

Through the "Front Door" to the "Backyard": Linguistic Variation of the American Circus

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Abstract

The language of circus can be interpreted through two perspectives: the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus. There is considerable anthropological importance and research within the study of spectacle and circus. However, there is a limited amount of academic literature pertaining to the linguistics and semiotics of circus. Through participant observation and interviewing, of both circus and non-circus individuals, data will be acquired and analyzed. Further research will provide background information of both types of circuses.

Results indicate that an individual's preference can be determined based on the linguistic and semiotic terms used when describing the circus.

Introduction

Throughout my life, I have always been intrigued by the circus. As a result, I joined the Gamma Phi Circus, here at Illinois State University, in order to obtain a better understanding of circus in our culture. A brief explanation of the title is useful in understanding my paper. I chose the title "Through the 'Front Door' to the 'Backyard'" because "front door" is circus lingo for the doors that a person goes through on entering the tent. The word "backyard" refers to the area in which behind the tent where all the people in the production of the circus park their trailers.

This title encompasses the range of information that I have gathered from performers, to directors, to audience members.

Within the past five years that I began to notice that two very different types of circuses existed in America. I began to notice that one circus relied on the spectacle of each act (Traditional American Circus), while the other was very artsy, with an on-going theme (New American Circus). Furthermore, I observed linguistic variation between the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus.

This paper focuses on circus linguistics in the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus. There is considerable anthropological importance and research within the study of spectacle and circus. However, there is a limited amount of academic literature pertaining to the linguistics and semiotics of circus. It is very difficult to discuss the linguistic aspect without also discussing the semiotic aspect of circus. The semiotics, or the study of signs, within the circus is where the majority of the linguistics discussed.

To explain, descriptive language that is used to describe the language reflects how people see the circus, which is through signs and symbols.

In other words, the visual representations of aspects of life are seen through a circus performance. The study of circus and spectacle semiotics from an anthropological standpoint has much to offer.

This research is being conducted to identify trends within circus linguistics and subsequently larger cultural characteristics. Through qualitative research methods, including interviews, contextual research, and

participant observation, a greater understanding of circus linguistics will be sought allowing trends and patterns in historical and cultural traits of circus linguistics to be identified and analyzed. Interviews will be coded (identification of certain trends, etc.) and examined. I hypothesize that circus linguistic variation will indicate an individual's circus preference, and how circus is perceived in our culture.

Research Methodology

Data collection was accomplished through participant observation, historical and contextual research, and by administering qualitative interviews via the Internet.

Participant observation was conducted during the summer, fall, and winter of 2002-2003. Several circuses, including; Cirque du Soleil, Circus Jenzac, Ringling Bros., Barnum and Bailey Circus, Gamma Phi Circus, and Cirque Eloize, were observed during this time.

Historical and contextual research offered a great deal to this thesis. Effort was made to retrieve and survey a wide variety of texts, pamphlets, manuals and advertising to accomplish a greater understanding of the interrelatedness of circus, culture, and linguistics.

Interviews were administered to both Traditional American Circus and New American Circus performers. Also, non-circus performers were interviewed. A snowball method was used to obtain respondents. The interviews were conducted via the Internet through electronic mail.

The reasoning behind using interview as a method for obtaining data is based mainly upon the depth and intensity that qualitative research allows. (Creswell 1994:143-145). The confines of this research project limit the ability for extensive quantitative research methods. In addition, qualitative interviews offered intense and in depth data, while still being capable of applying the results to the larger society.

Proper interviewing techniques were adopted and subsequently modified for use via electronic mail. Proper coding procedures were offered by Strauss and Corbin (1998:57-122). Questions were formulated using previous knowledge gained through participant observation, historical and contextual research and the guidelines set forth in Kvale (1996) for proper interviewing techniques and questioning. Every effort has been made to make appropriate, unbiased questions and to "give voice" to the respondents answers. Also, great effort was exercised in identifying meaningful data in conjunction with the methods outline in Coffey and Atkinson (1996:26-51, 108-162).

As such, it may be that this research and data collection was conducted under appropriate guidance and procedure for qualitative interviewing, though being modified for electronic mail procedures.

Literature Review

Anthropology of Circus

There is an extensive amount of literature in regards to the circus. However, the majority of these books are for children, such as a picture book.

Therefore, the circus is described in simple terms with no in depth discussion of what circus means in American culture. Another common subject of a book about circus is an historical overview. As a result, the amount of scholarly literature about the circus is much smaller. There are three anthropologists who do research in the area of circus, although they are different areas.

Yoram Carmeli, an anthropologist in Israel, focuses his research on British circuses. Carmeli frequently explores the rise and fall of the circus in Britain as a "product of varied marginalization" (Rushing 2000:6). In other words, he examines the dynamics of what causes the circus to disappear and reappear. The dynamics that Carmeli investigates are "circus economics, [and] social and semiotic constraints" (Carmeli 1987:744)

Another anthropologist, who does research in the realm of circus, is Kenneth Little. He studies the anthropology of performance through the medium of circus acts, especially clown acts (Little 1993:117, 1991:77, 1991:227; Rushing 2000:6).

In addition, Little is interested in the "cultural studies of spectacle consumption" (Little 1995:15). To explain, spectacle consumption functions as a way to display modernity and some of its' dilemmas. Therefore, performances emphasize the concept of spectacle consumption and at the same point comment upon it.

For example, Cirque Archaos is a very risqué circus and also quite violent. When the circus came to Toronto, the city did not want anybody to go see it.

Although the city officials did not want this circus in town, the problem was in newspaper articles, thereby telling the general public to stay away from Cirque Archaos. These articles had the opposite affect because the general public now wanted to see the show because the city officials stated that it was inappropriate. Therefore, Little examines what draws people to a circus: Is it name, curiosity, or going to see something that people are told not to see (Little 1995:18-21).

Moreover, whenever an event or occurrence is labeled out of the ordinary, there is an insatiable need by the members of society to view the behavior.

The last and most useful anthropologist, for my topic, is Paul Bouissac. Bouissac examines circus acts as form of communication.

Circus can be analyzed in the "general framework of ... semiotic methodology ... that can be characterized as a tentative application of the various linguistic methodologies to all forms of semiosis" (Bouissac 1976:ix). In addition, messages (audio-visual) are sent back and forth from performer to audience member. This research is significant to my paper as I investigate the descriptive differences from audience member to both Traditional American Circus performers and New American Circus performers.

Linguistics and Anthropology

Language is a very significant aspect to human existence. It is defined as

"a patterned system of arbitrary sound symbols, whose characteristic features of displacement, cultural transmission, productivity, and duality are rare/absent in animal communication" (Aitchison 1972:18).

The studying of any aspect of language is known as linguistics (Shaul and Furbee 1998:255). Furthermore, a branch of linguistics is sociolinguistics, which is the

"study of systematic relations of language and social group ... which relates language(s) and varieties of a single language to communities of language users (speech community) and smaller groups (networks)" (Shaul and Furbee 1998:17)

In relation to circus, sociolinguistic concepts can be used in the analysis section as the two social groups (performer and non-performer) describe the circus.

The three main functions of language are as follows: Directive Function, which provides factual information; Expressive Function, which is the communication of feelings and emotions; and Phatic Communication, which deals with maintaining friendly social contact. In addition, language is the primary tool for social order (Atkinson 1988:390).

As a result, almost every aspect of human interaction involves language in some shape or form, from both a social and cultural standpoint.

Consequently, an individual is at the center of cultural and linguistic knowledge, such that "culturally appropriate behavior can be accounted for solely by use of a set of finite rules" (Shaul and Furbee 1998:145). Similarly, there are two codes to language, according to Martin Atkinson, known as the restricted and elaborated.

The elaborated code deals with expression, which is more useful in this analysis (Atkinson 1988:392).

Furthermore, language has structure, which was clarified by Ferdinand de Saussure. Structural linguistics indicates, "language is a patterned system composed of interdependent elements, rather than a collection of unconnected individual items" (Aitchison 1972:21). In other words, language is interconnected and therefore, it does not have separate entities.

Another significant aspect of language is that "text cannot be restricted to written or oral because text depends on formal properties [which] pertain to the context of the message" (Bouissac 1976:90). To explain, language does not have to be spoken or written in order to be considered a form of communication. Rather, signs, or semiotics can be regarded as a system of communication. Signs may be visual representations of the culture, and can be understood to the people of that culture.

In addition, semiotics is defined as the study of signs, which is significant in both expression and content (Wells 1977:11).

Thereby, it can "encompass the universals of communication and at the same time can account for particular instances by providing criteria for distinguishing constants from variables and for expressing specific functions" (Bouissac 1977:145).

In other words, the universal manner of communication of the circus is through performance, however, the extent of communication may vary from individual to individual, which will be mentioned in the analysis.

Circus Background

In order to fully understand the linguistic variation within the American circus, I must explore the history and characteristics of both the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus. In general, the Traditional American Circus is defined as a three or more ringed circus (although that is not always the case), with no underlying theme, and a performance based on spectacle (Albrecht 1995:50, 224, Carmeli 1987:762, Davis 2002:81, Rushing 2000:17, 23, Stoddart 2000:24, 41) Spectacle, in this sense, refers to building the circus act based on the tricks, with the most difficult and dangerous trick last.

On the other hand, the New American Circus is generally defined as a one-ring circus, with an overall theme, tying every act together, and a performance based on artistry (Albrecht 1995:29, 50-52, 77-85, 224, Bouissac 1989:6, Rushing 2000:17, 23, Stoddart 2000:28). In other words, the difficulty of the trick is not emphasized; rather, the way in which it is performed is stressed. Further information about particular attributes of each circus will be discussed within the history.

History

Based on historical records, circus-type performances have occurred since ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, although these displays were not technically circuses, but rather they were feats of strength and endurance (Murray 1956:29-55).

The development of circus began in 1770 and was introduced by Philip Astley, the father of circus, in Great Britain. At this time, circus was defined as "a troupe of performers and clowns" (Chindahl 1959:1). Astley's circus involved complicated equestrian tricks, as well as acrobatics, which were performed in an amphitheatre. In order to see the performance, there was a small admission price (Chindahl 1959:5, Murray 1956:79).

Two men brought over the concept of the circus from Great Britain in 1771: Joshua Sharp and Jacob Bates (Chindahl 1959:6).

Sharp and Bates were involved in performances similar to present day street performers. They would complete a small set to tricks and in return money was given. Another important figure was Thomas Pool, who was the first native circus rider to perform in 1774 (Chindahl 1959:6, Murray 1956:117). The first complete circus in American occurred in 1793 and was developed by John Bill Ricketts. The performance included equestrian, tightrope walking, and a clown. During the next several years, Ricketts added more acts,

such as juggling and acrobatics, and moved the performance into an amphitheatre (Chindahl 1959:7-9,11, Murray 1956:119).

From 1800-1840, several European troupes traveled to America and began joining small circuses, which traveled mainly by wagon.

These immigrants brought more acts and aided in the development of the circus (Chindahl 1959:17). During the period from 1820-1840, the circus began to expand with the addition of the menagerie. The menagerie is a collection of a variety of animals, such as lions, tigers, snakes, and leopards. Prior to 1820, menagerie did exist, but they traveled separately from the circus. Furthermore, circuses began to travel lengthier distances, to the Midwest, West, and South, by using river systems (Chindahl 1959:20,30).

By the 1850s and 1860s, the concept of a circus performing on a boat developed. This greatly decreased the cost of "transporting, erecting, and taking down a tent, seating, properties, etc., and making it possible to provide more comfortable seats for their patrons" (Chindahl 1959:55). However, these showboats did not last for very long, and they seem to have disappeared by 1866. Other circuses still traveled by wagons and carriages, which was difficult as roads were unpaved (Chindahl 1959:55). During the Civil War, circuses still traveled throughout the United States, however, it was dangerous to travel in the North, East, and South. The only safe region appeared to be the West (Chindahl 1959:86).

The first successful circus to travel by railroad occurred in 1872 with "P.T. Barnum's Great Traveling Exposition and World's Fair" (Chindahl 1959:93). A few other circuses attempted to travel by rail prior to 1872, but it was more difficult as there were insufficient tracks. The development of the railroad transformed the circus by providing faster and safer travel, and the ability to carry heavier loads (equipment and animals) further distances.

In addition, there was a major growth and expansion of the circus during this time. The number of rings increased from one to two or three, the menagerie gained importance, and street parades and side shows developed (Chindahl 1959:114, Murray 1956:165).

Circus historian Jessica Davis suggests that the "turn-of-the-century railroad circus was a powerful cultural icon of a new, modern nation-state" (Davis 2002:10). In other words, the circus grew in response to the growth of the nation (Davis 2002:18).

Author George Chindahl states that by the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the "number, size, and quality of the organizations catering to the public ... [developed]... diverse forms, such as the Wild West show, the dog and pony show, the trained wild animal show, the one-, two-, or three-car railroad show, and the indoor circus" (Chindahl 1959:118). This era is known as the Golden Age of Circus, with an increase in the number of acts and improved animal acts. During this time, there were several hundred traveling shows of various sizes (Chindahl 1959:118). However, as larger circuses further increased, there was a decline of smaller shows beginning in 1910 (Chindahl 1959:149). Furthermore, technology began to escalate, with the use of power driven stake drivers, for example, which decreased the need for manual labor (Chindahl 1959:151).

Other technological advancements are lighting techniques and automobiles.

In 1921, the American Circus Corporation was established, which reorganized circus in America (Chindahl 1959:159). During the 1930s and 1940s, there was a decrease in the number of circuses traveling by railroad.

However, the economic depression may have been partially responsible for this decline because many circuses went out of business (Chindahl 1959:162-163). It is important to note that although Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus has been an established circus for some time, it was "no longer a typical American circus because of its size, its mode of transportation, and the character of its performance" (Chindahl 1959:165).

In recent years, Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus has not been seen as a Traditional American Circus, but rather it falls between the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus. For instance, in the 1990s, Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus developed a new show entitled the Kaleidoscope, which is reminiscent of a European style circus with one-ring and has a street fair atmosphere (Albrecht 1999:6-13, Rushing 2000:17).

However, some examples of the Traditional American Circus are Carson and Barnes Circus, Kelly Miller Circus, and the Clyde-Beatty Circus.

The beginnings of change within the American circus began with the counterculture of the 1960s, in which everything "that smacked of traditional values, including the three-ring circus" was rejected (Albrecht 1995:4).

This attitude developed as a result of the increasing commercialism and consumerism of traditional circuses. (Albrecht 1995:4, Rushing 2000:7).

Furthermore, the three-ring circus in the eyes of the counterculture "militated against any honest contact between performer and audience, thus violating another of the new culture's ideal (Albrecht 1995:4).

However, it was in Europe, which also had problems with commercialism, where changes within the circus began.

In 1974, a new type of circus emerged in England, developed by Alexis Gruss, in which Philip Astley's Parisian circus from the 1770s was recreated.

Thus, the European circus was revitalized, and reached a new level of social and artistic acceptability (Albrecht 1995:5). Now that Europe's new circus was a success, America was inspired to change as well. However, this change was not a rejection of traditional circus, but rather a desire to return to ancient street performances and "*saltimbanco*

[which happens to be the name of a Cirque du Soleil show], or itinerant performers" (Albrecht 1995:7)

American born Hovey Burgess was one of the most significant figures in the development of the New American Circus. His main goal in life was to become a circus performer, but there were two barriers. Burgess believed that in order to be a performer, a person must be born into a circus family. In other words, outsiders could not join the circus.

The other obstacle was the apparent decline of the traditional circus (Albrecht 1995:12-13, Rushing 2000:8). However, these two impediments did not prevent Burgess from reaching his goal.

While visiting Europe in 1965, Burgess analyzed classical European circus buildings and street performances, eventually becoming a street performer for several weeks. It was at this point that the realization that the close connection to the audience became clear and developed into one of the major tenets of the New American Circus (Albrecht 1995:15). Burgess left Europe confident that circus in America could be revived.

After returning from Europe, Burgess began "teaching circus skills to actors at the New York University School of Arts" in 1966 (Rushing 2000:9).

In 1969, Burgess with the help of several students formed a group, which toured New York City parks and streets for two years. The group was known as Circo dell'Arte, which was the fusion of *commedia dell'Arte*, traditional circus skills, and street performing (Albrecht 1995:17). *Commedia dell'Arte* was "a form of improvisational street theatre, [which] developed in Italy during the sixteenth century" (Albrecht 1995:14-15).

Although Burgess never began his own circus, he developed the major characteristics of the New American Circus with the emphasis on street performances and intimate interaction between performer and audience.

One of Burgess's most talented Circo dell'Arte students' was Larry Pisoni. In 1970, Pisoni decided to start

his own circus in California.

When he arrived in San Francisco, Pisoni began to teach circus and street performance skills to the San Francisco Mime Troupe (Albrecht 1995:18,22).

It was here that three major elements of the New American Circus began to take hold: "comic persona, uninhibited entertainment and a rejection of tradition and convention" (Albrecht 1995:20). In addition, the association with theatre continued.

In response, Pisoni formed the Pickle Family Jugglers, with the help of Peggy Snider and Cecil MacKinnon, which preceded the development of the first new circus in America: The Pickle Family Circus (Albrecht 1995:22).

The Pickle Family Circus performances began in 1975 and continue today, though changes have occurred throughout that time span (Albrecht 1995:23).

Although the circus did not have much money or funding, it was this makeshift outdoor one-ring setting in which the audience found captivating.

The audience sat in a circle forcing complete strangers to interact with one another. In addition, a five-piece jazz band played all the music for each performance, and audience participation was key. In 1993, the Pickle Family Circus disbanded because of bankruptcy, however, a new company formed with the name of the New Pickle Circus (Albrecht 1995:24-36).

Two students, Paul Binder and Michael Christensen, from the San Francisco Mime Troupe were inspired by director Larry Pisoni to further their circus career by eventually creating their own company (Albrecht 1995:41, Rushing 2000:10).

Similar to Burgess, Binder and Christensen traveled throughout Europe, while learning the secrets of street performance, which will be very valuable information when they begin their own circus (Albrecht 195:42, Rushing 2000:10).

However, while in Paris, Binder and Christensen began performing in a theatre, which needed variety acts, and appeared on a television show, where Annie Fratellini and Pierre Étaix, who were in the beginning stages of their show *Nouveau Cirque de Paris* and founders of the French National Circus School, saw the two performers and eventually hired them.

As a result, Binder and Christensen became greatly involved in the process of making the show, learning first-hand from Fratellini and Étaix about fund-raising and other aspects, such as the "vitality and energy of the form" (Albrecht 1995:44).

From May to September of 1976, Binder and Christensen performed in this circus, and it was at that point that Binder began to desire his own circus and circus school (Albrecht 1995:42-44).

In early 1977, Binder created his proposal to develop a circus arts school in New York City, with the help of Christensen.

It was named the Big Apple Circus. After many trials and tribulations, the one-ring tent show opened in the summer of 1977, in Battery Park City. The performers of the circus ranged in skill from expert to amateur. The amateur learned more tricks and how to perform with the help of the experts (Albrecht 1995:45-48). In addition, the concept of a themed show developed in 1985 (Albrecht 1995:51).

In 1993, Binder decided to focus exclusively as producer/director (Albrecht 1995:48). The Big Apple Circus continues to thrive today, although they mainly tour on the East coast. Binder would not have been able to create the Big Apple Circus without the help of *Nouveau Cirque de Paris*, Circus Gruss, Circus Knie, Circus Schumann, and many others (Rushing 2000:10). The Big Apple Circus was truly of first New American Circus.

Similar to the Pickle Family Circus and the Big Apple Circus, the foundation of the French Canadian Cirque du Soleil is based on street performing.

Guy Laliberté, founder of Cirque du Soleil, greatly enjoyed the art of street performance learning several skills, such as juggling, fire breathing, and stilt walking (Albrecht 1995:68). Throughout Laliberté's street performing years, he had a partner by the name of Gilles Ste.-Croix, who desired to establish a stilt-walking company (Albrecht 1995:69).

In 1980, Ste.-Croix received some funding for his stilt-walking troupe, and named it Les Échassiers. By 1982, Ste.-Croix and Laliberté created a summer festival located in Baie St. Paul called La Fête Foraine, which ran for two years (Albrecht 1995:70, Drake *et al.* 1993:24). The festival involved workshops of a variety of acts throughout the week and then a performance on the weekends (Albrecht 1995:70). In addition to Les Échassiers, other companies were also present displaying such skills as juggling, trampoline, and unicycling (Drake *et al.* 1993:24).

In 1983, Laliberté asked the Canadian government to fund a small troupe of street performers, who would tour throughout Quebec.

Although, Laliberté was denied funding, the Canadian government would assist if he developed a detailed plan.

As a result, Laliberté created a new circus entitled Cirque du Soleil, received governmental funding, and toured Quebec for the first year in a festival-type atmosphere, rather than in a tent (Albrecht 1995:71-72). In addition, Laliberté spent a great deal of time examining European circus, similar to Burgess, Pisoni, and Binder and Christensen, including Circus Gruss, Circus Knie, and Circus Roncalli. Each of these circuses greatly influenced and inspired Laliberté to reconfigure Cirque du Soleil (Albrecht 1995:73).

With the assistance of Guy Caron, founder of the Canadian National Circus School, and Ste.-Croix, Laliberté went into the second season without government funding. Caron was the artistic director, while Laliberté was the businessman and Ste.-Croix was the creative director (Albrecht 1995:72, 74). The new show began to tour in 1985, including Niagara Falls and Toronto, and the season ended with a \$750,000 deficit. However, other than the deficit, the show succeeded in gaining public approval and critical acclaim. Consequently, the Canadian government decided to fund Cirque du Soleil, but they first refinanced the entire operation.

The 1987 season began without a debt, and Cirque du Soleil made its' first appearance in the United States in Los Angeles California. If the show failed, Laliberté would have to sell the tent in order to get the performers back home.

Fortunately, the show was a huge success, and as a result, Cirque du Soleil has gained popularity throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia in recent years (Albrecht 1995:75).

Cirque du Soleil has been incredibly successful. The first complete show was *Le Cirque Réinventé* followed by *Nouvelle Éxperience*.

However, currently there are eight Cirque du Soleil shows, five of which are touring throughout the world. *Saltimbanco* is presently in Spain with a European tour. *Quidam* is touring throughout Asia. Three Cirque du Soleil shows are touring the United States: *Dralion*, *Alegria*, and in it's first season *Varekai*. In addition, there are three permanent shows in the United States, two in Las Vegas Nevada: *Mystère* and "*O*"; and the other in Orlando Florida at the Walt Disney World Resort: *La Nouba* (Cirque du Soleil website). Additional examples of the New American Circus are Cirque Eloize, Cirque Archaos, and Cirque Ingenieux.

Stylistic Variations between Traditional and New

The history of the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus are very different, which may have influenced the different styles and production designs. This section will discuss definitions of both the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus. In addition, particular stylistic areas within each circus will be examined, including the atmosphere, the presentation of the show, audience participation, theme, music, lighting, costumes/wardrobe, and the cost/commercialization.

To begin with, it is very difficult to define the term circus, as well as Traditional American Circus and New American Circus.

Therefore, the only way to define each one is by examining characteristics unique to the particular type. The term circus, which is Latin word meaning 'round,' has a variety of definitions (Murray 1955:42). Marcello Truzzi defines the circus as "a traveling and organized display of animals and skilled performances within one or more circular stages known as "rings" before an audience encircling these activities" (Stoddard 2000:3). However, this definition excludes some modern performances without animals, which people continue to call a circus.

Consequently, a circus can be defined by specific characteristics, such as a ring, an audience, sometimes animals, and the demonstration of uncommon, and often dangerous, skills (Stoddard 2000:3-4).

The Traditional American Circus will also be defined by a set of common characteristics. The Traditional American Circus is defined as a "show made up of both ring acts and menagerie under a tent" (Murray 1955:129).

As previously mentioned, this type of circus consists of a three or more ring circus (although that is not always the case), with no underlying theme, and a performance based on spectacle (Albrecht 1995:50, 224, Carmeli 1987:762, Davis 2002:81, Rushing 2000:17, 23, Stoddard 2000:24, 41).

In contrast, the New American Circus is focused on one ring themed show, with performances concerned about the artistry of the performer, rather than the difficulty of a trick (Albrecht 1995:29, 50-52, 77-85, 224, Bouissac 1989:6, Rushing 2000:17, 23, Stoddard 2000:28). Furthermore, the new circus is characterized by "intimacy, artistry, attention to skill, and a feeling of ensemble (Albrecht 1995:7). In a sense, the circus, similar to other art forms, could enrich the lives of individuals as well as uplift their spirit (Albrecht 1995:8).

Another defining characteristic between the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus lies in the interactions between members of the circus. Within traditional circuses, there tends to be "class distinctions, hierarchical segregation, functional division of labour, and a proud concern for genealogies" (Bouissac 1989:7).

In other words, the concept of a family owning and operating a circus is present, as well as generations of performer's families.

For example, a fourth generation performer will receive more respect and have more control than a first generation performer (Bouissac 1989:7).

On the other hand, the New American Circus consists of "groups, communes, bands whose members belong to the same generation (Bouissac 1989:6).

Furthermore, there are no older generations who control certain aspects of the production. To explain, cooperation among members is key to the success of the show. This is further imbedded based on the fact that individuals were not born into the circus; rather they choose to be in the circus. As a result, this decision has a lasting effect on every feature of the show, ranging from artistic performance to driving a truck to the next city.

The traditional circus also has cooperation among the members, however it is more rigid and structured; a person's type of job is influenced on their rank within the group (Bouissac 1989:7.)

Another characteristic of the Traditional American Circus is that the audience consists of a large number of children of every age, whereas the New American Circus is composed of mainly adults and very few children (Davis 2002:34-35, Albrecht 1995:11).

P.T. Barnum was responsible for the increase of children at circuses as the circus prior to 1880s was mainly for adults (Davis 2002:34).

Atmosphere is also a characteristic of the circus. In the traditional circus, the atmosphere can be considered

the midway, which is the area with concessions, novelties, frequently a petting zoo, elephant rides, and occasionally small carnival-type rides.

People usually wander around this section prior to entering the tent for the show. The tent is almost always white canvas and rectangular; the length depends on the number of rings. The seats for the audience are long benches. (Davis 2002:3)

However, the New American Circus has an entirely different atmosphere. Cirque du Soleil will be used to describe this atmosphere. Their tent is vinyl with a blue and yellow striped roof and blue sidewalls. People enter the tent from a staircase and sometimes a clown will show the person to their seat. The inside of the tent "is a solid blue and ... it is illuminated by theatrical lighting instruments that make the vinyl seem to glow" (Albrecht 1995:78).

In addition, fog machines fill the ceiling of tent almost causing the top to disappear. Similar to the general atmosphere, the atmosphere at the beginning of a new act is mysterious, such that characters are established and a context is created for the proceeding performance. The purpose of all of these effects is to transport the audience into another world and have a magical experience (Albrecht 1995:78-79, 86).

Another characteristic it is quite different between the traditional circus and the new circus is in the presentation of performers and acts during the show. In the Traditional American Circus, more than one act can be presented because there is more than one ring. For example, three acts can occur simultaneously, such as swinging trapeze, aerial silk, and aerial strap (Albrecht 1995:50). Although each act is an aerial act, there is no connection between the three.

In a sense, it is three independent acts, which occur at the same time (July 2002).

Furthermore, anthropologist Yoram S. Carmeli suggests that the acts throughout the entire circus are independent of one another.

To explain, "a circus show can be carried on when some parts are missing; it can be decomposed and its acts attached to other shows" (Carmeli 1987:762).

In other words, if an act cannot perform in a show, it does not cause much disruption because there is no connection to other acts (Carmeli 1987:762).

Additionally, some critics have the traditional circus believe it is an "...anthology of predictable numbers" (Krajewski 1990:20) as well as "routines which inevitably climaxed in bangs" (McFerrin 1991:9).

To contrast with the traditional circus, the New American Circus presents their acts as an interconnected series of short stories encompassed in a larger story (Albrecht 1995:29). Unlike the traditional, the new circus cannot simply add and remove acts at will.

Rather, the entire show is organized and set in a particular order in which changes would disrupt the continuity of the whole performance.

Therefore, Ernest Albrecht proposes that "each act is cumulative rather than sporadic. Each act builds on the effect created by the one before" (Albrecht 1995:109). This type of presentation is contrary to the traditional circus where every act must "start anew to establish itself and make an impact" (Albrecht 1995:109).

Besides the different types of atmospheres and presentations between the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus, the extent of audience participation varies as well. Traditionally, the audience, for the most part, only watches the performance.

Occasionally, a clown act may pull someone from the audience, but for the most they are just spectators.

However, the performers will style directly towards the audience and may even look them in the eye (Stephen Interview, Amy Interview).

On the contrary, the New American Circus has more audience participation in the sense of hassling the audience prior to the beginning of the show.

For example, a seemingly helpful clown shows a group of guests to their seats. However, the clown has led

the guests in the complete wrong direction, and makes fun of the guests' inability of find the correct seats. Another example is when a clown will come up to an audience member and perhaps rub the head of a bald man; thereby embarrassing and ridiculing the guest (July 2002). For a more in-depth example, "audience participation is closer to an involving ritual than a mere representation" because "life-threatening situations are actually, not just symbolically, overcome" (Bouissac 1989:9).

Although people may be offended by these situations, people must realize that this type of behavior is common.

In addition, in contrast to traditional circuses, the performers of new circuses do not style directly to the audience because that would be out of the character that they are playing.

One of the most distinctive differences is that the Traditional American Circus does not use a theme, whereas the New American Circus does use a theme.

As previously mentioned, the acts of the traditional circus are independent of each other, and consequently, there is no theme to carry through the course of the show (Albrecht 1995:109, Carmeli 1987:672). The new circus, on the other hand, has a "story line, a thread ... to tie together all the individual stories told in the various acts" (Albrecht 1995:77).

As a result of the theme, other elements of style develop, such as facial expressions and gestures, which are essential to the story being told.

Another aspect of the theme is the extensive degree of choreography, which every single movement, gesture, expression is carefully placed within the routine (Albrecht 1995:86).

The next issue of style variation lies in the use of music throughout the entire performance. In the past, the traditional circus had orchestras and brass bands to play the music. These orchestras and bands tended to be relatively large, and popular, frequently playing prior to show time as well as after the show during the concert, which was basically a variety show (Chindahl 1959:211). Circus bands characteristically played marches, fanfares, and operatic selections (Davis 2002:5). Routines were not necessarily choreographed to the music, however, musical cues were used for the entrance of the performers of a particular act (Davis 2002:51).

Currently, traditional circuses use cassette tapes or compact discs, which play similar marches and fanfares.

Conversely, the New American Circus had taken a different approach to music. More often than not, the new circus has a band, similar to the traditional circus.

However, the key point is that the New American Circus specifically writes the music for the show (Albrecht 1995:28). It is unique to each show and to each act. Furthermore, the music is "carefully selected and composed; ... the action is even edited to fit the music" (Interview form Albrecht's book page 28).

In other words, the music is often composed first, and then the act is choreographed. Also, the music sets the mood of the act, as well as the show. It can influence the medium for emotions and ideas (Drake *et al.* 1993:28) Therefore, Guy Caron, of Cirque du Soleil, believes that "in the movement you see the music and in the music you hear the movement" (Albrecht 1995:77). Overall, in the traditional circus there is in no connection between the act and the music, whereas in the new circus, there is a strong connection between the act and the music.

In addition to themes and music, lighting is another characteristic, which has some differences between the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus. In the traditional circus, lighting is not very significant. Since the tent is typically white in color, sunlight can shine through creating natural light. In order to focus on a particular act or acts, spotlights are used as well as more directed lights frequently located on a tripod-type stand and are mobile. Sometimes there are colored lights, but most often the lights are white. (May 2002)

Whereas the traditional circus does not put much emphasis on lighting, the new circus is just the opposite. Lighting plays a very large role in creating the atmosphere, and carrying the theme. Most new circuses have a complex lighting design, which as acts change; the lighting can cause numerous moods. Therefore, a large variety of color is used in order to create a specific atmosphere. Furthermore, some new circuses use "a lighting system equaling that of a Broadway show" (Albrecht 1995:66). As a result, the dramatic theatrical lighting causes the tent to almost be iridescent and an entirely different world (Albrecht 1995:66)

The last characteristic to be discussed between the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus is the cost and commercialization.

The price for admission into a Traditional American Circus show is on average ten dollars, and entrance into the mid-way is free.

In contrast, an average admission price for a New American Circus show is seventy dollars for a Cirque du Soleil show and about twenty dollars for a Big Apple show. It is clear that new circus admission prices are higher than traditional circuses.

In addition, the extent of commercialization and consumption is also different in traditional and new circuses. A few of the major aspects of American culture is bigger, better, and faster. The Traditional American Circus is no exception with "its huge canvas enclosure of rings and stages, a distinctly American cultural form [who] departed sharply from its intimate one-ring European antecedents" (Davis 2002:24). As a result, the circus could capitalize from the huge tent by more and more people coming, selling food, drink, and novelties.

In addition, in the midway having elephant and camel rides, a petting zoo, and so on all at an extra cost. Although these costs were for the most part inexpensive, they can add up quickly.

In contrast, one of the reasons the New American Circus was established was to rid society of the consumption aspect of circus.

In other words, they desired a show where the artistry of the performance is emphasized. Consequently, little toys, cotton candy, and the like could not be present in the new circuses, as it would detract from their entire mission.

Furthermore, commercialism caused people to no longer take circus serious as an art form, which explains why new circuses are so opposed to it (Albrecht 1995:4).

However, in recent years, Cirque du Soleil seems to have fallen prey to conspicuous consumption by having very expensive tickets, and expansive clothing, music, and other objects for sale before and after each performance.

The reason everything is so expansive is because they know that people will keep coming back based on the unforgettable performance (July 2002).

Data and Analysis

This following section comprises the dialogue that occurred from the interviews that were conducted via the Internet, and the resultant concepts that were identified between the New American and Traditional American circuses.

First, we may discuss some of the questions poised in interviews conducted with traditional American circus performers.

Anne, a veteran performer with several traditional American circuses, gives her response to the following question (From here forward, the interviewer will be noted by the letter L.):

L: *Please list some words that come to mind when you think about the circus.*

A: Magic, entertainment, excitement, elephants, aerialists, laughter, clapping, mysterious, travel.

As shown, Anne specified several elements of traditional American circus, such as the presence of animals, the travel, and the "magic" of the circus.

She also recognized a specific type of interaction between the audience and the performer, a topic that will be discussed later in this paper.

When the same question was posed to Stephen, a sixteen-year veteran/performer for several traditional American circuses, he provided the following list:

S:

Flying trapeze, juggling, showing off, pretty girls, leotard, cotton candy, big top, making money.

It may be noted that Stephen mentions three distinct characteristics that may be attributed to Traditional American Circus; cotton candy, big top, and showing off. These three elements are displayed again several times during the interviews when describing the Traditional American Circus.

Some New American Circus performers were asked the same question. John, a 25-year-old comedic acrobat from New York, gives his input:

J: Daring, focus, discipline, humor, imagination, theater, humanly impossible.

Denise, a thirty-six year old performer/instructor from Montreal, also had much to contribute:

D: Colors, acrobats, juggling, clowns, music, freedom, family, danger, tent, gypsy.

Note that both John and Denise tend to focus on the individual aspects of the circus. Denise does mention family as another aspect of circus, however. This causes an interesting dilemma: Do New American Circus performers really consider their occupation a circus or a play? Some may identify circus as being just Traditional American, while New American is simply theatre (Stoddart 2000:28). Here, however, Denise uses the term "family" because her family is the circus, as we shall see when she is posed her next question.

When we look at non-performers and their description of the circus, we find some unique characteristics. For example, when Nancy, a fifty-year-old woman from Chicago was asked to list some words that come to mind when she thought of the circus, she had the following to offer:

N: Clown, trapeze, elephant, cotton candy, tiger.

All of Nancy's responses may be used to describe traditional American Circuses, particularly the presence of animals.

Carrie, a twenty-two year old from Chicago, also mentions what comes to mind when she thinks about the circus:

C: Clowns, acrobatics, circus tent.

Carrie's response did not seem to fit directly to either the New American or the Traditional American circus. Marc, a 54 year old from Chicago, had similar trends in his response:

M: Color, pageantry, tigers, parade, clowns, big top

Marc notes the use of animals and parade, two common elements of the Traditional American Circus.

Finally, when Jessica was asked for her input, she listed the following:

J:

Trapeze, clowns, Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey, elephants, peanuts, red and yellow tent, tightwire, Dumbo, cotton candy, my dad and me, Gunther Gable Williams.

Jessica provided not only consistent characteristics of Traditional American Circus, but also included specific icons and idols within the business.

As we have seen, when people are asked to list specific words that come to mind when they think about the circus, they have very diametrically opposed sentiments between them, with the possible exception of Carrie. These sentiments or categories lie in the two distinct groups, the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus

The respondents that fall under the Traditional American Circus commonly used words, such as magic, entertainment, elephants, laughter, clapping, travel, showing off, cotton candy, big top, clown, parade. Those words that had multiple responses are elephant, cotton candy, clown, and big top. The respondents that fall under the New American Circus frequently use words such as focus, discipline, music, freedom, theatre, and imagination. The only words that overlapped between both types of circus are big top or tent and clown.

It may be that if the same question were asked to non-circus performers from Canada, specifically in and around Canada, answers might be related more to the New American Circus. This and the subsequent questions show a distinct trend in thought by the respondents between the Traditional and New Circus.

The next set of questions asked about more specific characteristics of the circus. John provided the following dialogue:

L: *What do you enjoy about the circus? What do you dislike?*

J:

Working with people and apparatuses that require many hours of practice in order to make something seemingly impossible look as easy as walking down the street. I enjoy clowning that comments up on hierarchical relationships between people and the world in an exaggerated anarchic fashion.

L: *In your opinion, what characteristics make a good/bad circus?*

J: Good:

Uses metaphors within the acts to comment on everyday reality, excellent technique, excellent integration of music, theater, dance, ensemble performances with solo acts interspersed.

Makes you think about your own reality in a new way. Has technical tricks that cause your brain to wonder how what you saw was even possible. Has performers who are sexy because of their vulnerability.

Bad:

When more emphasis is put on selling over-priced plastic shit during intermission than the actual show itself.

The sexist bull-shit, subservient roles for women in an act and cheesy hero without a shirt on for the men.

When you can see that the performers are putting on a fake smile and doing it for a paycheck, probably because their management doesn't have their interests in mind.

As John illustrated, he has very specific tastes and opinions for what is appropriate for circuses. He mentions that he enjoys clowning that has a reflexive nature. In other words, clowning that places emphasis in reaction to social circumstances.

John also cites several characteristics that are used in the New American Circus, such as "excellent integration of music, theater, dance, ensemble performances with solo acts interspersed" (John Interview). He may feel that the New American Circus offers a greater opportunity to provide commentary on life, as compared to Traditional American Circus, which he may feel offers only rudimentary dialogue between the performer and the audience.

Bouissac (1987:9) describes the interaction within the New American Circus between the performer and the audience as a ritual. Both groups overcome what appear to be impossible obstacles; they are in this together. The performer actually completes the trick, while the audience observes the language of the performer, through the "costumes and the music, the demeanor and the facial expressions [which will suggest] the ultimate mood of the act [such as] playful, triumphant, amorous or tragic" (Bouissac 1987:9). In other words, there is an emotional relationship between the audience and performer.

Denise offered additional insight when asked the following questions:

L: *What do you enjoy about the circus? What do you dislike?*

D:

Working in it; It is a great way to travel, it has a nice family feeling, it's wonderful to meet and work with other performers. Watching; it's magical, highly skilled acts that blows me away, the creativity. I don't like when circuses uses the cheap and easy to entertain. Circuses have no limits to creativity, which should be exploited. I rarely like the clowns, and no animals should be used. I dislike cheesy circus bands.... basically traditional circuses.

L: *In your opinion what characteristics make a good/bad circus?*

D:

A good circus would be one that keeps its passion for the arts, that keeps exploring. A bad circus would be one that is closed minded doesn't expand ones horizon, that keeps the same show because it works financially.

Denise outlines her feelings about the circus in a fashion similar to Johns'. She felt that creativity, artistry, and exploration were key factors that she admires and likes in a circus. Also, she notes specifically that animals and "cheesy circus bands" should not be used in a circus atmosphere, a trait of the Traditional American Circus.

Stephen was asked the same questions...

L: *What characteristics make a good or bad circus? And similarly, a good/bad performer?*

S:

I think the best performance is when the performance deals directly with the audience, both with the audience participation as well as when you have a nice trick, you don't just put your arms out and go clap "hey" but you actually look at some of the audience in the eye and get them to smile directly at you and you can feel better about that. And of course, the quality of the act is in touch with the quality of the show. If you have a flying trapeze act that does a triple, it's going to look better that a flying trapeze act that can't even do a double. A lot have it has to do with your direct quality of attention with the audience. A bad show is one that's disorganized, is not ready to go, cannot deal with unusual happenings, somebody sprains an ankle, and you don't know how to deal with it, that kind of thing.

Stephen emphasizes the relationship to the audience as a key factor in a good circus performance, and also notes that each act must be in tune with the rest of the show. Response from the audience is necessary in this interaction. Organization within the circus also seems to be of great importance to Stephen.

Anne also had much to say on the topic:

L: *What do you enjoy about the circus? What do you dislike?*

A: I enjoy performing. I enjoy listening to the kids talk about their favorite part of the circus. I loved educating people about the circus animals.

The thing that I dislike most about the circus is dealing with animal rights activists. I lived and traveled with elephants and tigers for about 3 years. I tried to take the opportunity to try to educate people about REALLY [*emphasis is Anne's*] went on "behind the scenes". I tried to explain to people that these animals were like part of our family and that their needs came before ours.

The most frustrating thing about dealing with the activists was that they had their minds made up before they even came to the circus. I found it increasingly difficult to deal with such 'closed minded' individuals.

L: *In your opinion what characteristics make a good/bad circus?*

A: I think that the performance of the ringmaster determines if a show is successful or not. I believe that the ringmaster has one of the most important jobs. This person must keep the flow of the show going and keep the audience on the edge of their seats wanting more. He\she must be aware of everything that is going on around them. They must detect problems with animal or human performers, be aware of equipment and rigging issues while also keeping a smile on their face so that the audience does not pick up on any problems. If the ringmaster can make anything seem like 'part of the show' then they have done a fabulous job.

Anne emphasizes the importance of organization and flexibility as key factors in the circus. She ardently defends the use of animals and the importance of animals in the circus. Also, she notes that the ringmaster has an intrinsic role in the circus to keep the organization and flexibility of the circus flowing.

It is interesting to note that the New American Circus performers do not mention the audience in their descriptions, whereas the Traditional American Circus performers frequently mention the audience and intentionally perform to the audience.

This idea of direct interaction with the audience is a common feeling in traditional circuses. In addition, this concept with the audience extends the idea that the new circuses are more individualistic caring more about how they feel during the performance, rather than how the audience feels, as with traditional circuses. This idea opens up further discussion of how culture influences a performer.

Non-performers were asked similar questions regarding their likes and dislikes of the circus. Some of the responses showed to be favorable to either the New American Circus or Traditional American Circus. Most of the responses also give insight to the performer audience relationship. Nancy gives her input:

L: *What, if any, characteristics about the circus did you enjoy? Dislike?*

N:

I enjoy acrobatics and trapeze acts very much, although sometimes I close my eyes when it looks dangerous!

L: *What do you feel are some of the characteristics of a good circus? a bad circus? Why?*

N:

Funny clowns are a definite plus...they keep everyone entertained, especially between larger acts. A good Ringleader is also important. Animal trainers and trapeze acts are amazing.

Nancy offers a very similar opinion to Anne when discussing the likes and dislikes of the circus. Nancy identifies the impression of danger and skill (through her reaction of closing her eyes), as well as the importance of animals and a ringmaster. Carrie divulges somewhat different tastes...

- L: *What, if any, characteristics about the circus did you enjoy? Dislike?*
- C: I enjoy the amazing acts that the acrobats do. Any time you can see something that is out of the ordinary it reminds you of the wonderful things human beings are capable of accomplishing.
- L: *What do you feel are some of the characteristics of a good circus? A bad circus? Why?*
- C: A good circus contains a wide variety of acts. These acts contain the features I have described above.
A bad circus focuses more on spectacle than on the individual talents of people united.

Carrie notes that the circus can be a place of amazement through the ability of the performers to accomplish a variety of astonishing feats.

She identifies the pleasure of seeing things "out of the ordinary," which is a characteristic of spectacle. Jessica offered similar preferences:

- L: *What, if any, characteristics about the circus did you enjoy? Dislike?*
- J:
I like most everything about the circus! Clowns are probably not my fave, but not because I am scared of them, just because I like the physical stunt work better - going back to the dancer in me.
- L: *What do you feel are some of the characteristics of a good circus? a bad circus? Why?*
- J: It's gotta have continuity - a common theme to take the audience through - BUT [*emphasis is Jessica's*] only if it's strong. I would rather have a bunch of random acts than acts that try too hard to go back to the theme. However, when the theme is strong - it makes it that much more enjoyable for the audience.

Jessica seems to like the acrobatic side of the circus, but also notes that an overall theme and organization is important. Marc had similar likes as Jessica:

- L: *What, if any, characteristics about the circus did you enjoy? Dislike?*
- M: I was impressed by the apparent joy that the circus performers showed in their work. They really seemed to enjoy performing.
The magical aura created by the props and costuming were a wonderful relief from the daily grind. I didn't particularly care for small animal acts (dogs, chimps, etc.)
- L: *What do you feel are some of the characteristics of a good circus? a bad circus? Why?*
- M: High quality (and highly maintained) costumes and props. A shabby, non-professional looking circus loses all of its magic, no matter how good the acts may be.

Marc emphasizes the importance of the appearance of the circus performers and props as key to a good circus. Also, Marc notes the performers' joy in their work. He also does not seem to like animal acts.

Two trends seem to develop from this analysis, thus far. The first one deals with those in favor of the Traditional American Circus, both the performer and non-performer tend to identify the importance of the audience and performer interaction.

The other trend refers to those individuals favoring the New American Circus by identifying the theme and the individualistic nature of the show as important. These trends reflect behavior through their conceptualization of the circus.

Next, respondents were asked about their opinion about circuses place in our culture. Although the intent was not to find specific anthropological reasons or attributes, some evidence of specific trends pertinent to this thesis were given. John gave a great deal of effort forming his opinion to this question:

L: *What is your opinion of circus's place in our culture?*

J: It's potentially a total integration of all the performing arts: Dance, acrobatics, Music, Acting, scenic design. It's not nearly funded enough in the United States. Would like to see a new funding source instituted by Congress to specifically establish a national circus school in the United States and to fund new circus companies like what is done in Quebec. Quebec is now world-famous for exporting it's circuses and people around the world love Quebec. The United States in these times of animosity towards it should think about exporting world-class circuses as opposed to dropping bombs on people in other countries. In the U.S. specifically the circus has been debased over the years as an art form by negative association with commercial enterprises disguised as circuses a la Barnum. But I think after you experience great circus it's hard to sit through an entire ballet, an opera, a play, a modern dance work because circus can be all of these things combined.

John shows his distaste for Traditional American Circus through emphasizing what he believes are the benefits of the New American Circus, such as dance, music, and acting. He appreciates the combination of a variety of art forms to develop a whole circus.

Denise discusses a few of her opinions about circuses place in our culture:

L: *What is your opinion about circus' place in our culture?*

D: It's a safe and legal outlet for the freaks of society, ha! Actually it is an interesting question, because being from Quebec peoples view of the circus are very different. It is very prestigious to work in one. But other countries often view it as a hard way to make a living, which is often the case.

Denise identifies the differences between cultures and countries regarding their view towards circus performing.

This may be similar to the views between the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus.

Stephen gives his insight:

L: *What is your opinion on circus's place in our culture?*

S:

I think, circus by itself doesn't have a single place, but with regards to performance art, and I'm not talking about some of the weird performance art that's out there, I suppose I'm kind of

qualifying it like that, but with actors, that kind of stuff, mimes, there is a lot of different kinds of performing arts and people need to be entertained and even in this culture of TV, movies, and the Internet, I think a lot of people need to see live entertainment and the circus just fits in great there.

Stephen notes the necessity for performing arts, including the circus and other live entertainment, but does not identify that they need to meet or come together in a single production. He separates circus from other live entertainment, but justifies all the activity as necessary. Anne offers similar feelings:

L: *What is your opinion about circus' place in our culture?*

A: I think that this is one of our greatest American traditions. Our culture is lacking in 'live' forms entertainment that people of all ages can enjoy together. The circus provides this to people in our culture.

Anne also notes the necessity of live entertainment that "all ages can enjoy." Her description is in tune with characteristics of Traditional American Circus.

Non-performers also identify differing views on the place of circus in our culture. Here, Nancy gives her input:

L: *What is your opinion on circus' place in culture?*

N: We all need entertainment, especially in our hectic lifestyle. Television is boring, going to movies is great, but live performances really take you away from your every-day life for awhile.
And a circus is such a different, more whimsical type of performance...it's really a "great escape."

She also identifies her need for live entertainment, and circus as a method to escape from everyday life. Jessica offers her insight:

L: *What is your opinion on circus' place in culture?*

J:
I think it holds a strong place in American culture, and perhaps an even stronger place in European culture, although I think that the two are quite different. I hope the circus never dies out... that would be a sad day. I think often times circuses get a bum rap, and the people involved take a beating, and not nearly enough credit for all the hard work they put into each and every show.

Jessica does not signify why she thinks the circus holds a strong place in American culture, but she does identify the difference and difficulty between circuses. Marc also offers his response:

L: *What is your opinion on circus' place in culture?*

M: It is a very valuable tradition.
Live excitement is so important in a world where children see everything on a television screen.

Marc notes, like others, the importance of live entertainment in contrast to television. He observes the

importance of this tradition.

Live entertainment is shown to be key to the consumption of spectacle both in the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus.

In order to more fully understand what the performers and audience felt while they are at the circus, two questions in particular were asked; "what is the most lasting impression you experience as a part of the circus/while at the circus?" and "what keeps you performing/coming back to the circus?". John offers his description:

L: *What was the most lasting impression you experience as a part of the circus?*

J:

The feeling of testing a show out for the first time in front of an audience – the energy of an audience helps you figure out who you are and why it is you do what you do on stage.

L: *What keeps you performing?*

J:

The thrill of learning more about myself through my work and the thrill of performing in front of an audience and the adrenaline rushing through my body.

John, as a circus performer, appreciates the reaction of the audience to his performance, but also identifies more personal, perhaps individualistic, goals and objectives in addition to the audience/performer interaction. Denise offers more insight into the personal nature of the circus:

L: *What was the most lasting impression you experience as a part of the circus?*

D: The good and bads of living in a large group all the time, and the hard work.

L: *What keeps you performing?*

D:

Expressing my creativity. Basically, I never wanted grow up, I didn't want to live looking forward to 2 days in a week... the weekend. I feel I accomplished it by performing, I love every aspect of it, the training, devising a new act, making the promotional package, selling it and waiting for a new gig.

Denise does not address the audience per se; she simply identifies the personal life of performing, including the people and the effort in organizing the performance. Stephen emphasizes the group experience of circus people:

L: *What is the most lasting impression you have experienced as part of the circus?*

S:

I think it's amazing how circus people, even though their life is completely different from everyone else, to them it's a completely normal life. It's a daily routine. It happens everyday and even though people, like town people think it's exceptional, it's just a normal day that just happens every single day in their lives and so there is nothing exceptional about it.

L: *What keeps you performing?*

S: I have no other skills. Ha Ha!. No, it's what I do. The camaraderie, I've made a lot of friends. It's kind of a private club and I like it.

Stephen does not address the audience in this dialogue, but more the family aspect and the friend that he has made keep him in the business. Anne discusses her reasons:

L: *What was the most lasting impression you experience as a part of the circus?*

A: My favorite thing about my time in the circus was working with the elephants. Life with them gave me experiences and memories that I will never forget.

L: *What keeps you performing?*

A: The magic of the circus is what keeps me performing!!!

Anne also identifies the friendships she made while in the circus, particularly with the elephants. When non-performers were asked similar questions, they sighted several unique characteristics that they enjoyed. First, Nancy describes her experiences:

L: *What was the most lasting impression you experience while at a circus?*

N: It's hard to believe what the performers can do! Such as high-wire, trapeze, and animal training.

L: *What features of a circus keep you coming back? from going again?*

N: Probably the same as mentioned above. I used to go back to the Ringling Circus over and over to see Gunther Gebel Williams and his animals, too. I wouldn't go back again if the show was too long.

Nancy seems to really enjoy the awe and spectacle of the circus, particularly the animals. Carrie, on the other hand, had different experiences:

L: *What was the most lasting impression you experience while at a circus?*

C: The collaborative effort that went into the show. Each act took time, dedication, and a lot of hard work. These are the qualities that stand out the most to me.

L: *What features of a circus keep you coming back? from going again?*

C:
When a circus can both make me laugh and keep me in awe of the human body, I'll go back again. However, I will not go back to a circus where the center of the show focuses on animals that are being tamed (or possibly mistreated) or on motorcycle acts or the like.

Carrie seems to appreciate more the dedication and sacrifice of human performance within the circus and less on the animal and traditional circus acts. Jessica offers her view:

L: *What was the most lasting impression you experience while at a circus?*

J: Being scared out of my mind when Lisa does stuff high in the air without ropes and things... also, the gymwheels on fire.

L: *What features of a circus keep you coming back? from going again?*

J:

Lisa keeps me coming to gamma phi, tradition would keep me going to others...poor treatment of animals would keep me from ever going again.

Jessica seems to appreciate human dedication and performance along with the tradition of the circus. Finally, Marc gives his input:

L: *What was the most lasting impression you experience while at a circus?*

M: The feel of the ensemble parades.

L: *What features of a circus keep you coming back? from going again?*

M: Exciting acts, grandeur, fun, happy kids.

Marc, although brief, emphasizes traditional aspects of the circus and the happiness present in Traditional American Circus.

It appears that spectacle consumption keeps them coming back to the circus. In other words, the audience's need to see extreme forms of human skill cause them to keep returning. Furthermore, their conceptualization of what is extraordinary feeds their need to see these two types of circuses. Some view the necessary components of theatre and dance, which is the new circus, while others are drawn by danger and thrill, which is the traditional circus.

The next question asked of the respondents was quite straightforward, asking them to describe what they felt were some differences in some of the circuses they have seen. John offers his opinion:

L: *Please describe some differences in circuses you have been a part of or seen.*

J: Why do you think these differences exist? I've only been a part of 2 circus productions and they both fall under the nebulous category of 'New Circus' (which is open to interpretation, really) which means that there is an emphasis on theater, dance, music, character, plot, visual metaphors integrated into the technique of the individual or group acts.

Denise gives her input:

L: *Please describe some differences in circuses you have been a part of or seen. Why do you think these differences exist?*

D: One relies on tradition and things that work and the other one explores and takes risks.

Stephen offers his opinion:

L: *What is your opinion about some of the French Canadian Circus that have appeared on the scene in recent times, say the past twenty years?*

S: I think they have great acts. I think they are closer to a theatre production than a circus. I don't think that's bad.
I think just like any other circus, they have good management and bad management that you can, some are great and you love hanging out with and some just treat you like you're jerks, that's okay, you know that happens everywhere in life, so you just have to ignore it, but I hope it doesn't take over from the great American type circus, if they can have their niche and we can have ours I don't think there's any problem.

L: *What do you think the major differences between the two types of circus are?*

S:

Well, obviously animals, the American circus traditionally has animals, that are well taken care for, music is quite different.

Most of the French Canadian ones really don't deal with any type of a ringmaster. It's more of a theatre production with just music and lighting, although they have very talented performers as well.

Stephen identifies his opinion that at some level, certain French Canadian circuses are not circuses at all, but rather theatre. He conceptualizes the New American Circus differently, perhaps not as spectacle at all.

Anne gives her interpretation:

L: *Please describe some differences in circuses you have been a part of or seen. Why do you think these differences exist?*

A:

I think that many differences, that are apparent to me, are due to the facility that a producer chooses to hold his\her circus in.

Some choose buildings, while others choose tents or even 'open air'. I think that these differences exist simply because of the producers' personal preference or the 'tradition' that their 'family show' carries on. Each arena or tent takes on the characteristics of that particular show and the personality of the producer that runs the show. Each is spectacular in its own way and no two are the same.

In terms of the circus performers, they are very much aware of the two types of circuses. John categorizes himself as a participant of the New American Circus by mentioning common features, such as theatre, plot, and visual metaphors.

Similarly, Denise understands one circus stems from tradition, while the other takes more risks. Stephen critiques the New American Circus as being more of a theatre production than a circus. Anne, however, approached this differently by determining that differences occur because of the producer/director as well as what type of facility the performance takes place.

The non-circus respondents seem to identify the difference between the Traditional and New American Circus, and the following question allow greater insight into their conceptualizations of the two circus types.

Nancy gives her input:

L: *Please describe some of the differences in the circuses you have seen.*

N: I enjoy more "traditional" circuses...as mentioned above. I don't enjoy real unusual circuses as much, like "Cirque du Soleil."

Carrie offers her insight:

L: *Please describe some of the differences in the circuses you have seen.*

C:

I have seen mainstream circuses sponsored by Barnum and Bailey (spelling?) as well as the Shriner Circus. I have also seen the Gamma Phi Circus which I have described above. The GPC, is my favorite.

Marc offers his insight:

L: *Please describe some of the differences in the circuses you have seen.*

M: Some smaller circuses have pathetic looking animals, bad music and ratty costumes. Some circuses have superior (European or Asian) tumblers who seem markedly better than others. I enjoy the larger three ring circuses. Even if you are missing something, three rings at once creates an atmosphere of true excitement.

It appears that the non-performer can distinguish between the traditional and new circus without being aware of it. Nancy prefers a more traditional circus, rather than an unusual circus. On a similar note, Marc makes a distinction between the wealthier circus (superior performers) and the less wealthy circus (poor music and costumes).

It tends to follow that the New American Circus has more money than the Traditional American Circus.

Table 1: Demographics and Circus Preference of Interviewees

	Age	Marital status	Last Level of Education	Birth Country/City	How long Performing	Circus Pref.
John	25	Single	B.A.	USA/NYC	6 mo.	N
Denise	36	Common-law	Some college	Canada/Montreal	10 years	N
Stephen	35	Single	Some college	USA/Milwaukee	17 years	T
Anne	29	Single	B.S.	USA/Kankakee	11 years	T
Nancy	50	Married	Some college	USA/Chicago	-	T
Carrie	22	Single	Some college	USA/Chicago	-	N
Jessica	21	Single	B.S.	USA/Chicago	-	T
Marc	54	Married	High School	USA/Chicago	-	T/N

Table 1 represents the demographics of each interviewee as well as their circus preference. The four circus performers that I interviewed are John, Denise, Stephen, and Anne. John and Denise are performers for the New American Circus, and therefore prefer that type of circus using such descriptive words as theatre, focus, discipline, music and freedom (Denise interview, John interview). Stephen and Anne are performers of the Traditional American Circus, and therefore prefer the traditional circus. Some words that the traditionalists use frequently are cotton candy, showing off, excitement, elephants, laughter, and clapping (Anne interview, Stephen interview). In addition, the performers are all between the ages of 25 and 36. However, a performer's age does not seem to influence the type of circus that they prefer, although, it is a small sample.

It is interesting to note that seventy five percent of the performers are single. Denise appears to be the only exception with a common law marriage.

This unattachment may have resulted from the constant travel from one town to the next. To explain, it is difficult to have a relationship when a person is always on the road, unless the other individual traveled with the show.

Furthermore, both Denise and Stephen have only some college, while John and Anne graduated from college, with a BA and BS respectively.

There seems to be no correlation to the extent of schooling and the type of circus they perform in.

The four non-circus individuals that I interviewed are Nancy, Carrie, Jessica, and Marc. Both Nancy and Jessica enjoy the Traditional American Circus more, based on their descriptions of the circus. These two individuals mentioned animals (elephant and tiger), cotton candy, danger, and ringmaster, which are common characteristics of the traditional circus (Jessica interview, Nancy interview).

Marc has a somewhat confusing response as he falls in between the traditional and the new circuses. First he mentions tigers, parade, three-rings, and big top. However, then he describes the importance of costumes and props as well as the joy of the performers (Marc interview). As a result, Marc seems to have both likes and dislikes with each type of circus.

The last non-circus interviewee, Carrie, tends to use more New American Circus ideas in her descriptions. Words she uses when describing the circus are clowns, acrobatics, and tents. In addition, she feels that the individual talents of the performers are more significant than the spectacle, which is a common new circus notion. She also dislikes motorcycle type acts (daring, death-defying). Although Carrie does mention some traditional characteristics, she mainly uses new circus characteristics in her descriptions.

Some other information gathered in Table 1 deals with the last level of education and marital status. One out of the four interviewees has received a college degree, two have had some college, and the last has had no college education.

In addition, the two older individuals, Marc and Nancy, are both married, whereas Jessica and Carrie are not. Although this may be a consequence of their young age, 21 and 22 respectively.

Table 2: Stylistic Variation of the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus

Characteristics	Traditional American Circus	New American Circus
Family Oriented	Yes	No
Emphasis on the Individual	No	Yes
Menagerie	Yes	No
Use of a Theme	No	Yes
Number of Children in Audience	Majority	Very few
Number of Rings	1, 3, 5	1
Acts	Independent of each other	Strategically placed in the show, connected
Atmosphere	Midway, carnival rides, white canvas tent	Dark colored tents, no midway or carnival rides, theatrical lighting, mysterious, foggy
Music	Fanfare, brass band, marching	Specially composed for show, synthesizers, live vocals
Lighting	Basic, white lights	Computerized lights, colors, lasers
Concessions	Inexpensive toys	Expensive merchandise
Ticket Cost	Low	High

Table 2 lists twelve stylistic characteristics, which are used to compare and contrast the Traditional American Circus and the New American Circus. Further description of each characteristic is located in the Literature Review under the heading of Circus Background and then the subheading Stylistic Variation. The first characteristic deals with whether the show is family oriented. The Traditional American Circus is

family oriented, while the new American Circus is not. The second attribute focuses on the emphasis of the individual, which refers if the performer emphasizes how they feel during the performance, rather than the audience.

The Traditional American Circus does not focus on the individual, whereas the New American Circus does emphasize the individual.

The third feature looks at the presence or absence of a menagerie. The Traditional American Circus has a menagerie, while the New American Circus does not have animals. The use of a theme during the performance is the fourth characteristic. The traditional circus does not use a theme for their entire show. The new circuses, on the other hand, do use a theme throughout the course of the performance. The fifth quality deals with the number of children in the audience. In the Traditional Circus, there are a large number of children who attend the show.

With the New American Circus, the number of children dramatically decreases, to practically none.

The sixth feature is in regards to the number of rings each circus has. The traditional circuses tend to have an average of three, however, some have one and some have five. In contrast, the new circuses all have one ring. The acts during the show are the seventh characteristic. In the Traditional American Circus, acts are independent of each other, whereas in the New American Circus, acts are connected and strategically placed in the show. The eighth attribute looks at the atmosphere of the circus. The atmosphere of the traditional circus is the midway, carnival rides, and the white canvas tent. On the other hand, the atmosphere of the new circus is theatrical, mysterious, and foggy with no midway.

The ninth quality investigates the music played in the performance. The Traditional American Circus tends to have fanfares, and marches, whereas the New American Circus has specially composed music for the show with synthesizers and live vocals. Similar to music, lighting is the tenth characteristic. In traditional circuses there is basic white light. In new circuses there are computerized lights, colors, and lasers. The eleventh attribute deals with concessions sold at the performance. Inexpensive toys are sold at traditional circuses, while expansive merchandise is sold at new circuses. The final feature examines the cost of a ticket, which is low for the Traditional American Circus and high for the New American Circus.

Anthropologist Paul Bouissac constructed seven class, or sub-codes, of circus acts similar to these stylistic differences.

They are linguistic message, either written or oral, the social behavior/skill of the performer, the costume of the performer, accessories/styles, technical behavior/skill of the performer, music, and lighting. There is some overlap of the stylistic variations and Bouissac's seven classes, including family oriented/emphasis on individual and social behavior, atmosphere and accessories/style, music, and lighting. Each of these sub-codes is a part of the Super-code, which is the language of circus. Similarly, the twelve stylistic variations can also be considered sub-codes, and subsequently, the language of circus (Bouissac 1976:15-16).

Furthermore, it is through both the stylistic differences and Bouissac's sub-codes that individuals are able to understand the language of circus.

In other words, "natural language and its stock of descriptive devices do not provide adequate means to construct equivalents of some clown's artifacts and behavior" as well as an acrobat's tricks (Bouissac 1976:68).

As a result, semiotics is the key to comprehending the language of circus, through performers' presentations to the audience (Bouissac 1976:69).

Conclusions

Each interview provided information in the form of linguistics and semiotics to determine certain characteristics of each type of circus.

To reiterate, some of the key features that indicate a traditional circus are animals, tradition, direct audience interaction, audience reaction, children, family, joy, and magic. On the other hand, some of the key attributes that indicate a new circus are theatre, dance, art, music, theme, individualism, social commentary, risk, and creativity.

Therefore, it seems clear that the Traditional American Circus is more family oriented with a carefree environment.

Furthermore, the majority of the non-performers preferred this type of entertainment whether they realized it. The Traditional American Circus is in their culture and they may not be ready or want to change this feeling. Moreover, it is an excellent representation of American culture through ideals, such as bigger is better, exotic animals, and family entertainment.

The family entertainment aspect is significant because in both the past and present, individuals feel a need to be connected to their family, in such in individualistic and chaotic world.

In contrast, the New American Circus is intended for a more adult audience with an abstract, deep environment.

Children cannot understand the abstract concepts with the theme, but adults will understand and enjoy it because they can relate to it. In addition, there is no ringmaster to keep children on track. Consequently, individuals must pay close attention to everything that is occurring, from the fog at the ceiling to the wander creatures on the floor, to the common eerie music.

Also, the show is presented similar to that of a play, and therefore there are no items for sale in the tent. As a result, people must only focus on the story and what is occurring in the ring.

In addition, the language of circus was gathered through the descriptions of each interviewee's attitudes and beliefs of the circus.

However, this was not through written or oral language, but rather semiotics, or the signs of the circus. Therefore, these signs of the circus are visual representations of our culture. In other words, individuals do not have a problem relating to the circus and its occurrences. As a result, circus language is a part of American culture, and an individual is the crux of linguistic/semiotic and cultural knowledge (Shaul and Furbee 1998:145)

The goal of this research was to provide further insight into the language of circus. Paul Bouissac investigated this concept by analyzing the communication that takes place during an act between the performer and the audience.

I took this concept a step further by exploring how this communication, or language, occurs and subsequently how these descriptions suggest the personality of the individual as well as their circus preference. Further research is possible in this topic by delving into such concepts as defragmentation, which is the separation people from community, or how the circus is an escape from reality, which means how the circus allows individuals to forget about their troubles, at least for a while. Lastly, this research has been significant because it is an addition to the growing literature on the American Circus.

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