared similar feelings:

How long have you been training?

Six or seven years with Fern Street. [laughs] That was depressing.

Why was that depressing?

Um, because I started off here and I haven't really gone much further.

The difficulty of circus training bled over into other areas of life as well. One participant said: "especially around this time, around the shows that are coming up, around April, May, June it gets really busy with rehearsals and shows interfering with school and homework and it really creates a pressure on me to get my work done."

Working toward goals in the circus was sometimes a frustrating process that caused pressure in the lives of the performers. However, positive feelings as they reached their goals more than balanced these frustrations. As one said, "well it's kinda hard at first 'cause you're trying a new thing but then it gets easier and funner and funner, and when you finally could do it you feel all happy." Another shared that reaching a goal in his juggling "felt great. It was cool 'cause I could just stand there and juggle." The participants learned how good reaching their goals could feel, and the promise of these positive feelings assisted them in achieving further goals. A juggler working on a new routine said: "I think it'll be really cool. It'll give me some experience." Participants saw the frustration of

working toward a goal as worthwhile. Achieving the goal, they told me, "feels great," makes the work "funner," and, in the end, as one said, simply "means a lot" to those in the circus. They found the emotional life of circus training rife with frustration at delayed gratification, but found the rewards commensurately satisfying.

Youth circus training, then, means learning to set immediate and longer-term goals. These goals may include considerations of career and life goals, and goals for performance as well as skill achievement. It means learning to work to achieve those goals through discipline and practice, and, further, working through the positive and negative thoughts and emotions that arise in the training process of working toward those goals.

Risk

Taking part in youth circus training means assessing and taking risks and confronting fear, displaying the kind of emotional self-awareness Gardner attributes to intrapersonal intelligence. The participants in the study all mentioned some sort of risk or fear involved in circus training. For some the risk was primarily physical. Others spoke of psychological risks involved in training. Also, participants perceived different aspects of circus training as risky. Some found risk in the physical challenge of learning new skills, while others found psychological risk in the pressures of performance. Another set of comments reveals a projected sense of risk on the part of some participants, many of whom spoke of a sense of personal risk in other segments of their interviews. This idea

of risk came up without my asking any leading questions about it; although I did in some cases ask follow up questions about nervousness or fear when warranted by previous responses. Risk generally came up in response to questions about learning new skills, what performance is like, and, in some cases, the meaning of circus and/or circus training.

To begin, circus training means managing physical risks. Participants showed an awareness of the obvious physical risks involved in circus training: "There's, like, tricks that are really dangerous." Several participants shared this frank admission of the risks inherent in what they do. For many, the primary risks mentioned were attributed to the process of learning a new stunt. For one, a large part of extending himself to learn new skills was "basically just trying things, taking a risk." Another shared that when learning a new trick: "Um, it's interesting, it's fun to find out how you do it and it's like, it matters if the trick is difficult or not. Sometimes it's sort of scary a little, sometimes it's not, if it's an easy trick." Some of the younger participants revealed their sense of risk more obliquely. One told me that the one thing she did not like about training was that "the web gets really hot and it burns your hands," a mild statement, considering that friction from an aerial rope can cause painful burns and blisters. Another said that the hardest thing about training for him was: "Trying new things, 'cause I don't know what will happen when I try it." When asked, "How do you think about tricks when you're trying to learn them?" his first response was: "I hope I land."

As these last comments begin to reveal, *circus training means confronting psychological as well as a physical aspects of risk involved in circus training. This risk may involve entering into the unknown, or facing tangible fears such as performing in front of people.* The difficulty for the acrobat is not merely that the trick might be dangerous and therefore risky, but that he "doesn't know what will happen." To some extent, this was the heart of training for this individual:

What does training mean to you?

Trying. Doing something you've never done before.

For an older participant the risk of entering the unknown took the form of a brief entrance into the adult world. She told of performing in

> a club downtown and they wouldn't let me in 'cause I wasn't 21 much less 18 and so I went in there and they made me stand outside and then I went in and did my aerial act and came out and went home and it was amazing inside it was so spooky and gothy and so it was great.

Her enthusiasm for the event was due, in part, to the exhilaration of risk in entering the unknown. Fear of the unknown was echoed by an aerialist who recalled the start of her training: "I was a little timid 'cause I couldn't do much you know it was my first time learning anything and I wasn't very good at it." Her comment also concerns fear of failure. For others the psychological element of risk centered on this fear of failure, often within the context of performance.

Most participants in the study had felt the fear of failure in performance, popularly known as "stage fright." One young performer said of performance:

"Well it's fun and sometimes you get nervous and scared if it's your first show 'cause some people do that because they've never been in front of a whole audience before. Sometimes 'cause maybe if you've got a lot of lines, then maybe you forget them it kind of ruins the whole show, so [*trails off*]." She reveals the kind of risk performance can entail. Stage fright becomes a fear of ruining the whole show. Another said that before a performance "Um, sometimes I'm a little nervous, sometimes I'm not really." This statement reveals an equivocation around the risks of training and performance that was common in participant interviews.

Circus training also means experiencing some level of ambivalence about risk. Many of the other participants spoke of the risk in terms that displayed some ambivalence or dissociation. Stage fright and fear were things that other people experienced, or that they had once felt but no longer experienced. One said: "it's really fun performing 'cause I don't have stage fright and just like having an audience." In denying experiencing stage fright this participant implied that others might experience this fear. Later this same interviewee admitted to feeling "nervous" when trying a particularly difficult trick. Another explained that he doesn't like tightrope: "Um, because I tend to have balance with things that are moving under me," such as rolling globe or rola-bola. The level of difficulty involved in tight rope walking and the accompanying risk of failure translated into not liking the act.

For several, the idea of risk was even more abstracted. Two, for instance, mentioned the "death-defying" acts of the circus. These responses often came in response to questions about the definition of circus or what circus means to the interviewee. An aerialist said that she liked her act in part because, "it looks really dangerous you know and it's exciting." These comments show an awareness of the perception of risk on the part of an audience as part of circus training and performance.

Youth circus training, then, means managing the physical risk of difficult performance skills. It means confronting the psychological risk of entering into the unknown, and the emotional risks of failure. It can also mean experiencing some ambivalence about risk.

Economics

Youth circus training means engaging with economic considerations ranging from actual finances to time-management to employment and career choices. Economics may at first seem an odd issue to frame with the concept of "intrapersonal intelligence." However, the way in which economics arose in the interview links it with the idea of personal intelligence. Participants touched on such issues as time-management, future career goals, and other aspects of person development and self-knowledge. For some, economics simply had to do with affordability. For others, the economics of circus training were expressed in terms of time. For many, circus also provided an actual or potential source of income. Data for these findings broke down roughly according to the age of the

participant. Younger participants were more likely to have an awareness of only the time element, while older participants were more likely to regard their activity at least in part as a job or career choice. I attribute this to the higher awareness of money issues on the part of teenagers, and to the fact that older participants were at a point where they needed to think about career choices. It also reflects the Fern Street's past policy of paying older, but not younger, performers. One participant described this policy:

> I'd just like to point out that it's on a voluntary basis if you're under sixteen which I think is great 'cause then you don't get kids in here that are nine years old working for the money. Everyone here under sixteen is doing it for fun.

At the time of the interviews, Fern Street was in the process of reworking their youth employment policy in order to come into compliance with non-profit and tax regulations.

The most basic economic factor in youth circus training at Fern Street was affordability. *The fact that the program is free of charge means that youths whose families might not be able to afford most enrichment activities are able to take part in circus training.* This factor is particularly important for members of large families, and may in part account for the large number of siblings involved with Fern Street. One participant said: "you know we're really grateful that we're in the circus and you know people have trained us for free." His brother described how he and his brothers got involved with Fern Street:

> My mom was looking for some things to get us involved in when we were younger, something she could get us all involved in together that wouldn't cost too much and she saw an ad in a parents' newspaper for an after school program teaching circus skills. So she looked at it and went and checked it out and we liked it so we've been going ever since.

For this large family, the lack of fees associated with the program was crucial to their involvement. Another participant said: "I started out in gymnastics when I was really little then I dropped out of it for a while 'cause it was too expensive and then I started doing it in this [Fern Street] and it was just really cool." The lack of fees at Fern Street made circus training economically feasible for many who might not otherwise be able to afford a similar program.

The economic aspects of circus training extended to time management. *Youth circus training also means developing a sense of the value of time.* Most of the participants spoke of the time taken by circus training. Asked what she didn't like about circus training, one participant replied: "Well sometimes you get tired and you can't do stuff that you want to do 'cause you have to perform or do a show." For her, the time taken up by circus training could be a source of frustration. Another appreciated the fact that circus training allowed her "to miss school sometimes." Circus training occasionally allowed her to spend her time in a way she enjoyed. Many of the participants spoke of the tension between the time demanded by circus training and the time demanded by school and studies. For one, the economics of circus training balanced perfectly with her work as a

student at a performing arts high school. She told me: "I go to a performing arts school in Coronado and so whenever I have a gig on a week day I can honestly tell them, like, my school, that I have a job and get little contracts to go out and do it during the day and I get credit for it 'cause it's art." For these participants, circus training involved a significant time investment, making time management essential.

Youth circus training means considering the potential or actual income available to circus performers. The economic aspect of circus training most often spoken of by participants was circus as an actual or potential source of income. For the older, more accomplished participants, Fern Street Circus provided an occasional source of income. Fern Street paid performers over sixteen as part of artistic director John Highkin's commitment to "training artists to know their worth" (Highkin Interview). As one said: "And I don't know there's just performing in front of people the fact that I'm earning money doing something that I absolutely love and that has well not always come easy but has become easy for me to do." The idea of earning money doing "something I love" comes up repeatedly in responses to questions about the "meaning" or "definition" of circus and about what aspect of circus training was "most important" to them. Even participants who were too young to earn money in the circus under Fern Street's policy included a consideration of financial gain in their responses to these questions. One told me: "Our circus individually I would define as a place where the performers can come to have a good time themselves and make the audience

have a good time and everyone can work as a team and have an individual act at the same time and get experience and for some people, a living." He saw the economic dimension of circus training even though he himself was not paid. Another participant acknowledged the economic aspect of circus training at Fern Street as "money management." "I think it just helped me a lot in just maturing in all areas of life, you know, money management," he said, putting the financial aspect first in a list of ways in which training has helped him grow.

The economic aspect of circus training extends beyond full circus shows produced by Fern Street. As one participant told me, "circus has really helped me in other jobs like in plays at the Moonlight Amphitheater [located in Vista, California] and stuff. You'd be surprised how many people want circus at their parties and in plays or medieval jesters like that." Another mentioned that he had "worked at fairs and theme parks juggling and doing yo-yo tricks."

These contracts were not always booked through Fern Street and this proved a source of conflict for some participants. *This reveals an added complexity to the economic meanings of circus training, in that it can mean learning to negotiate the "politics" of performing as an independent contractor.* As one said:

> The hardest part is probably telling other people who want you to do the job you have to book me through Fern Street Circus. Sometimes you want to work independently but you never know if you're going to make the circus angry by taking your talent that they taught you away from them or,

> uh, bigger companies stealing you or like that its politics. Basically there's no problem with any outside dressing of it but you never know when to break away.

There were no formal rules about taking work outside of the organization, but rather a vague understanding. As this participant explained: "with every gig you get a new contract. You're not on a life sentence kind of thing, but basically I think they want you to wait until you're eighteen to take it away kind of thing." She had to balance the value of continuing to train and perform as a member of the circus in good standing with the value of the potential outside gigs. The free training and experience she obtained through Fern Street only complicated the equation with an ethical dimension as she transitioned into a new status as an "adult" performer. This anticipated transition to professional performance allowed many participants in the study to consider circus training as a potential future source of economic gain.

Youth circus training, then, means considering future work performing professionally or semi-professionally. Many participants saw circus training as a potential source of income, whether or not Fern Street currently paid them at the time of the interviews. Many saw circus as a potential career. One of the younger participants expressed his aspirations by saying that the thing he'd miss most if he had to quit would be: "the wire 'cause that's what I love to do and hopefully that'll be, um, my main focus as, um, a future career." The participants

seriously considered the potential of a career as a performer whether or not they actually wanted to pursue that potential. One juggler reflected:

> You know, I've decided when my recreational juggling or circus skills becomes my career, my job, "Oh lets go to work, anggg, darn", I'm gonna quit. That's not worth it. Why would I destroy what I love to do just so I could make it into what I don't like to do but could make a living at? There's a lot of different things I could do with my life and I don't want to make juggling my enemy.

For others, the potential of performing as a career was greatly desired and very real. A teenaged aerialist worked "sporadic jobs," but told me: " if I could work all the time I would but there's just not enough private parties or corporate gigs around but it's--when I turn eighteen I'm going with Ringling's [Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus] so that'll be a dream come true in a year." She explains:

> Well, I went to Ringling Brothers two years ago and I was with my friends that had been in the circus too with me and we went to the gate afterwards and we started talking to people and they decided that they wanted to go party with us and so we went on the train and met a bunch of people and it turned out that the artistic director had been on site and so the next day we came in in the morning and gave him my head shots, resume, everything--video, resume--and they called me six weeks later and said, "Congratulations you're in Ringling Bros." And, uh, I purposely didn't put

> my age on my resume and so after they had accepted me they said, "How old are you?" and I said "Sixteen," and they said, "We can't accept you until you're eighteen" but Guy did say, "When you're eighteen you have a job." So I have a standing contract.

For her the potential of a professional career appeared only a birthday away from actuality.

Youth circus training, then, means engaging with a number of economic considerations. The free training at Fern Street means many can afford circus classes, and that they feel a sense of debt to the program. The availability of paid performing and teaching means participants must learn to negotiate some of the responsibilities of contracted work. Further, the intense rehearsal schedules mean the development of time management skills. Finally, the opportunities available to young performers as they gain in skill and age means they are likely to consider the potential of a career in circus.

Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence

Circus training for participants at Fern Street means taking part in an athletic activity that resonates with recreational and competitive sports. It might seem self-evident that youth circus training would mean exercising what Gardner has termed bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. The circus performer, like the dancer, employs his or her whole body in expression. Gardner points out "the ability to use one's body to express emotion (as in dance), to play a game (as in sport), or to create a new product (as in devising an invention) is evidence of the cognitive

features of body usage" (Multiple Intelligences 19). The participants spoke of such body usage in several ways.

My interviews reveal a complex relationship between circus training and sports or athletics in the minds of the study participants. To begin, the vocabulary used to talk about the activity borrows from the world of athletics. The idea of "strength" in particular often comes up in the interviews. These language choices are backed up by conscious comparison of circus training with sports to show that participants consider the two to be similar or allied activities. Some interviews revealed a tendency to think of circus as recreational sport, with participants in the study valuing circus training for the fitness, pleasure in physical play, and the challenge and social interaction that they might also find in many athletics organizations. Others described circus as having much in common with athletic training, but they noted important differences.

Gender and age differences seemed to have an impact on consideration of circus training as athletic. The older and/or male participants in the study saw circus training as a sport activity more often than the younger and/or female participants. I attribute the difference in response between young and old to the tendency of young children to group a large range of activities, ranging from art-making to sport, as "play." Further, older adolescent participants may value "working out" and "fitness" for their perceived value in promoting sexual attractiveness and social acceptability, thus heightening their awareness of these aspects of circus training. I attribute the gender difference to the changing but

still pervasive tendency of American culture to regard sport as a male-identified activity. Males may also feel some need to masculinize an activity which some might perceive as feminine, as many performing arts are in popular culture. Female respondents may feel an opposite urge, de-emphasizing the sport aspects of circus training. These gender issues have a historical basis in the circus, as athletic female circus performers were (and are) carefully promoted as feminine (graceful, light, lithe, etc.) and male performers promoted as strong and daring to downplay the feminine or homoerotic trappings of some acts, such as flamboyant costumes, tights, flexibility, and close contact with other men (Tait, "Performing Sexed Bodies"). Of course, my own gender bias as male plays a role in both my collection and interpretation of the data.

Circus training means adopting the language of athletics. The language used in the interviews shows an alliance of circus training and athletics in the experience of the interviewees. Some of my language in the interview questions might tend to lead toward this result—the word "training" itself has athletic overtones. However, the number of responses containing other sports-related words is noteworthy. Circus training involves "coaches" who "spot" people who are learning "acrobatics" and "gymnastics." They "warm-up" using "stretches," and learn through "drills," "practices," and "exercise" to get them "in shape" and confer "fitness" and "strength," which prepare them to "perform" and to compete in "championships." While many of these words are shared by many activities,

taken together they show that participants in circus training use the lexicon of athletics training to make meaning of their experience.

Strength

Training means prizing and working for physical strength. The idea of strength in particular comes up frequently in the data. One participant said, "If I can't do any tricks I'll at least climb up and down a couple times just to work on my strength and to keep it up." The aerialists all mentioned the need to "work on my strength." One noted: "around shows you'll see me here about four hours a day getting in shape" Another added: "Um, well, with Spanish Web, its, um, you gotta climb it without your legs sometimes, and that hurts." While none of the participants in the study identified fitness as their sole reason for training with the circus, or even the main one, many shared the opinion expressed by one young woman: "it helps me to exercise 'cause otherwise I wouldn't have any time to exercise and, um, build up my strength."

Youth circus training means engaging in physical activity that simultaneously evokes and differs from competitive sports. Not only did participants in the study use athletics terminology to discuss training, but they consciously compared circus training to sports, sometimes equating the two and sometimes drawing strong parallels or acknowledging aspects of one in the other. A juggler related: "I juggled seven balls for five minutes this morning I was sweating all the way through, clothes were soaked, I was working out, and it's definitely a sport, a recreation, for some people a job, it's everything it's for

me it's a recreation and a sport." Another participant said that if he quit the circus one of the things he would miss would be "the physical training because outside of that I haven't really pursued any physical training. I did for a while I wrestled and those kinds of things, but now it's pretty much my only physical training that I have a set schedule with four hours a week." These performers spoke of their circus disciplines as "a sport" and "physical training" on par with "wrestling and those kind of things." This conscious identification of circus as sport is common in the data.

While almost all participants included some reference to the athletic elements of circus training in their responses, however, many also pointed out significant differences between training for sports activities and training for circus performance. Many of the comparisons center on gymnastics, one of the more obvious crossovers between circus and sport. One participant highlighted the difference between training for circus and training for sports gymnastics when asked what circus training is like:

> It's basically like gymnastics but not as strict 'cause they don't like um like really they the circus I say encourages you better to do the tricks but gymnastics I think they teach you better form but its about the same.
>
> *So how is it different from gymnastics?*
>
> It's easier to learn 'cause I'd say you don't get as tired and I'd say in gymnastics there's like periods when you can't get a drink and in circus you can but it just takes time out from practicing.

A picture emerges of circus training as slightly less regimented but more enjoyable than sports gymnastics. Another young performer put the difference in more personal tones. When asked if he had done anything like circus training before he said:

> Well, I went to the YMCA [for gymnastics, according to his mother] for two or three years, um, but I didn't really like it there 'cause you didn't get to do much, and a lot of people were mean. So I dropped out for like a few months and then I signed up for Fern Circus and now I can choose what event I want to do.

Participants also saw circus and sports training as different in terms of performance or end result. One participant said, "Annetta teaches us sports tumbling and acrobatic skills and Pop teaches us different stunts and comedy things," implying that sports gymnastics is part of circus training, to be augmented by other skills. Circus performance by this reckoning makes use of sports acrobatics but also needs the stunts and comedic skills supplied by Pop. Another performer, who participated in sports gymnastics for twelve years prior to joining the circus, states the difference in performance more implicitly:

> It's great. When I was in gymnastics--I tell this to everyone--when was in gymnastics you could never smile, you could never show emotion in meets and competing.

For her, circus training was a liberating experience after sports gymnastics, particularly in terms of performance.

As these sections of the interviews show, *circus training means taking part in physically demanding activity similar to athletic training undertaken for participation in sports or for fitness. It means adopting a vocabulary in common with athletics. It also means valuing and working for physical strength. Further, it means engaging in an activity that is like competitive athletics, but differs in sometimes nearly intangible ways.*

Artistic Intelligence

To take part in youth circus training is to absorb, reproduce, and reinvent the aesthetic of circus performance. The overwhelming majority of the participants in the study demonstrated their awareness of circus aesthetic through discussion of performance. They spoke of the importance of the audience to their work. They also showed an awareness of circus traditions and history that are intrinsic to the aesthetic of circus.

Due to the contested notion of circus as art form, before discussing the aesthetic aspects of circus training I want to make it clear that the participants themselves considered their activity to be an art. One participant, asked to define circus, told me: "I'd define it as an art form, a skill anyone can learn." Another noted that she gets credit when she misses a day at her performing arts high because of a gig. She could "get credit for it 'cause it's art." Others equated circus with other performing arts. One told me that she had "been doing a lot of performing all [her] life in theatre and stuff but the circus is definitely the most unusual one so far." Another cited the transfer of performance skills learned in a

choir. One participant differentiated between the artistic quality of the simple activity of juggling and choreographing a juggling routine for performance. He told me: "There's a lot of art in a routine, but just in juggling there's a little, not, it's--making tricks is very artistic and difficult and making shows and tying together moves that can flow through." While, as this quote shows, not all participants considered all aspects of circus training as art, all spoke of at least some elements that they construe as artistic and aesthetic.

Performance

To participate in youth circus training means to perform. Performance is an aesthetic element that proved nearly inseparable from training for the participants. For some, performance was the object of training. Circus, one said, is "just a time to just perform your skills, the things you learned." Another said, "You can do shows if you train a lot." For these participants, the learning that occurs in training enabled them to perform. One encapsulated the training process as follows:

> Well we go we work with a teacher and we decide our walks and make our voices how we want and do faces and walk around and talk like that for a little bit so we get used to it and then we can do a show with all the things we learned.

As her statement shows, some considered performance to be the logical end to training. Another participant gave a somewhat more complex account of training:

> I would define it a perfecting, for most people it's perfecting what you like to do or choose to do and making everything better, making things fit so--occasionally making a routine but mostly its learning and discovering what you can do and what you couldn't do and making sure what you can do consistently and what you can't and what you need to work on to make consistent for a show or just for fun to show your friends.

While he had a more elaborate account of training, he still concluded the training process with performance, whether "for a show or just for fun to show your friends." Questions asking for the "most important" or "most valuable" thing about training often yielded responses that included "performance." One responded: "The performing. Because performing is always a really valuable thing you can do, like, uh, I personally think that performing helps in your everyday life 'cause it makes you outgoing." The importance of performance to circus training demonstrates the aesthetic dimension of circus training.

Further, youth circus training means learning to create aesthetic events for an audience. Participants trained not just to do the trick, but also to present it artistically. Aesthetics are not just important to why participants train, but to how they train as well. One participant revealed that much of training consists of dealing with details specifically involved in performance. He told me:

> The tumbling crew I'm in, Pulse, we've just been training and our coach has been choreographing the act and every day we just practice it more and more add a little bit maybe take away stuff clean up stuff and um, just

> busy planning out music planning out area and space and props and a lot of stuff has to get ready and costuming has to go with the lighting has to go with the music you just little details that you gotta work out.

His description of the rehearsal process reveals the many aesthetic considerations of preparing a circus performance that participants learn to think about.

Training means not only learning to present skills artistically, but to experience and learn a creative process. One young artist described his process of creating a juggling act with his trainer:

> Well um I come up with a cool idea and my trainer says no it won't work or do it this way and, um, sometimes I'll say, "What if I do it this way?" and he'll say, "Yeah, that's good." Or sometimes he'll say, "Why don't you do it this way?" and I'll say, "Yeah that's good." I'll get an idea and we'll perfect it. I get an idea and throw it on the table and we'll nit-pick at it and work on it and see what will look good on stage and what won't. Since I'll be competing internationally in the International Jugglers Association in the juniors' competition my instructor just told me "Hey lets make that show." So we started working on it and then he told me, "Hey we're going to be doing it in the Balboa Park and a few other scattered performances." So I'll be doing the almost the same act probably with different music since we have a live band in the circus and I'll be doing that same act in the shows.

Speaking of what happens when he performs, this same juggler described a state often associated with artistic performance: "But when I get there I switch into a performer mode where almost everything I say is funny or if I'm doing it to music and not saying anything everything I juggle is good and I just go into a performer's trance or something." His "juggler's trance" is characteristic of the flow state which often accompanies the creative moment.

As shown by the participants, circus training means learning and employing the aesthetics of circus performance. Training means training for performance. It means learning to create aesthetic presentations for an audience and, further, to develop a creative process to develop new work.

Audience

The effect of their performances on the audience is central to the meanings these performers make of what they do. Their responses go so far as to indicate that the audience is as much a part of the circus as the performers. The participants' awareness of the audience is so pervasive in the data that it deserves a section of its own.

Awareness of audience is central to the aesthetic of circus arts. The participants displayed a strong awareness of the affective aspects of circus, and were highly conscious of the effects of their work on their audiences. "Audience" commonly came up in response to the question "what does 'circus' mean to you?" One said: "Um, I don't know, I think to me it means every six-year-old in the city coming to one spot and for once sitting down for an hour and a half which

will never happen before and leaving tired amazed and feeling fulfilled and happy." Another offered:

> And it's where people can go and just have fun and just enjoy others as they perform and just to bring joy to the audience and laughter. And you want to bring the audience, you know, into your picture of the circus, you know? You want to try, um, when you're out there on stage what I mean is you're out on the stage to kind of involve them with what you're doing and you know just participate with them and they'll participate with you at the same time and just fun with the audience and bring joy to them.

Others also included audience in why they enjoyed performing. One of several who offered "performing" as their favorite part of training, gave her reason as follows: "You can be funny and its fun to make people laugh and giggle." For these participants the audience made what they do "fun." Another said that "presentation before an audience" was an area in which circus training had helped him "mature" and that "it's something that will help me in the future." For him audience was central to the personal growth he experienced through circus training.

Others showed a more complex awareness of the audience, in that they compared the way circus works with audiences to related performance styles and even differentiated among circus audiences. One who had felt constrained by competitive gymnastics said:

> And so when I joined the circus I all the sudden could be myself on stage and mess with the people as much as I wanted and really get the audience in the palm of my hand and that's the best part of it--that's always been the best part of it.

Many others echoed this awareness of the effect of the performers' direct involvement with the audience. Another example is the juggler who intended to compete at the International Juggling Festival, who stated that his experience performing with Fern Street would:

> . . . give me some experience probably a head start on everyone else performing because everyone else will be performing for the judges and I'll be performing for the audience and that's the way I operate, everyone tries to give the judges a good time and I try to give everyone a good time and that's what's going to give me the top notch with judges 'cause I hear they look for that.

This quote also shows a complex understanding of audience in that it differentiates between an audience of judges and a general, public audience. *In short, circus training means developing an awareness of the audience and one's effect on it, an awareness that grows the more one trains and performs.*

History and Tradition

Youth circus training means to incorporate the rich history and traditions of circus performance. The final significant way in which some participants showed awareness of the aesthetics of circus was in their absorption and incorporation of

circus history and tradition. This occurs through the appropriation of traditional circus jargon, contact with professional circuses and performers currently working in the circus world, and, in the exceptional case of the Canestrelli family, direct transmission of generations of circus history and lore from trainer to student.

To begin, *youth circus training means adopting circus jargon.* Some demonstrated this by the use of phrases taken from traditional circus performance and promotions. Several spoke of the "death defying acts" which they enjoy and embody as part of the circus. Asked to define circus, one young participant said: "'Come one come all it's fun for all ages.' I learned that from the Barnum and Bailey circuses. I like circuses." He understood circus through the traditions associated with the largest and longest running of American circuses.

Youth circus training also means absorption of circus traditions through contact with those currently keeping those traditions alive. Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey served as a portal into circus tradition for several of the participants. In discussing the economic meanings of circus training, I have related the experience of an aerialist from the participant group who interviewed and was offered a job with Ringling Bros. The contact of others with the Ringling Bros. show came through their trainers. One spoke of his new coach: "[he] was actually a former student, he graduated, well not graduated but yeah, he graduated, went to Barnum and Bailey got a year contract with them then came back and he had all this knowledge and they hired him as a coach." This coach

provided two levels of entry into circus tradition: As a "former student," he provided a link to help create a tradition of Fern Street Circus; As a former performer with Ringling Bros. he provided a link into the long history of American circus.

Finally, circus training at Fern Street Circus means learning history and traditions of circus through the direct transmission of knowledge from the trainers. As I noted in the findings on family relationships within Fern Street Circus, one of the main trainers is the current patriarch of a venerable Italian circus family. As one participant told me, "'Pop' Canestrelli, he's the father of my first coach and he's been with the circus for seven generations." The Canestrelli family provides a source of direct transmission of European circus history and tradition. The skills he teaches are based on the acts passed down through his family. Indeed, the comic table acrobatic act he taught the Salmon Brothers was, as one of the brothers told me, " basically an old act he remembered and thought we could do." The transmission of tradition and history (to say nothing of skills and acts) through former performers from other circuses is an essential aspect of the way in which participants learn the aesthetics of circus. One encapsulated the importance of tradition and history in telling me "what circus training means" to her:

> . . . it's always just an amazing experience it means so much to me and the history behind it is pretty amazing I mean the sideshows and the crazy

you know death defying acts is just--I love to be entertained so I'd like to return the favor in some way.

She connected the history of circus and the aesthetics of the "death-defying acts" to her own enjoyment of entertaining and being entertained. Circus history provides the background to her experience of circus training.

In short, *youth circus training means learning the traditions and history of circus performance. It means adopting the jargon of the circus world, and learning through contact with working professionals. It means experiencing direct transmission of generations of circus lore from master teachers.*

Verification: Telephone Interviews

In October 2005, in the course of completing my writing, I was able to take advantage of the time that had passed, and the maturity that the participants in the study had gained, by conducting brief telephone interviews with three of the six original participants who had reached the age of eighteen or older. I chose to limit myself to the older participants both for ease of contact and to provide a degree of triangulation from the perspective time away from the after-school training program might provide. The three older participants I did not interview either ignored my calls and the calls the Fern Street staff made for me, or were unreachable due to lack of current contact information. Fortunately, the participants I did reach for follow up interviews reflected a spectrum of current involvement with circus. One was completely out of training and performance, another was still involved with Fern Street as an instructor and performer, and

the third was working full-time as a professional circus performer. One is female, the other two male. I employed a fixed script designed to take a half-hour or less to complete. The protocol began with a set of open-ended questions, and then moved on to a section in which the participants were asked to reflect on the findings I had already parsed out of the original interviews. Transcripts of both sections of the interviews from all three participants provided a good deal of confirmation of the findings. To describe some topics, these three individuals used almost exactly the same words they had in the initial data collection. In this description of the results yielded by these interviews, I focus on those areas where the participants' responses shed new light or clarification on the findings. For strong confirmation of findings, I will only use responses from the first section of the interviews, while dissent or clarifications may come from either section.

First, the new interviews strongly confirmed the findings regarding interpersonal relationships, particularly those dealing with family. One in particular offered: "I've just loved all of the shows when we got together as a family like I mean honestly it was a family." Another reflects that he has become closer to his biological family: "Because I've been out on the road now three or four years on my own and being away on the road is, um, really giving you a different perspective and um, on your personal life and how much we take things for granted." The main new idea that arose surrounding any of the interpersonal intelligence findings came from a participant who related that interactions with some individuals involved with Fern Street "gave [her] a sense of just the way

this world is that not always everybody is one hundred percent honest, and not everybody's going to always look out for your best interest, and everybody's not always straightforward and upfront; some people have a lot of hidden agendas." He cast this experience in a positive light, however, as a valuable learning experience. Another reflected on the occasional difficulties of working so closely with others this way:

> Anytime you're dealing relationship with good, good, relationships and relationships with passionate people there's iron clashing with iron and sparks fly sometimes. But in the end if both parties are strong and wise and correct it ends up sharpening each other. You end up a lot better for it.

This statement strongly shows the type of development that occurred for participants in my study through youth circus training.

Another finding that these interviews cast light on is the idea that circus training means setting and working toward goals. Two used the word "discipline" to describe the meaning of circus training. One also described his decision to "take it to the next level" and become a professional performer in terms that clearly demonstrate this behavior. He explained, "next summer I'm planning on taking a college course for business and marketing and hopefully taking that knowledge and uh, putting my own show together."

The acknowledgement of risk from these interviews was striking in its similarity. All three said: "anything you do is a risk." One elucidated this

statement: "if you take a risk in something, that means you don't have knowledge of what you're getting into. So with that being said, every performer knows what they're getting into, and that's why they're there." Another said: "I don't consider anything I do up in the air risky, because I feel that I'm completely trained for everything that I do." These statements indicate a strong element of risk management, in that the participants rely on knowledge to mitigate the danger of what they do.

The interviews yielded many considerations of the economic meanings of circus training. Not surprisingly, as the participants have moved into young adulthood, the employment aspects of circus training have moved to the foreground. All three noted the relatively limited earning potential of early career circus performers. One said:

> I would say that I have kind of made it a point not to let circus have anything to do with my financial stuff because I'm one of those people who can't really sleep easy not knowing if I'm going to get paid or if I'm going to get this job, so I keep my full-time job and then whatever I make on top of that working for circus is great.

The others both joked about the pay: "I mean its not that you get paid as well as say a lawyer, per se or whatever." Each mentioned the importance of the free training at Fern Street as well.

Little mention of the athletic aspects of circus came out of these interviews outside of my direct question about the finding. The issue of strength did arise,

however, in the interview with the participant who had completely stopped training. He said: "But when you're doing circus, man, there's muscles you didn't even know existed that start popping out when you're doing that whole training at least three times per week for two to three hours per day." But he noted the result of having stopped training: "that every once in a while I'll do a handstand and, good lord it used to be so easy. And I can feel those muscles just trying so hard and they're trying just pull myself up and they're like: Its not happening buddy, you lost it."

My request for reflection on the aesthetic aspects of circus drew the most negative response. One simply stated: "It's a way to get your artistic side out—it's like dance you know?" The other two, however, expressed a strong dislike of "artistic" circus. One said:

> I loved the whole thing of performing and being on stage but, when it came to the people starting talking about artistic stuff, and the meaning for the group that we performed in front of, and this was European and this was this culture, I don't know--it went right over my head and in one ear and out the other. I didn't want to be involved with it.

The professional performer echoed this professed discomfort with the artistic aspect of circus:

> A lot of people in this business approach everything and every act with an artistic perspective, so my mindset goes back to traditional circus and that's totally understandable because, that's the way I was trained by a

> traditional performer, and the first thing to your mind being trained by a traditional performer is not going to be, uh, artistic, its going to be either you do it or you don't.

These strong reactions, however, do not display a lack of aesthetic approach on the part of these participants. On the contrary, they reflect a strong preference for the aesthetic of traditional, non-narrative, pre-Cirque du Soleil circus performance. Their distrust of "artistic" considerations is in itself an aesthetic choice.

As this sampling shows, this cycle of interviews with the young adults from my original participant group displayed many of the same themes of meaning found in the original interviews. They provide some additional clarification to some of the meanings gleaned from the first interviews. Primarily, however, they serve to confirm the findings of the study, and I hope they add an additional degree of confirmation of the units of meaning drawn from those findings.

Having offered these findings based on the data, I will offer some conclusions based on them in the next chapter. I will include a brief summary of these categories of meaning. Then I will discuss the findings in terms of the thought of other circus theorists and practitioners. I will offer a final statement of the meanings of youth circus training that emerged from my research, followed by a consideration of further research suggested by this study.

5. Conclusions

Summary of Findings

A number of themes emerged from the interviews individually and as a whole. Participation in youth circus training at Fern Street Circus means:

1. To develop interpersonal relationships and skills by navigating complex webs of interactions ranging from working partnerships to family relationships.
2. To explore and develop one's sense of personal identity.
3. To set, work toward, and achieve goals.
4. To develop ways of dealing with risk.
5. To engage with economic aspects of circus training.
6. To participate in an athletic activity requiring the development of strength.
7. To learn and employ the aesthetics of circus performance through experience of performing for an audience and immersion in the history of circus arts and tradition.

I believe this set of meanings has authentically emerged from the data provided by my interviews. I will now examine them in terms of other possible lenses that have influenced my research process and note ways in which my findings support and are supported by other research.

Discussion of Findings

I chose to cluster the meanings of youth circus training using multiple intelligences theory, in part to let them stand alone from any other circus-based influences. However, themes and theories found in the historical narratives, cultural criticism, and formal and informal research dealing with circus and youth

circus training also resonate with my results. This resonance authenticates the results of my study, as it grounds the results in existing theory. Admittedly, such resonances may also demonstrate an influence of existing theory on my process from the initial formulation of interview questions right through to the themes I saw in the transcriptions. As one last step in the iterative process of phenomenology, I will here examine the statements in my summary of results in terms of the theories and information from other literature that resonate with each finding. Further, I will identify ways in which the findings meet or diverge from the preconceptions about the meaning of youth circus training that I laid out in my early bracketing of the phenomenon.

Most of the sources I deal with here have been published since my initial research and coding in 2000-2002. This may in some aspects indicate more authenticity than influence as these ideas came from others simultaneously pursuing other methods of research and other sites. I primarily draw on the writings of Reg Bolton, Robert Sugarman, and Sharon McCutcheon to show resonances within research on youth circus, and on the social criticism and historical narratives of Hoh, Stoddart and Davis for examples of resonances in the broader scope of circus literature, although I will of course draw on other sources as well to contextualize my findings.

The theme of interpersonal aspects of circus and circus training is implicit in circus literature. As Bolton puts it: "The literature and cinematography of circus portrays a tightly knit, self-sustaining band of disparate types, moving

within and across a wider society" ("Why Circus Works" 192). Youth circus researchers have focused on the inclusiveness of circus training. Sugarman holds that "circus learning enables those who have fallen into social roles that make them outsiders find ways into community with their peers" (13). McCutcheon, in her master's thesis, conceptualizes the interpersonal aspects of youth circus training in terms of positive change in relationships with teachers and peer tutoring (110-111). She also found evidence of likening relationships in circus training programs to family relationships: "Regardless of skill level, age, group, etc., and once an individual becomes part of the circus--they become a member of that 'family' and consequently enjoy all the benefits that coincide with belonging to a supportive environment which encourages people to safely experiment, explore and enjoy their new discoveries" (114). She found that the "circus programs at James Cook, Dubbo West, and Batemans Bay all celebrate their family ethos and the students openly discuss what it feels like to belong to another family" (115).

Bolton writes of the interpersonal aspects of youth circus training in terms of trust and touch. Considering the benefits of circus, he notes:

> A child, once free of the maternal embrace, looks for peers. Often, he seeks to create a new small "family" among his friends and to find a purpose for that group. *Cirque Bidon, Cirque Plume, Circus Oz, Le Grand Magic Circus, Big Apple* and a myriad of youth circuses have begun and grown in this way. ("Why Circus Works" 192)

This mention of creating family supports my findings. Bolton's explicit point regarding the interpersonal aspects of circus training is that it develops a capacity for trust starting with safe and healthy touching:

> Young people deserve to live in a supportive environment, and to move from trusting to being trusted themselves. Circus helps them to learn and follow essential rules. They learn that nothing is impossible, and that doubt and fear are to be examined and absorbed into positive action. Circus gives the opportunity to touch, to hold hands and bodies, with each other and with adults in a healthy, non-threatening, non-sexual context. ("Why Circus Works" 192)

While Bolton includes other considerations of the interpersonal intelligences developed through youth circus, as in, for instance, his section titled "Fun, Play, Laughter and Happiness Revisited" (186), he focuses on trusting touch as the first vehicle for interpersonal development.

Seay looked for an interpersonal element in the effects of participation in youth circus activity in her study, using "questionnaires created to assess social involvement and participation" (27). This is the one aspect of her study that yielded a measurable change in the participant group: "Results indicated that the parents of the children participation [sic] in the Circus of the Kids rated their children as being more socially active and participating in more activities than before the circus as compared to the parents of the exposure and control group" (49).

Davis, in her social history of the American circus, discusses the interpersonal aspects of circus in terms of the effects of a circus performance on a community. She notes that "the railroad circus was an interactive cultural arena for workers, owners, and audiences" (27) and adds: "Although Circus Day was a carnivalesque occasion for community consolidation, it was also, paradoxically, a time for community fragmentation" (29). This consolidation and fragmentation of community is a common trope in the social and historical narratives of circus. Circus provides a catalyst for the unification of a community for those outside the ring by performing "otherness" even as it provides community for its performers by offering them a place of belonging. Davis writes that "despite the constant racial, gender, and social divisions within the circus caste system, show people still saw themselves as part of a closely knit traveling community" (72). Interpersonal relationships, whether conceptualized as community or family, enter into most narratives of circus literature. These concepts of interpersonal relationship resonate quite strongly with the themes of relationship that emerge from my data, particularly with the idea of circus as "family."

The issues of personal identity found in my data also resonate with themes common in youth circus literature. McCutcheon states: "Circus can be a useful tool in providing young people with an accurate perception of their physical 'real' self and provide them with the avenue to make choices about its successful utilization and development, thus improving their chances of developing a healthy

self-esteem" (108). She goes on to note: "This autonomy and individuality is a common theme running through all the circus programs I observed" (110). Like McCutcheon, Sugarman writes of the role of circus training in developing a sense of personal identity in terms of benefits to "self esteem" and holds that "Circus Learning provides an authentic world in which the individual controls his or her actions" (13). Reg Bolton lists "self-individuation" as one of the experiences of a child participating in circus activities. And his dissertation contains a chapter titled "Self-Invention, Self-Design and Individuation Revisited" (164). He observes "many examples where artists and students, including children, would experiment with their identity on the spectrum clown to ringmaster" and he notes that "this experiment in identity can be temporary, and its transience is part of its suitability for youth development" (164). He tempers his consideration of personal identity with the observation that "compulsory self-confidence and individuality in children is a Western concept" (165) and that Chinese circus training (to give one example) may be more about sublimating oneself within the group. He further comments on the complexity of the issue: "A child must learn the right level of confidence, and know the moment when he must hold back and work with the troupe. Circus, correctly handled, can teach these lessons" (165).

Issues of identity occur in the broader range of circus literature as well. Both Stoddart and Davis both write extensively about issues of gender identity in circus performance. "With their blurring of male and female bodies," Davis writes, "circus acts flattened sexual differences and went so far as to challenge

the distinction between human and animal" (27). Tait likewise notes: "even in traditional circus, bodies move across categories of gender identity" ("Performing Sexed Bodies" 218). Members of women's circus projects in Australia also write of this use of circus to explore gender identity:

> Women join the circus for an enormous variety of reasons. For some women the circus is a means of putting feminist beliefs into action; for others it is a way of making friends, building business networks, overcoming body memories or getting fit. Though the circus espouses no single feminist view, circus members are united by a belief that "the strength is in the doing." (Louise Radcliffe-Smith, in Beissbarth and Turner Women's Circus 34)

Gender identity does not arise explicitly in my data, in part possibly because I did not look for it. However, the ideas of belonging, of being "united," resonate strongly with the ways in which themes of identity did emerge in my study.

Circus historian Hoh posits the search for identity as a definitive aspect of circus: "The business of defining ourselves and what we are capable of has preoccupied the hearts and minds of mankind since we first walked on two feet and concluded that we were somehow different from other animals. We will see that that search for definition is the business of the circus as well" (20). He elaborates on the identity forging effect circus may have on an audience:

> . . . the performer who defies human limitations gains considerable control, power over mere mortals, because the rest of us define ourselves by our

> very limitations. Once we see those limitations transcended, our definition of human potential grows. A simple circus-type stunt becomes associated with the universal quest for identity: Who are we, and where do we fit into the universe? Mystical superhuman power is an essential element of man's common search for selfhood, for an understanding of whatever limits there are that define us as human beings. (27)

This idea that circus becomes an identity-forging event for its audience is echoed by many, particularly in discussion of the performance of nationalism in circus. Davis includes many examples in her chapter, "Instruct the Minds of All Classes." She writes: "The turn of the century marked the first time that railroad showmen stressed the moral, political, and economic dominance of the United States in world affairs" (192). From the identity politics of gender studies to the construction of nationalist identities, issues of identity occur liberally in circus literature, and resonate with my findings dealing with personal identity. However, the themes I took from the data dealing with belonging and awareness of other's perceptions seem somewhat different iterations of the concept of identity.

Discussions relating to my next finding, goal setting, also show up frequently in circus narratives, particularly those dealing specifically with youth circus training. Sugarman holds that "clearly defined goals and clearly defined methods for achieving them make it possible to venture into unknown and frightening areas" (13). McCutcheon discusses goal setting behaviors in terms of the development of peer tutoring and the discovery of ways of learning. She

sees that "scholastically, circus not only taught students to 'learn through doing' but also how to 'learn how to learn'" (25). In fact, one of her key conclusions is that in youth circus programs, "students are encouraged to be autonomous and set challenges for themselves and their circus ensemble" (125). The challenge setting to which she refers mirrors almost perfectly the goal-setting to which my participants referred. Bolton implies goal setting with the headings "Dreaming and Aspiration," and "Hard Work and Application."

Goal setting is less explicit in social and historical circus narratives. As Bolton notes: "Most circus-related literature and art tend to skip to the miracle--ignoring the painstaking training that produced the skills" (193). The idea of goals is implicit, however, in the record-setting mentality common in such narratives, and in the historical narratives about circus impresarios and artists. Hoh, for instance, referring to the quadruple somersault from the trapeze, states: "The quest for the quadruple is, in miniature, the history of the circus" (303). In Hoh's narrative, circus history is in large part defined by the setting and achievement of goals by circus artists. Working with goals shows up in my data in similar ways, although the need to work through feelings accompanying working toward a goal adds a degree of sophistication to this theme.

Discussions of "risk" are also common to writings about circus. In his abstract, Bolton states: "I argue that contemporary Western childhood presents unexpected hazards, mostly involving passivity and over-protection." He adds, "a child involved in circus activities has a chance to make good some deficits, by

experiencing constructive physical risk, aspiration, trust, fun, self-individuation and hard work" ("Why Circus Works" ii). Bolton leads off his list of the beneficial aspects of circus activity with the idea of "constructive risk." In concluding his summary of risk in circus training he states: "educators, insurers and civil moralists should understand that circus is intrinsically a process of risk management. Children undertaking a new task, even as simple as a backward roll, are encouraged to assess the risk, take appropriate precautions (e.g. hands behind the neck), negotiate the hazard and emerge safely" (189). Risk is a major theme in McCutcheon's research as well, as her title, "Negotiating Identity Through Risk: A Community Circus Model for Evoking Change and Empowering Youth," indicates. In discussing her practices common to successful youth circus programs she concludes: "A circus trainer must be able to maintain a safe training environment, whilst still being able to maintain an element of risk, danger, and freedom" (121). In defining circus she simply states: "Circus is fundamentally based on risk, personal and communal" (21). Stoddart, in her cultural history, also employs "risk" as an element in her definition of circus:

> Circus is above all, a vehicle for the demonstration and taunting of danger and this remains its most telling feature. Physical risk taking has always been at its heart; the recognition that to explore the limitations of the human body is to walk a line between triumphant exhilaration and, on the other side of this limit, pain, injury or death. (4)

Risk appears frequently in discussions of the aesthetics of circus performance, as well as the related term, "danger." If anything, the idea of risk is more predominant in the literature than in my data.

The economic aspects of circus occur throughout narratives of circus as well. However, unlike other themes found in my study, discussion of the economic aspects occur much more frequently in the historical and cultural narratives than in the literature of youth circus training. McCutcheon does touch on economic themes in discussing the low-income status of some of the populations in the youth circus programs she examines, describing them as "at risk" (122). Sugarman paradoxically states in his opening paragraph that the "book provides context for those working in these areas and insight for general readers into the way art, economics and education interact" (9). But he then asserts that his "study is not about economics or the ways in which societies educate their young, but those forces do impact on how Circus Learning is conducted" (10). I read this second statement as an acknowledgement of the socio-economic factors that impact all educational enterprises, as some of the circus groups he looks at, such as Make*A*Circus and Circus Ethiopia, are publicly-funded programs for "at-risk" youth from low-income backgrounds, while others, such as San Francisco School of Circus Arts (now Circus Center) and Circus Smirkus in Vermont, (which may offer scholarships or other programs for low-income individuals), earn a large amount of their income by charging for classes. Bolton includes a section discussing the growing "social circus"

movement, but notes the lack of "any significant literature about this phenomenon apart from Circus in a Suitcase (Bolton 1988) and accounts of individual projects in popular and circus magazines" (161). He acknowledges the use of circus with economically disadvantaged populations in noting: "In other parts of the world, and in some Western populations, childhood has other problems, linked to deprivation, corruption and physical danger" ("Why Circus Works" ii). Given the realities of non-profit funding and of English-speaking culture, and the growing gap between wealthy and poor in the U.S., it seems likely that this will be the dominant aspect of the economics of youth circus training in any narrative. It is noteworthy, then, that while the fact that Fern Street's free program allows access to families that could not afford to pay for it figures into my findings, the income possibilities of the training also play into my findings regarding economics.

In addition to the references to economic concerns in the literature of youth circus training, a preponderance of economic and materialist discussions of circus appears in the narratives. Stoddart titles a chapter "Economics" (48-64). "The history of circus is one dominated by entrepreneurship and advertising," she writes (48). Historical narratives of circus also commonly include thorough discussions of economics. Hoh, for example, frequently attributes causal links between the economic realities of circus production and the aesthetic product of the circus. The period he refers to as "The Golden Age" of circus was, in his estimation, driven by economic concerns: "labor and transportation costs were

low; railroads found it profitable to bring the circus train to town; streetcar lines were usually there to bring the town to the circus (163). As a popular entertainment, the link between economic forces and circus history is inescapable. The link between economics and youth circus training proved similarly strong in my data, resonating strongly with the economic matters in historical narratives and in narratives dealing with youth circus.

The kinesthetic aspects of circus training in my study's findings are, as would be expected with such a physical phenomenon, common in youth circus literature. McCutcheon dedicates a portion of her study to the "physical fitness" benefits of youth circus training. She asserts: "It is through this physical, kinesthetic learning, that circus helps young people become aware of their physical self; its potential and its limitations," (29). Sugarman writes, "Like dancers, circus performers demonstrate the ability of humans to extend the possibilities of the body, just as trainers extend the possibilities of animal achievement" (13). He later concludes: "Those who learn best through their bodies adapt easily to Circus Learning and develop confidence and work habits they can apply to other learning. Circus Learning is also important to those who need to become more comfortable with their bodies and to use them more effectively" (237). Seay also attempts to address the kinesthetic aspect of circus in her thesis by measuring physical activity, body image, and "physical self-esteem" (11). She terms the measure of these kinesthetic elements "physical activity motivation" (45) and found that they were not increased, (at least over the

three-month period of her study) by the short-term exposure of the Circus of the Kids program she investigated. I have already noted Bolton's ideas about touch as central to how circus works on an interpersonal level to foster trust, and those same ideas reflect the kinesthetic aspects of youth circus.

Discussions of bodily knowledge, skill, and achievement are ubiquitous in the historical record as well. As circus, by definition, involves some form of physical, bodily performance, such common reference is inescapable. Davis cites the rise of the physical-culture movement as a factor in the increased acceptance of female circus performers toward the end of the nineteenth century as "wholesome" (91). "In the milieu of the women's physical-culture movement," Davis writes, "audiences could read circus women's meager dress as a function of wholesome athleticism" (91). Davis links circus to the physical education of young people by theorizing that "the Progressive advocates of the playground movement may have designed urban play areas with the circus in mind: children could build their bodies and spirits by twirling on the Roman rings or swinging on a tiny trapeze, just like well-toned circus acrobats" (90). Stoddart, in discussing the physical aspects of circus performance, refers to "the non-representational aspects such as physical skill, balance, strength, agility and daring which have tended to be the foundations of the highest rated circus acts and which have sometimes led to their being grouped as sport rather than craft or art" (81). The role of the body and physical prowess in circus is inescapable, and references

such as this one to the connection between circus and sport resonate with my data's themes dealing with kinesthetic aspects of youth circus training.

The aesthetic dimension of circus is of course present in the narratives of circus. As Stoddart notes: "The process of defining the terms of circus aesthetics is very much like, and is linked to, defining its generic identity" (79). In other words, any definition of circus addresses issues of the aesthetics of circus. Such definition is central to Bolton's dissertation: "This thesis proposes that circus as education is more effective when both teacher and student have a better understanding of circus as an art form." ("Why Circus Works" ii). Sugarman contrasts programs that focus on the aesthetic aspects of circus training with those that do not: "In the youth programs examined in this study, the most effective presentations theatricalize skills" (239). McCutcheon's study includes slight consideration of the art-making aspect of youth circus training, focusing instead on the presumed social, psychological and physical benefits of circus training. Further, the theme of aesthetic elements embedded in circus traditions which emerged from the data, while found clearly in the processes of defining engaged in by circus historians, seem rather less common to the circus education texts.

Finally, my findings should be viewed in light of my expectations at the outset of my research. In bracketing my ideas about youth circus training, I posited that I might find meanings dealing with the following themes: aesthetics, history, sports training, recreation, materialism and economics, identity, and

tradition. While many of these themes did indeed emerge from the data, several of them did so in ways that surprised me or changed my initial ideas significantly. For instance, the way the data emerged made it clear that history and tradition were actually subsets of the broad theme of aesthetics. Similarly, the recreational aspects of youth circus training were slight and emerged in such a way as to make them and "sports training" subsets of kinesthetic aspects. My preconceived notions that youth circus training meant learning the aesthetic aspects of circus, engaging in sport or athletic activity, developing a stronger sense of personal identity, dealing with the economic aspects of training, and immersing oneself in the rich history and traditions of youth circus undoubtedly influenced my findings. I did not, however, anticipate the findings dealing with risk, goal-setting, and interpersonal relationships.

To summarize, all of my findings have at least some resonance with texts in the narratives dealing with circus in general and youth circus training in particular. This may indicate some influence on my research by the literature on the topic. On the other hand, the fact that these themes came from disparate research methodologies may instead indicate a high level of credibility and trustworthiness in my conclusions.

Eidos

As van Manen notes, the final step of phenomenology is to "see past or through the particularity of lived experience toward the universal essence or *eidos* that lies on the other side of the concreteness of lived meaning" (185). This

is a poetic aspect of phenomenological research, the "rising above the data" common to qualitative methodologies. Taken as a whole, the "essence" of youth circus training as I see it, admitting the myriad of preconceptions and biases that bind me, is as follows.

Youth circus training is a rich social, cultural and artistic activity, and holds rich meaning for those who experience it. Circus training means working to achieve one's potential in an environment where ordinary people become extraordinary and the extraordinary is accepted as the norm. It means working with a group so closely that they come to feel like family, and having a constant backdrop against which to measure one's personal growth. Youth circus training means finding the wisdom to set and follow through on goals, assess and manage physical and emotional risks, and manage time, money, and career goals. Participation means developing great physical strength and athletic prowess while entering the stream of circus traditions, aesthetics and history developed by generations of performers.

Suggestions for Further Research

As any study must, my findings raise as many questions as they provide answers, and suggest a number of different paths for future study. The field of youth circus research is wide open, and much of the basic work, both qualitative and quantitative, has yet to be done. My findings provide clues as to starting points for this work. In addition, they suggest some interdisciplinary opportunities for further study.

To begin, case studies of as many sites of youth circus activity as possible would be invaluable in order to compare practices and outcomes of youth circus training. In addition, a managed longitudinal study would do much to help identify the long-term effects of youth circus training. Such an approach could examine elements of youth circus participation that lie outside the sphere of phenomenology, such as correlation between circus participation and scholastic achievement.

A number of interdisciplinary approaches would also provide invaluable information about youth circus. A book-length historical study of youth circus activity would complement the existing works on general circus history. My findings dealing with personal intelligences suggest a number of issues for study through the lenses of pedagogy, psychology, and sociology, and particularly the role of risk-assessment and risk taking in youth circus activity. Studies from the standpoint of kinesthesiology and exercise science could also provide valuable insights. Finally, research and translation could identify and provide access to the bodies of knowledge generated by the long-standing circus education traditions of the Eastern European countries of the former Soviet Union.

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APPENDIX I

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Research Compliance Office
Office for Research & Sponsored Projects Administration
P.O. Box 873503
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Phone
(480) 965-6788
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To:	Roger Bedard GHALL 232
From:	Albert Kagan, Chair Institutional Review Board
Date:	10/06/2005
Committee Action:	**Exemption Granted**
IRB Action Date:	10/06/2005
IRB Protocol #:	0510000246
Study Title:	A Phenomenology of Youth Circus Training at Fern Street Circus

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

APPENDIX II

COMPOSITE INTERVIEWS

Composite Interviews

I interviewed each participant twice over the course of six months, utilizing an open interview schedule. The interviews ranged from twenty to forty minutes in duration depending on responses and follow-up questions. I designed the interview schedule to draw out memories of past experiences with the circus, current involvement, future goals, and reflection on the experience of being part of the Fern Street after-school program. One set of interviews took place within a day of a performance by Fern Street Circus that involved nine of the eleven participants, and the questions and responses reflect that performance event.

I will attempt to provide here a composite of the interviews with a representative sample of questions I asked and typical and significant anomalous responses to those questions. I have omitted opening questions regarding demographic data as I have summarized this in my participant description. I include multiple, sometimes similar, responses to show both large and subtle differences in respondents' opinions. Names of participants have of course been changed to maintain privacy, except in the case of adults who indicated that they wished their real names be used. I present my questions in italics, and responses are indented to distinguish from commentary. Bullets indicate a change of speaker.

How did you start with the circus?

Participants came to Fern Street either through friends:

A kid at school while I was juggling five (a recent trick) asked me if I had ever heard of Fern Street Circus 'cause they had a great kids program and he'd seen the summer show so he asked me if I was in it. So I looked it up and they called me and I went down and went to my first rehearsal.

or through family members:

- My mom was looking for some things to get us involved in when we were younger, something she could get us all involved in together that wouldn't cost too much and she saw an ad in a parents newspaper for an after school program teaching circus skills.
- My little brother found out about it somehow and I had to go to a few of the rehearsals and I thought it was neat so I started

What do you remember about the first time you attended circus class?

Responses reflected a sense of wonder and freedom:

It was interesting. I walked in and it was like a childhood dream. I walked in and there were like these mats that I could do anything I want on and trampolines and ropes I could climb and basically it was like Chucky Cheese--it was a place to be a kid [*a reference to a chain-restaurant's advertising campaign*]. It doesn't matter what you do its really pretty amazing but it was just a really good experience for me.

Respondents also mentioned a sense of fear or intimidation:

- The experience the circus was... at the beginning there were a few older kids and they pushed me around and they were all really

good and I was a beginner and they had power when they came in and I had nothing. I'd never done anything like this, so it was hard starting out and the coach wasn't really patient with little kids.

- I was a little timid 'cause I couldn't do much, you know. It was my first time learning anything and I wasn't very good at it, and I was doing juggling when I first came 'cause it's what my brothers do, but then I kinda got, kinda decided that I wanted to do my own thing.

What's your favorite thing about training with Fern Street?

The responses to this question included references to physical and mental engagement and challenge, a social element, and performance. The physical aspects of training were prominent:

- The physical challenge of it. I like everything that presents some kind of physical and mental challenge, um, and also the social aspect of it. I like going and doing things I like to do with people who like the same thing and then I like also performing. I love performing before the audience. I really love that.
- That you get to do a lot of fun stuff with other people and they help you and you can do shows if you train a lot and it's really fun 'cause you can do tricks.

Many echoed this appreciation of the physical aspect of the work:

- Because of the strength involved. Everyone is very impressed by the strength you have to have to do it and it looks really dangerous you know and its exciting.
- Um I don't really know—it's just fun to do the tricks and stuff.

Others picked up on the social aspects of training:

- ...it's a lot of fun and it's a good way to get to know each other better.
- Well a lot of people are nice...
- Having my mom in the circus too.
- You get to know different people new people.

Most responses touched on performance as a favorite part of training as well.

- I think the shows 'cause it makes all the training like preparing the routines and having all that fun.
- ...you get the experience of performing with others.
- I like performing in front of others.

What don't you like about it? What's difficult about training with Fern Street?

Responses to this question broke down into three basic themes:

First, participants indicated a frustration with the discipline required to become proficient at a skill:

- I think trying to do all the tricks that I want to do and I can't because they're too hard. It kinda makes me sad and mad 'cause I wanna do it right away and learn how.

- It just takes a lot of practice.

They linked with that frustration the physical difficulty of the training:

- Well the trapeze really hurt my arms and, lets see, I don't really like climbing ropes for Spanish web.
- I'd say just building up my strength, um, 'cause you know having to climb up the rope and do all the tricks takes a lot of strength.
- Sometimes it's hard and gets tiring sometimes physically.

Second, several also mentioned social aspects as difficult:

- Occasionally things'll come up like somebody'll get on my nerves or somebody'll give em the run-around or they'll pressure me to do certain things or I'll caught in the middle of something but you know that only comes up once in a while.
- ...at the beginning there were a few older kids and they pushed me around and they were all really good and I was a beginner and they had power when they came in and I had nothing I'd never done anything like this, so it was hard starting out.

Third, three of the older, long-standing members of the program also noted difficulty with adult instructors or with management of the program. These responses reflected past issues that seem to have been resolved:

> I think the hardest thing for me has passed and that was with the second coach I had because he was a nice. But he also demanded that we do it right and only do it right and that was the hardest part. I enjoyed it to a

> certain extent but then he asked us to do things that were sometimes beyond our capabilities.

Another response referred to the same coach:

> ...the coach wasn't really patient with little kids. He just wanted kids that already knew... that had some talent that he could show further. He didn't want to start anyone off from the beginning so it was hard for me for the first couple of years.

An anomalous response referred to the politics of dealing with the management:

> The hardest part is probably telling other people who want you to do the job you have to book me through Fern Street Circus. Sometimes you want to work independently but you never know if you're going to make the circus angry by taking your talent that they taught you away from them or, uh, bigger companies stealing you or like that. It's politics basically there's no problem with any outside dressing of it but you never know when to break away.

What's performing like for you?

By far the most common response to this question was simple enjoyment of performing:

- Um, it just gives me a lot of joy.
- I'm happy 'cause it's my first show of the year, so, I mean it's going to be fun.
- It's a lot of fun.

The word "fun" came up fifteen times in responses to this question, and every participant included some mention of performance as enjoyable in his or her responses. In addition, many included an awareness of the audience in their answers, often as a reason for their enjoyment of performing:

- ...it's really fun performing 'cause I don't have stage fright and just like having an audience.
- And it's always a lot of fun being involved 'cause it's like everyone loves to see it and its so entertaining.
- It's great. When I was in gymnastics--I tell this to every one--when was in gymnastics you could never smile you could never show emotion in meets and competing. And so when I joined the circus I all the sudden could be myself on stage and mess with the people as much as I wanted and really get the audience in the palm of my hand, and that's the best part of it. That's always been the best part of it.
- Um, it's just really fun 'cause you get the audience...
- ...it's really fun performing 'cause I don't have stage fright and just like having an audience.

A number of the participants also mentioned stage fright and nervousness as part of performing:

- Well it's fun and sometimes you get nervous and scared if it's your first show 'cause some people do that because they've never been

in front of a whole audience before. Sometimes 'cause maybe if you've got a lot of lines, then maybe you forget them it kind of ruins the whole show so…

- …this is gonna be my first show ever so I'm kind of nervous but it's kinda cool at the same time.

Participants often referred to stage fright as something they had observed or overcome rather than as something they experienced at the time of the interview:

- It's been fun. For the first couple of times I went out on stage I didn't know what to do because I didn't have a character. I didn't know what stage presence was; didn't, you know, have any idea about that and it was a bit rough getting started but after a few years it just got easier and easier and it's just become more fun.
- Um, sometimes I'm a little nervous, sometimes I'm not really.

What's the best part of performing?

Here again, enjoyment and audience were the key factors:

- You can be funny and it's fun to make people laugh and giggle.
- I don't know, probably every one is happy. Y'know I always feel depressed when someone else is depressed well everyone leaves happy so I go home real happy and I want to juggle or I don't know--do something.
- Probably getting applause and entertaining people.

Getting paid for performing was also mentioned:

They pay me to play dress up.

Participants also cited family involvement as a favorite part of performing:

I know there's somebody that like if I feel or get hurt I have my mom there to help me and if I made a mistake she helps me train 'cause she's a clown…

What's the hardest thing about performing; what you don't like about performing?

The majority of participants in the study indicated that there was nothing they did not like about performing. Some brought up logistics and scheduling as difficulties in performance:

- … there's still rough times, you know, like today sometimes I was told things on short notice.
- You just need things to be planned more ahead of time and communication needs to be better still--that's the one thing I don't like about the circus.
- Well I… it seems that wherever we go right before we perform we're always late so whenever I perform I think "wow isn't this great two minutes late and I start in three minutes. That's not good." I feel like everything's running slower I feel like all my clocks got set back five minutes. I feel like the car's only going fifty miles per hour when we should be going seventy-five.
- Well, sometimes you get tired and you can't do stuff that you want to do 'cause you have to perform or do a show.

Some also mentioned simple exhaustion:

- Well sometimes you get tired and you can't do stuff that you want to do 'cause you have to perform or do a show.
- Sometimes there's hard shows, sometimes there's really easy ones.

Describe your relationship with your trainers and other people in the circus.

Several described their relation to others in the circus as family-like:

- My relationship with the people I perform with... I think it's pretty solid and pretty good and I get along real well, and they get along real well with me and, um, it's a real solid relationship. And there's still ups and downs you know--just like I would have with my family.
- Um, a lot of the adults are coaches most of the time so I have a really good relationship with them and I, you know, I love everybody in the circus, you know. I've been around 'em so long it's just become like, I guess, second family I guess you could say.

In focusing on their instructors, some described give-and-take:

- Well, um, I come up with a cool idea and my trainer says "No it won't work," or "Do it this way." And, um, sometimes I'll say, "What if I do it this way?" and he'll say "Yeah, that's good." Or sometimes he'll say, "Why don't you do it this way?" and I'll say "Yeah that's good." I'll get an idea and we'll perfect it. I get an idea and throw it

> on the table and we'll nit-pick at it and work on it and see what will look good on stage and what won't.

Several classified their various instructors according to how strict they are:

- It's pretty good. I don't really argue with them or anything so we don't have anything against each other some of them are nice but some of them are a little strict. The reason some of them are nicer is 'cause they're used to teaching kids so they know how to teach kids and to encourage them better to like do tricks and stuff.
- ...some of 'em are very strict and very into training and I think those are the best coaches but some of them are nice but they teach you a lot.

Others compared their relationships with various instructors, and mentioned an instructor's perceived patience in dealing with participants in the program as a factor in the quality of the relationship:

> It got easier 'cause they got a new coach, the old coach he, uh, he was an excellent, excellent performer and he had a lot of talent but he wasn't good with kids, just like his father. He didn't have much patience so they got a new coach and he was actually a former student. He graduated, well, not graduated, but yeah he graduated, went to Barnum and Bailey, got a year contract with them, then came back and he had all this knowledge and they hired him as a coach and he was really good with kids, teaching kids since he was fifteen. He'd be teaching little kids at the

YMCA, teaching them tumbling and he's got a lot patience and within--what took me two years with the first coach he took two weeks to teach me solid. It was just amazing and from there it just got easier and easier.

In some cases responses indicated a paternal or role model relationship with adults in the program:

- Um, John Highkin, the director, he's not only there when we perform; every time I see him he's all, "Hey what's up? Hey buddy!" and gives me a hug or whatever.
- Brandy Wirtz was my trainer on web toward the end of her career with Fern Street Circus and she came in like the wind and learned the web in a year, became the solo aerial artist, decided that she wasn't comfortable here, that she needed to be in a bigger space. So she moved to Montreal, Canada and really got into it and trained with the best in the world and really got on her feet with it and I admire that so much, and I hope someday I can go to that same trainer.

What is it like to train with family members?

This question, of course, was not relevant to some participants. As mentioned before, however, one respondent named her mother's presence as her favorite thing about training and performing with Fern Street Circus. Several participants mentioned feeling closer to their siblings in a number of ways:

> We're definitely more focused on what we're doing and we've definitely developed a lot in our relationship in that area and with others.

and:

> We're different ages and I think we get to spend more time together because there's not that age thing here like there is in school.

One downplayed the role of her siblings in the show:

> It's cool, but really we pretty much do our own thing.

Another noted that his sister had joined the circus in order to spend more time with her brothers:

> Then my sister started going "Hey! Hey where'd they go? Come back here!" And we told her, "Hey, just come to circus."

Learning to trust was also mentioned:

- Um, well when we do an act I'm more trusting 'cause in... there's like tricks that are really dangerous and I'm more trusting in my brothers than I would be in someone else so it's easier to do my act.
- I think we've really learned to trust each other's instincts when we're juggling.

How has circus training impacted your life?

Interviewees responded to this question with three basic themes. Many mentioned that the time involved in training as put strain on their schoolwork.

- My school. Sometimes I have to miss it 'cause I have a really important show so it kind of affects my school a little bit, but not that much. I don't do shows that much on school time 'cause my parents won't let me.
- Especially around this time, around the shows that are coming up, around April, May, June, it gets really busy with rehearsals and shows interfering with school and homework. And it really creates a pressure on me to get my work done and every once in a while during the year it does create a hindrance on the homework sometimes.
- I'm behind on my homework, but that's mostly my fault. Just my decision.

Others echoed the idea that circus training had a minimal impact on schoolwork:

> School's cool. I always get my homework done and if I don't it's not 'cause of circus its 'cause I forgot or 'cause I went to the bathroom and missed a homework assignment, it's for some other reason.

Several also mentioned difficulties with time management.

- Well it does take up a lot of time, circus.
- ...between drumming, circus, and Aikido things get kind of hectic at times and sometimes I have to just go and skip a rehearsal or something.

- I just try to spread it out. Sometimes I don't balance. Then I have to work really hard to catch up, you know? And it's just a constant battle. It becomes easier and easier as I learn to balance my time.

Participants cited positive and negative effects on friendships:

- … it kinda draws away from spending time with your friends sometimes but, um, they've been good about it, you know, and they're still--I still hang out with them every once in a while when I can.
- Well it doesn't really affect my friends because they like they think I'm funny so that's kinda good. 'Cause I can be more funny to my friends.
- It's also like a social thing. I mean I've met a lot of friends.

Many also mentioned the positive effect of circus on their way of dealing with other people.

- Um, it's given me a better understanding of people and how different people operate and how different people think. It's kinda taught me a lot about people. About how relate to people different races, different ages, different backgrounds, religious backgrounds.

What is the most important thing about being in the circus and training?

This question drew a wide range of responses. Some spoke of social and emotional aspects:

- You get to be in shows and you meet a lot of new friends so whenever you feel down and you go there, your spirits just lift again.
- I think it just helped me a lot in just maturing in all areas of life. You know--money management, social skills relating to people, presentation before an audience, you know. I think that it's something that will help me in the future.
- Probably the people there.
- Um, the most important I'd have to say would probably be the atmosphere, the friendship, and the way you feel there.

Others referred to performing as the most important aspect of their participation, both for its perceived benefits and out of pure enjoyment:

- The performing. Because performing is always a really valuable thing you can do. Like, uh, I personally think that performing helps in your everyday life 'cause it makes you outgoing and it makes you not as shy, 'cause I used to be really shy. 'Cause you can't help but be crazy in the circus.
- It's just a time to just perform your skills, the things you learned, and it means a great deal to me.
- Presentation before an audience, you know. I think that its something that will help me in the future.

Several appeared to value the process of training as an end in itself:

- Every day you need to practice trick after trick after trick and get better at those tricks, you know, so you become solid and it takes a lot of your time actually, and dedication. A lot of dedication.
- Um… I think, um, the [tight] wire mostly. It takes a lot of practice and training.

Define "circus" for me.

Most of the participants defined circus either from the point of view of the audience:

- Circus means, kinda means like they have--you should come and get it 'cause they have lots of people who do stuff, like people who can do back flips, or people who can make you laugh, or people who do really good tricks and make you go "Wow!"
- People can have fun there, can see things they've never seen before.

Or from the point of view of the performers:

> Our circus individually, I would define as a place where the performers can come to have a good time themselves and make the audience have a good time and everyone can work as a team and have an individual act at the same time and get experience, and for some people, a living.

A few included both points of view but distinguished between the two:

- When you watch them you get to see them juggle and do daring, death-defying stunts and when you're in one you're just having a lot of fun and doing what you like to do best.
- Um, I'd say it's probably a show where all the people with unusual talents come and perform for people. It's also a lot of fun to come see, you know? It's a fun place for kids and stuff.

A number of responses referred to circus as communal in some way:

- And it's a real--I don't know how to put this into words, but you feel like family there, I guess, in the circus and you want to bring the audience, you know, into your picture of the circus, you know? You want to try, um, when you're out there on stage what I mean is you're out on the stage to kind of involve them with what you're doing and you know just participate with them and they'll participate with you at the same time and just fun with the audience and bring joy to them.
- ... everyone can work as a team...
- Um, I don't know. I think to me it means every six year old in the city coming to one spot and for once sitting down for an hour and a half which will never happen before (sic) and leaving tired amazed and feeling fulfilled and happy.

Several defined circus in terms of sport or recreation:

- It's basically like gymnastics but not as strict, 'cause they don't like, um, like really--they the circus, I say, encourages you better to do the tricks. But [in] gymnastics I think they teach you better form but it's about the same.
- Um, fun. Interesting, interesting to learn the tricks and stuff, and it's fun to learn the stuff, and it's easier to learn than normally.

Other responses defined circus as an art:

I'd define it as an art form, a skill anyone can learn.

Or as a job:

[Everyone can] get experience and for some people, a living.

Some younger participants responded with cultural *topoi* of circuses in the form of classic ringmaster's calls:

- "Step right up, come and get it!"
- "Come one, come all. It's fun for all ages!" I learned that from the Barnum and Bailey circuses. I like circuses.

Define "training" for me.

Responses fell into three major categories. Several cast training in terms of learning new techniques and pushing boundaries:

- Doing something you've never done before.
- ...mostly it's learning and discovering what you can do and what you couldn't do and making sure what you can do consistently and what you can't.

Others spoke of working to master current skill sets:

- I would define it a perfecting, for most people it's perfecting what you like to do or choose to do and making everything better; making things fit.
- Well, you go practice something and until you get good at it. You keep training and you try your hardest.

Many also spoke of training as preparation for performance:

- Making a routine.
- It means like we have to get ready for the show or else we can't do it 'cause we don't know what to do and training, kinda. That's what training means.
- ...what you need to work on to make consistent for a show.

What's training like for you?

This question often yielded descriptions of the actual work done in the after school program:

> Well we go, we work with a teacher, and we decide our walks and make our voices how we want and do faces and walk around and talk like that for a little bit so we get used to it, and then we can do a show with all the things we learned.

For some, as in the above case, training centered on teachers; other participants described training as a self-disciplined phenomenon:

> Well I do most of it myself. They don't, uh, Fern Street Circus had a trainer but she left for Canada to further her career in Aerial acts so I've recently been making up my own tricks, training myself, so…

Several described training as a self-rewarding process:

> Well it's kinda hard at first 'cause you're trying a new thing but then it gets easier and funner and funner, and when you finally could do it you feel all happy.

In other cases training seems to be more outcome based and concerned with creating a performance product:

> Lately we've been putting a new act together for my brothers and I, Archer and Joshua, and we've been working really hard to get a new routine together.

For most, training implicitly involves working with others. Several mentioned working with family members in conjunction with training:

> [Pulse is the name of] the tumbling crew that I'm in within Fern Street That's, um, kind of second to the thing I do with my brothers and that's the thing with my brothers, we're trained by a different coach.

Some also described training as planning and goal-oriented:

- We try to do something different every year 'cause, you know, the audience gets bored with the same thing over and over.
- The act, the tumbling crew I'm in, Pulse, we've just been training and our coach has been choreographing the act and every day we

> just practice it more and more. Add a little bit, maybe take away stuff, clean up stuff, and, um, just busy planning out music, planning out area and space and props and a lot of stuff has to get ready and costuming has to go with the lighting has to go with the music.

If you couldn't do circus anymore, what would you miss most?

> Everything.

Many interviewees had some difficulty separating out individual aspects they would miss:

> Everything about it. It's just it's become a major part of my life 'cause I've done it so long it'd just be like a complete absence. There'd be this big hole there.

Some said they would most miss the social aspects:

- Um, I'd probably miss most, probably the friendship that I've gained with others there. Yeah, definitely that 'cause I've definitely gained a lot of relationship with others.
- I'd miss a lot of my friends that are in it…
- The friendship I guess, and the time 'cause I like going.

They also saw performance as important:

- Being in front of people and making them laugh and going to--going to dress up like clowns and performing.
- I would miss the performing 'cause performing is so much fun.

- Probably the people there, and performing.

Several also mentioned the physical aspects of training:

> And you know I'd miss the physical training because outside of that I haven't really pursued any physical training. I did for a while I wrestled and those kinds of things, but now it's pretty much my only physical training that I have a set schedule with four hours a week. I would miss getting to work out all the time.

A number of the respondents also mentioned doing circus training for the sheer enjoyment of it:

> I would miss going to circus and starting juggling and just going into this like trance, and being able to do what I like to do and not have anything bother me, not have anyone say do your homework. Being able to just juggle for two hours straight. And I would probably miss the excitement of landing a new trick for the first time like, you know, when I got seven balls, you know, juggled for the first time by definition, it was like wow! I just felt so cool.

In the case of several of the older members, this enjoyment was tied to economic and career concerns as well:

- ...the wire, 'cause that's what I love to do and hopefully that'll be um, my main focus as, um, a future career.

- ...the fact that I'm earning money doing something that I absolutely love and that has, well, not always come easy, but has become easy for me to do.

How do you learn a new trick?

In most cases, the presence and example of instructors was described as key in learning new tricks:

- ...we've been working on a routine, the Salmon Brothers, for I think three years now--I think, three or four years--and its really developed a lot and we really owe a lot of it to Pop Canestrelli. He's our teacher. He's a sixth generation circus performer and um, we've really developed because of him and it's really been fun performing with him and having him teach us. And you know we're really grateful that we're in the circus and you know people have trained us for free.
- Talking to the teachers and just having them show you and just practicing.
- Well, Annetta, our trainer, helps us. She spots us from doing flips and stuff and then she'll let us do it by ourselves if we ask. And then if we land it, we land it.
- I've been juggling for about five years and I learned how to juggle wrong at first and I got a new instructor and he showed me a different way that worked better for me.

The coaches provide models for how to do a trick. They also assess readiness:

- …my coaches say, "Do you want to learn something new? Are you ready to go through some pain?"
- And sometimes it's just, as far as tumbling and sports tumbling, my coach, Annetta, will say, "Do you want to go for it?" And I'll say "sure." And she'll say, "do this" and I'll know what it is but I've never tried it before. And she'll say "go for it!"

In addition to the importance of trainers, most discussed the need for intense periods of focus and practice in learning new things:

- It just takes a lot of focus on the wire and to stay dedicated to it.
- Um, we do like, the training Mondays and Fridays. We do that training for the entire two hours. We do a lot of the training, we practice all the tricks, and I have a rope at my house where I do it at home too.
- Well, we have a Spanish web right there [participant points to the web in her backyard] and um, I practice on that sometimes and mostly like three times a week.
- Aside from the circus not much right now because I'm so busy. But I usually try to do it at least half an hour a day, you know? If I can't do any tricks, I'll at least climb up and down a couple times just to work on my strength and to keep it up.

Many described training as a slow process:

- Well it's a slow process but its not really a slow process but it just takes dedication to work at that trick and get it down…
- Um, for example, behind the back with a [juggling] club took me a long time to learn.
- Usually he says we learn really quick. Usually we'll have it in a couple months. Sometimes he'll say, ah, "it'll; take you a year to learn this trick."

Responses demonstrated an awareness of training as an ongoing process, which always leaves room for improvement as well:

- Actually we're working on some new tricks for the Balboa show in May: things such as the chair and the three man high. We've done the three man high last year, before, but we've got it really solid and by ourselves.
- [My trainer] just kept on training me and, um, I was finally able to juggle three balls really good, and I'm learning tricks on that now, but, um, how to combine stuff. But I would like to learn four balls.

What do kids at school think about what you do?

For the most part participants reported positive feedback from peer groups outside the circus:

- They--"Wow! You're in a circus!" They think its cool.
- They think its interesting that I'm in a circus.

Some spoke of indifference:

- It's just like, "Oh yeah, its Lionel the juggling kid."
- Well, one person in my class is also in it, and no one else really cares.

A few appeared to have some embarrassment about being in the circus:

- Once they find out that I'm not clown or anything silly, like I have all my toes and stuff, they think its pretty cool.
- Well not many people think it's dumb.

Several mentioned bringing others into the group as well, as revealed by responses to the next question.

How would you invite a friend to come join Fern Street?

In their invitations, most participants talked about the circus as a place to have fun and a place to learn. Several had actually invited friends:

- It's really fun and you get to try out new things like tight wire, rolling globe, unicycle, Spanish web, and it's really fun. Maybe you'll like to join.
- That's it's fun and you get to learn new... get to learn new things, and get to try different things.

Several spoke of the nurturing staff and environment as well:

- Um, gosh, I'd tell 'em that the teachers are great, and even if you can't do anything you'll always learn, 'cause it's such an easy learning environment and everyone's really nice, you know?

- It's um, fun and enjoyment. It's really easy and it's not forceful. It's just a good environment.

A few also spoke of the circus as an economic opportunity:

> I'd tell them that it's a great opportunity. I mean... I never thought that I could get into something or get paid for doing something that I love.

What are your professional aspirations in relation to the circus? Would you like to do this for a job when you're older?

Several of the participants seem to regard their work as vocational, but not necessarily tied to professional careers. Some want to ensure they continue to do circus for the love of it:

> Well a good example is my Dad. Sad. He used to program computers for fun and now it's just his job, you know? I've decided when my recreational juggling or circus skills becomes my career, my job, "Oh lets go to work, Argggh! Darn!" I'm gonna quit. That's not worth it. Why would I destroy what I love to do just so I could make it into what I don't like to do but could make a living at? There's a lot of different things I could do with my life and I don't want to make juggling my enemy.

Most at least consider the idea of circus performance as a profession:

- I know I want to continue it through high school and I'm staying home for college so I hope so.
- I'd like to enter a few yo-yo competitions and maybe start a career in that later in life to be able to travel a lot.

- I know I'm going to at least try.

One participant was well on her way toward professional work, and had received an offer from a major circus to become a performer:

> ...it turned out that the artistic director had been on site and so the next day we came in in the morning and gave him my head shots, resume, everything--video resume--and they called me six weeks later and said "Congratulations! You're in." And, uh, I purposely didn't put my age on my resume and so after they had accepted me they said, "How old are you?" and I said "Sixteen." And they said, "We can't accept you until you're eighteen." But the guy did say, "When you're eighteen, you have a job." So I have a standing contract.

In addition, Fern Street has paid several for teaching and performing:

> Yeah, um, they--for the past few years, they've hired me during the summer to do a summer program they do for the YMCA. They bring kids in and you teach them. Sometimes I assist, sometimes I teach tumbling. Things like that.

I concluded each interview by asking what, if anything, the participant would like to add. In most cases the response was "Nothing." I have woven the few richer responses I received into the composite interview when relevant to another question and, of course, have included the responses in my data analysis.