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Research Methods  
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### Literature Review

Having identified two potential ways that I want to approach my research interest of the circus arts – mapping the field and gaining historical context – I delved deeper into literature that explores both of those methods. Most of the literature centered on the topic of the circus arts, though I branched out to find more information about what mapping the field looks like in different disciplines to be able to apply those principles to the circus.

To gain a better background understanding of circus and how it developed I started with a historical analysis. The first source that I read was Stoddard's *Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation* (2000). This book goes from the inception of what we now know as circus in 18<sup>th</sup> century England through its development in Europe and the United States (with mentions of other countries as well) coming to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this survey, Stoddard covers not only the types of acts that various companies performed, but also the flow of prominence among certain companies or circus families in different eras, and historical influences including the advent of the American railroad (p. 53) or certain 19<sup>th</sup> century theatrical legislation in the United Kingdom that forced circuses to function on shaky legal grounds (p. 73). An interesting aspect of Stoddard's account that I hadn't considered going into this topic was circus's innovation off the stage in administrative aspects of arts management. For example, P.T. Barnum employed good examples of guerrilla marketing "stunts" to get more people to come to his museum including having a man move bricks around on a busy street corner in front of the museum and then

leading the resultant crowd of onlookers into the museum where they would pay for admission to see the resolution of his stunt (which did not exist) (p. 54). Other innovations include circus being “the first American show to be electrically illuminated” (p. 35), among the first to be “involved in early cinema screenings” (p. 27), and pioneering the early iterations of the touring company model of performing arts companies (p. 23). These accounts point to a good area of future research and topic alignment: how the circus’s development paved the way for certain standards in modern arts and arts management.

As far as issues and ethics that this work brings up, the main problem is finding true information. Stoddard points out that circus history is riddled with “romanticised fictions and histories” (p. 1) and says,

All of this makes the circus at once one of the most entertaining and the most frustrating of arts upon which to attempt research, since the memoirs, testimonies and handbills which constitute the clues to its history and development frequently demonstrate enough cavalier indulgence of fancy over fact to make an occasional Gradgrind out of the investigator. (p. 1).

Ethically, there don’t seem to be many issues brought up in this type of research, though she does bring up cultural stereotypes represented in contemporary circus presentations that can be problematic in the modern day (p. 104). This is an important facet of circus performance to keep in mind if my research takes me into the realm of modern performance analysis and study. All in all, though, Stoddard’s exploration of circus history is a great introduction to the topic and her bibliography gives me many sources to draw on for continued research.

For historical analysis, Speaight (1980) covers much of the same subject that Stoddard does, though he comes twenty years earlier, so his scope is not as

expansive and misses more recent developments. Speaight also limits himself in that he defines circus as, “that entertainment of human bodily skills and trained animals that is presented in a ring of approximately 13 metres in diameter, with an audience grouped all round it” (p. 8). Whereas Stoddard follows circus’s development with fewer boundaries and sometimes dips into forms of circus that didn’t happen in the ring, Speaight chose to define his circus in a narrow way. This is a perfectly legitimate choice, but in my pursuit of scanning the field as it is and looking for a modern definition of the circus, this sort of limitation is not something that I would want to imitate. However, limiting himself in such a way did allow him to go more in depth into topics such as specific acts going on in specific times and deeper views of proprietors, their successions and other circus participants. For that, Speaight’s account is a good one for very specific background information like travelling circus wagon sizes and other information like that, which will help inform my research of the modern day.

Because one of my main ideas of what to research about the circus right now is a sort of “mapping the field” project, I looked at other examples of mapping the field both within and outside of the circus. The first project that I looked at was the National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture’s “mapping the field” project from 2014. This project was a great example of what my project could look like because it asked a large variety of relevant questions about media arts organizations’ structure, budget, staff makeup, and primary activities. Their questions were thorough and intentional and the survey was generally well constructed. The drawback of this study, and it is a major one, is that they took it off of their website

after a redesign and I haven't been able to find it anywhere. I have the original citation that I made as well as my notes on it, but beyond that I can't actually find it anymore. This has made me start practicing downloading every source that I can as soon as I find it so that I have other ways to access resources and otherwise backing up my research and sources. Luckily I was using the NAMAC study more as a model rather than as direct information so I didn't lose out on too much from it disappearing.

The NAMAC study presented its findings as an infographic, but I also wanted to see examples of mapping the field that took form as a paper. For that I looked at King's *The Latin American Novel in Translation: Mapping the Field* (1985). I chose this project because it gave a very clear example of mapping the field and covered a topic that I peripherally studied as an undergraduate (having been an English and Spanish double major). King's objective was to map current (at the time) Latin American literature being translated by publishing houses in Britain so that publishers could see how lucrative it is and expand their practices. Something that was helpful about King's study was how clear and forward he was with his definitions. From the beginning, he laid out that he would only focus on novels published in Britain that were available in paperback or would be within the year that were for more general interest, not for the "literary specialist " (p. 123). This was very helpful as a reader because I knew right from the beginning what to look for and what not to look for in the paper. This also indicates to me as a researcher that I should keep my potential boundaries in mind as I research so to not have too wide of a scope both in my own study and in my eventual project. After that

introduction, he went through the novels and novelists country by country noting important themes in the books and biographical information about the authors where relevant. King's work was well organized from beginning to end and made for a good model of a clear mapping the field project that was appropriate in scope.

The final mapping the field project that I looked at was actually about the circus arts. Circus Now's "State of the Circus" survey (2014) sought to profile who all was participating in circus arts. Though some possible responses encompassed administrators and fans, the survey was more geared toward practitioners. In spite of this research being most relevant to my topic, it was also the least helpful in offering a good model of how to scan the field. For this study, they sent out a survey that received 710 responses that included demographic information, education, income, fields of practice (silks, trapeze, etc.), association involvement, and view for the future. The way they asked their questions allowed for a single respondent to give multiple responses to a single question, which is good for something like finding out about people's disciplines, but not as helpful for seeing what people think is important for circus going into the future (because everyone thinks everything is important). How this study is helpful for me, though, is good base demographic information about circus participants as well as a reminder to be intentional when designing survey questions, should I go that route.

From delving deeper into some of the literature that I had collected, I am now getting a better idea of where to go next and how I can approach this topic. The most over-arching issue present in all of these sources is that circus is not well defined,

which is one reason why I am pursuing this research: in search of a definition and boundaries.

#### References

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