



Circus | Studies

International Conference
November 6-8 2024, Marchin, Belgium

New Circus. New Architectures?

Book of Abstracts

New Circus | New Architectures?

Introduction by Franziska Trapp

Contrary to the common understanding of circus as a nomadic artform, the development of the institutionalized modern circus is fundamentally connected to a process of settling down. From 1850 to 1950, a multitude of static circus buildings were constructed across Europe and beyond (c.f. Ward 2023). Permanent venues began emerging that offered the traveling artists of the fairgrounds a stable place to perform and work, such as Astley's Amphitheatre and the Royal Circus in London, Cirque d'Hiver in Paris, and Circus Gymnasticus in Vienna.

One might even be tempted to speak once again about another international "construction boom." The solidification of contemporary circus as an artform that is "now firmly established as one of the most popular forms of live performances" (Lavers 2020, 1) has led to an increasing number of permanent circus buildings, which serve as circus schools, residency spaces, centers for leisure activities, and performance venues. New circus buildings are being constructed, e.g., Le Cirque de Latitude 50 in Belgium; historic circus buildings are being renovated and redesigned, e.g., Riga Cirks in Latvia; and other older buildings are being repurposed, e.g., La compagnie des Autres in Quebec repurposed a church, Up - Circus and Performing Arts in Belgium repurposed a supermarket, and Cirqu'Aarau repurposed an old riding hall. Impressively, the selected examples only include buildings that have been inaugurated in the last three years – the actual number of new and repurposed circus buildings is much larger.

The designs of these buildings are as heterogenous as the artform itself. All of them, however, refer simultaneously to their traditional heritage and the future of circus. The historical context of the venue, as well as its contemporary cultural milieu, shape each construction: La Tohu in Montréal, created in the late 1990s, represents the Canadian vision of circus at that time with its elaborate shows and big audiences, whereas the architectural decisions of Le Cirque de Latitude 50 promote a vision of contemporary circus in Europe, which can be described as collaborative, interconnected, and sustainable; the building offers individual artists or small companies (and their families) the space necessary for creation and contemplation.

The objective of this conference is to use analyses of historical and contemporary circus buildings, their forms and typologies, discourses, and epistemes as a starting point for discussions of broader questions concerning artistic, social, cultural, and historical interrelations.

Bibliography | Selection

Divac, M., Krklješ, M. and Milošević, S. Circus is a performance but it is also a building—memory of circus buildings in Europe. In: *City, Territory, Architecture. An interdisciplinary debate on project perspectives*. Nr. 9 (2022).

Dumitrița Efremov: The Circus Buildings of the Former USSR: An Exceptional Landmark of International Modernism. In: *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice*. N. 11:2-3. 2020. p. 410-412.

Dupavillion, Christian: *Architecture du Cirque. Des origines à nos jours*. CEP Éditions. Paris 1982.

Fabricia Fauquet. *Le cirque romain. Essai de théorisation de sa forme et de ses fonctions*. Archéologie et Préhistoire. Université de Bordeaux Montaigne, 2002.

Fourmaux, Francine (ed.): Les lieux du cirque. Le Manuscrit. Paris 2008.

Geens, Vincent: Cirque et architecture en campagne. Les éditions du Caid. Liege 2023.

Harel, Simon: A Las Vegas of the North? The Architectural Brutalism of Cirque du Soleil. Translated by Michelle Wong. In: Patrick Leroux and Charles Batson: Cirque Global. Quebec's Expanding Circus Boundaries. Mc Gill-Queen's University Press. Montréal 2016.

Jacob, Pascal and Christophe Pourtois: Du Permanent à l'éphémère...Espaces de cirque. Civa. Brussels 2002.

Ward, Steve: Opulence and Ostentation. Building the Circus. Modern Vaudeville Press 2023.

Financed by

ULB Faculté de Lettres, Traduction et Communication
RESIC/CiASP
FNRS
Latitude 50

Contact

Circus | Studies
Université Libre de Bruxelles
Dr. Franziska Trapp
Franziska.Trapp@ulb.be
www.circusstudies.com

Wednesday, 6/11/2024

13:00-14:00

Registration and get-together

14:00-15:00

Conference-Opening

Franziska Trapp, Olivier Minet, Vincent Geens and Jan Lazardzig

15:00-16:00

Opening-Keynote

Julieta Infantino

“The institutionalization of circus arts in contemporary Buenos Aires via the establishment of permanent architectural spaces for artistic pedagogy, rehearsal, and reproduction”

16:00-16:30

Coffee break

16:30-17:30

Panel I: Historiography

· Hannah Eßler

“Carved from the same wood? The construction of distinctions between circus and theatre in architectural and building literature toward the end of the nineteenth century in Berlin”

· Anne Schaap

“In search of the history of circus and its buildings. Circus as a living structure”

17:30

Opening – Apéro

19:00

Opening dinner

20:30

Performance Be Flat

Thursday, 7/11/2024

10:00-11:00

Keynote

Yann Rocher

“Latest news of the flying circus”

11:00-11:30

Coffee break

11:30-12:30

Panel II: The Ephemeral

- Florence Corin
“Dance, body, and architecture”
- Paloma Leyton (online presentation)
“From open horizons to circus buildings. A process of adaptations and architectural serendipity in research-creation”

12:30-14:00

Lunch

14:00-15:00

Keynote

Peta Tait

“Sustainable circus spaces and emotions”

15:00-15:30

Coffee break

15:30-16:30

Panel III: Inaugurations

- Edgars Jane
“Rīgas Cirks. Circus of radical conservation”
- Vincent Geens and Matthieu Meunier
“Latitude 50. Circus and architecture in the countryside”

16:30-17:30

Circus Buildings in Brussels – A Roundtable

- Matthieu Goeury (Les Halles de Schaerbeek)
- Reynaldo Rampersad (École Supérieure des Arts du Cirque)
- Emma Van Overschelde (La Roseaie)
- Olivier Bastin (Lescaut Architecture)
- Teresa Fajardo (École de Cirque de Bruxelles)

hosted by Bara Adolfova, researcher and current coordinator of Caravan Network

17:30

Vernissage

Hosted by the students of UCLouvain, Faculté d'architecture, d'ingénierie architecturale, d'urbanisme (LOCI)

19:00

Dinner

20:30

Performance Bête de Foire

Friday, 8/11/2024

10:00-11:00

Keynote

Jan Naets

“Thoughts on circus and architecture. A rigger’s perspective”

11:00-11:30

Coffee break

11:30-12:30

Panel IV: Society

- Bara Adolfova
“Building a youth circus school. Synopsis of the international pre-symposium”
- Miguel Manzano Olmos
“The integral circus laboratory: revitalizing vulnerable communities through social circus architecture”

12:30-14:00

Lunch

14:00-15:30

Panel V: Resistance

- Rachel Marques and Lucas Nathan Vilela
“Architectures of the South: the politics of discontinuities and the aesthetic of resistance”
- Elvira Avota
“Adding by removing. The recoding process of Rīgas Cirks”
- Antoine Pohu
“Outside the institution. Topographies of circus practices in Brussels”

15:30-16:00

Coffee break

16:00-17:00

Closing Walking Discussion

Hosted by MA students of Spectacle Vivant, Université Libre de Bruxelles

17:00-17:30

Closing: New Circus. New Architectures? New insights?

Franziska Trapp and Karel Vanhaesebrouck

19:00

Closing dinner

20:30

Performance Bête de Foire

21:00

Closing Party

Abstracts

The institutionalization of circus arts in contemporary Buenos Aires via the establishment of permanent architectural spaces for artistic pedagogy, rehearsal and reproduction

Julieta Infantino

The trinomial of sedentarization, permanent space (building), and institutionalization serves as a compelling framework for analyzing both the historical evolution and contemporary significance of the circus. Much like the role played by circus buildings in the development of the modern European circus, the establishment of permanent spaces for teaching, practice, and the reproduction of circus art marks a contemporary redefinition of the circus. As happened in different parts of the world, in Buenos Aires – the focal point of this presentation – a process of institutionalization or “ratification” began with the opening of the first circus school in 1980. This process took on distinctive features closely tied to the emergence of permanent circus spaces, which proliferated at the onset of the new millennium within independent cultural centers, repurposed old sheds (rented or squatted), and community venues. These spaces, serving as hubs and meeting points for knowledge transmission and collective creativity, cultivated a circuit that intertwined ideals of artistic independence and socio-political engagement. Advocating for the democratization of artistic access and production, artists employed strategies for economic sustainability alongside their artistic pursuits. The possibility of “having a circus space” emerged as a means to develop not only an art and a job, through teaching, but also to create groups with distinct artistic identities, work cooperatives, and/or performance circuits that contributed significantly to the cultural landscape of the city’s independent scene. The trajectories of some emblematic circus art spaces in Buenos Aires are examined, and their impacts on the aesthetics, poetics, and politics of contemporary circus art are explored. This exploration focuses on the organizational models of these spaces, their historical trajectories, and how such forms and ways of inhabiting spaces (buildings) – whether owned, squatted, or rented – generate specific aesthetic, organizational, and political practices.

Carved from the same wood? The construction of distinctions between circus and theatre in architectural and building literature toward the end of the nineteenth century in Berlin

Hannah Eßler

Theatre, circus, Varieté – each term alludes to a certain kind of performance, company, or architectural structure. Historically speaking, the terms have most often been distinguished by the kind of performance taking place in terms of its manner and purpose. In the German architectural and construction literature of the second half of the nineteenth century, however, we find the increasing separation of circus and theatre constructions as well as an attempted typology. I trace this development in Berlin through historical sources (architectural treatises, journals, building regulations) and selected case studies (i.e., the redesign of the Berlin Circus Theatre in 1855, the Markthallen-Zirkus in 1873, 1879, and 1919, and the construction of Circus Busch in 1895).

In search of the history of circus and its buildings. Circus as a living structure

Anne Schaap

Look! The circus is in town!

Over the last decades, the circus has created new forms and redefined its traditions; “new” forms of circus are now questioning the “old”, or traditional circus structures. A new form of housing circus has become an urgent issue. Besides questioning the nature of circus constructions, the

related social question must be asked: Do cities have “space” (political/spatial) for (permanent) circus buildings that also function as havens for performing, educating, and training artists? The research objective is twofold. On the one hand, it searches for new forms of buildings that align with the new forms of circus and its education. On the other, it questions how the circus can be connected to the urban civil society. The main goal is to find spatial program requirements that will allow us to establish new circus buildings in their social context. The journey of this research starts from the (built) history of circus and theatre. Other subjects are also visited, such as the influence of colonization on the circus, the use of horses, the presence of zoos, Garnier, Gropius’ Totaltheater, Soviet circus schools, Cirque de Soleil, and contemporary circus buildings. The research reflects the typology structure presented by Christian Dupavillion in *Architectures du Cirque. Des origines a nos jours* (1982). This structure includes tents (chapiteaux), half structures (construction-autoportées), and circus buildings (cirque stables). It considers the different spatial conditions of these structures, including their entrances, transitions, on the ground/in the ground, sound, sight lines, black box theatre, frontal or circular stage, etc. Three case studies of contemporary circus schools are analyzed: (1) La TOHU Theatre Montreal, the headquarters of Cirque de Soleil. La TOHU Theatre is situated in a new building located in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Montreal. Its arrival brought attention to the circus, as well as neighborhood improvement through circus and labor. (2) The Circus Space in London. It occupies an industrial space that once served as a Victorian power station. Akin to La TOHU Theatre, its presence invigorates the surrounding neighborhood. (3) Academie Fratellini in Paris. This circus school relocated from a tent on an old slaughter terrain (Parc de la Vilette) to a new built half-structure in the poor suburb of Saint Denis. Academie Fratellini also fosters urban renewal by means of culture. The spatial and social requirements of having a circus in town are considered. In conclusion, a set of program requirements, as well as a social political agenda presenting the importance of circuses in the city are discussed.

Latest news of the flying circus

Yann Rocher

This lecture will deal with the fact that many circus designers seem to play with the following paradox: Although architecture is static by definition, is it not logical to be inspired by the very mobile and aerial nature of the circus? A collection of recent cases will provide an opportunity to describe and analyze various attitudes of architects in this regard, and appreciate their contribution to the specific genre of the “acrobatic display”.

Dance, body, and architecture

Florence Corin

The connections between dance and architecture are both obvious and complex, as both work with space in opposing ways: one moves through it, and the other creates structures to fixate it. Dance and architecture reflect our perception of the world and its evolution. This paper considers the evolution of architecture and dance over time. Spatial design has shifted from a centralized perspective to an axonometric approach, offering a freer and more subjective vision of space. Architecture and dance thus converge paths in which physical experience, dynamism, and movement are essential. Space is read in a state of constant transformation and variation. The relationship between dance, body, and architecture is built in a renewed dialogue between the sensory and the intelligible.

From open horizons to circus buildings. A process of adaptations and architectural serendipity in research-creation

Paloma Leyton

The term "new circus" describes paths where innovation happens within, through, or for circus. Novelty often comes from either pushing the boundaries of technique and technology or reimagining circus performance itself. The former involves advancing skills and equipment, while the latter explores new forms of self-transformation. Creating spaces specifically for training and staging circus arts is crucial for both approaches and represents a significant step in advancing circus as an art form. Montreal is a leader in this area, offering numerous high-quality, well-equipped buildings designed specifically for circus arts.

However, what happens when innovation leads to unconventional objects, practices, or processes that don't fit traditional circus standards? Do they belong inside or outside of the circus schools? If circus is a way to explore the relationship between humans and gravity, how do these buildings, with their unique codes, impact the bodies performing in them? And how can artists adjust these spaces to suit their own creative processes? In other words, how do institutional spaces and creative processes affect each other?

To explore these questions, I draw from my research-creation, which looks at performance on original, unstable aerial apparatuses. Designed for open landscapes, these objects study precariousness through suspended movement. Moving away from circus aerial techniques, the emerging practice is grounded in sensory receptivity. Thus, the unique qualities of the spaces where the research unfolds¹ inform the content of the creation. Rather than limiting creation, each institutional and architectural feature reshape the interaction between body, space, and apparatus at every stage of the process. I suggest that embracing architectural serendipity in research-creation offers greater freedom of expression than struggling to conform to institutional codes. From this perspective, circus-specific architectures act as catalysts for both constraints and opportunities, opening doors to new ways of innovating within circus.

Sustainable circus spaces and emotions

Peta Tait

This presentation proposes that circus continues to endure because of the sensory affect and emotional feeling that it evokes within performance spaces and asks how outdoor contemporary circus in particular might be responding to climate change. What makes circus sustainable over time, firstly, as an art form and, secondly, as a human activity within a nonhuman environment? Circus and theatrical performance both evoke emotional responses and so they might at first seem similar, except that consideration of, for example, a durable Cirque du Soleil show, reveals that the momentum, mood shifts, and timbre of feeling are distinctive. The expectations, emotions, and exchanges are specific to circus and its spatial dynamics, which prompts questions as to whether the elemental forces including weather that influence space also have an emotional effect. In discerning contemporary theatrical performance that eschews dramatization in Postdramatic Theatre, Hans-Thies Lehmann values qualities that sound remarkably like those arising from circus. Lehmann explains, "If one reduces the distance between performers and spectators to such an extent that the physical and physiological proximity (breath, sweat, panting, movement of musculature, cramp, gaze) masks the mental signification, then a space of tense centripetal dynamic develops ... a moment of shared energies instead of transmitted signs" (2007: 150). Lehmann is emphasizing an energetic physical exchange in performance so that bodily

¹ École de Cirque de Verdun, École Nationale de Cirque, a tent at ToHU, théâtre La Chapelle, Agora du Cœur des Sciences (Hexagram), Laboratoire Arts Vivants et Interdisciplinarité (UQAM).

affect and emotional feeling outpace cognitive interpretation. Those of us who follow circus know the sensations of breath holding or, of looking away or, of a stomach jolt that happens prior to a conscious thought about what is being viewed. Lehmann does not acknowledge circus – although circus seeped through twentieth-century avant-garde performance – and an application of Lehmann’s description would typify historic circus in the ring with the physical movement of nonhuman animal bodies. The immediacy of the affective energetic exchange in circus makes it significant.

Circus of radical conservation

Edgars Jane

More than 100 years after the original plan, the first ever complete design project for the transformation of Riga Circus was executed in 2022. This project was sponsored by the European Union in a program that funds improvements to the energy efficiency of buildings, made possible through local ingenuity. Explicitly old and exceptionally new, it is a showcase of turning structural weakness into architectural strength. An acrobatic performance between technological capacity and economic imagination. Revealing obscured layers of gone eras, the new circus complex includes time as an added dimension of design – establishing a potent contemporary precedent where “building is the theory”. The method? Radical conservation: adding by removing. Despite its legal status, this project shows a desire beyond energy usage optimization: it seeks to optimize its cultural commentary. It illustrates that conservation is not a test, but a reflection. That design should not offer an answer, but an understanding. Today, the new Riga Circus presents a highly refined technological and socio-cultural update to its original ambitions. Paradoxically, the circus is more new than old, despite there being more historical substance and layers on display than before. The “architecture” of this project should not be looked for literally, but systematically. Not in the material, but in the overall design as a curated system of materials. Combining a sober ambition with high standards of execution, Riga has acquired a space for civic exchange, experimentation, and expression. The circus remains an ever-serious attempt to preserve a right to playfulness in the center of a metropolitan city: for the sake of its own history, for the city, for its inhabitants.

Latitude 50. Circus and architecture in the countryside

Vincent Geens and Matthieu Meunier

The audience is invited to go on a walk in the small village of circus architecture, Marchin, on the 50th parallel north. For more than 20 years now, Marchin has been home to Latitude 50, a circus and street art centre that has hosted a series of performances, co-organized street art festivals, and provided residency spaces for numerous circus companies and artists. In 2022, Latitude 50 received a new, high-quality cultural structure, namely, a contemporary circus building made of timber, which was designed by Matthieu Meunier (Atelier d'Architecture Meunier-Westrade) and built by Stabilame. In this presentation, I describe the form of governance that made this incredible project possible: How did Latitude 50 develop a circus ecosystem, build a wooden circus, and create an architectural village so coherently in just under 20 years, and in a rural community of 5,000 inhabitants? We will discuss the characteristics and qualities of the wooden circus, placing its typology in a forest of old and more recent circus models. We will then describe the design of the other buildings surrounding this circus: the circus school, the atelier, the bistro, and the two houses for the artists in residence.

Circus Buildings in Brussels – A Roundtable

Hosted by Bara Adolfova

This roundtable examines the challenges of circus infrastructures in a vibrant urban landscape like Brussels. Circus buildings worldwide show resilience through their innovative and creative solutions, such as repurposing unconventional spaces and partnering for shared resources. What is the situation like in Brussels? And is it enough?

Thoughts on circus and architecture from the perspective of a rigger's perspective

Jan Naets

When I think about a circus building, I think about a big door where you have to enter. Sometimes entering requires courage, knowledge, money, or being part of the community. If you don't have one of these, you might have to take a big step. Circus tents used to set up near their audiences; the setup was already a performance in and of itself and got people interested in what was to come. As soon as you start a set up for a high wire or flying trapeze performance in a public space, whether in a city center or in a suburb, you suddenly reach a lot of people who you were not necessarily supposed to meet. And the circus begins another social mission in which it connects people and discloses a world that they had never seen in their prior reality, so to speak. For every high wire performance, we have to create a path where nothing existed – find a solution to make it possible – for someone to walk over. Immediately thereafter, it is impressed on the memories of the audience; but when we return to the same spot some years later, we find the memory is carried and repeated by even new inhabitants, who never experienced it personally but are transmitting the experience of what people told them.

Building a youth circus school

Bara Adolfova

On November 5, 2024, an international symposium was organized by École de Cirque de Bruxelles and Caravan Circus Network. Bringing together professionals from youth circus school management and representatives of local municipalities, it took place at Tour & Taxis in Brussels. The symposium offered panels and roundtables that presented successful cases of collaboration between youth circus schools and local municipalities concerning the procurement, building, or renovation of spaces that are suitable for youth circus activities. The gathering also encouraged networking among Belgian professionals – both Flemish and French-speaking – as well as among peers from other European countries. The symposium – a day of talks and workshops – was concluded with on-site visits to several youth circus schools based in Brussels. This talk presents the main discussions and findings of the symposium.

The integral circus laboratory: Revitalizing vulnerable communities through social circus architecture

Miguel Manzano Olmos

The Integral Circus Laboratory is a transformative project that seeks to revitalize a marginalized neighborhood on the outskirts of Alicante, Spain, by harnessing the power of social circus and innovative architectural design. Conceived as my BA project in architecture, this proposal seamlessly blends my experiences as a circus artist, trainer, and architect, creating a unique synergy between community development and the performing arts. The project unfolds in three distinct stages, where the rehabilitation of an abandoned plot is guided by the evolving needs of the social circus program. At its core lies the concept of “circustech” – a comprehensive approach

that encompasses the technological devices (mats, trampolines, structures, etc.) essential for learning and practicing circus arts. By meticulously analyzing the learning processes and spatial requirements of various circus disciplines, we have crafted a proposal that harmoniously integrates different stages of skill development with the necessary infrastructural elements. This symbiotic relationship between space and curriculum results in a dynamic environment that continually metamorphoses over the years as students acquire new skills. Simultaneously, it presents opportunities for parallel vocational training in disciplines such as apparatus manufacturing, prefabricated space construction, carpentry, and horticulture, among others. Ultimately, the Integral Circus Laboratory is a profound reflection on the transformative potential of circus arts, transcending its role as a mere performance medium to become a catalyst for community empowerment and professional development. With a resolute focus on uplifting marginalized communities, this project harnesses the multifaceted nature of circus to foster social cohesion, economic opportunities, and a profound sense of collective ownership and pride.

Architectures of the South. Politics of discontinuities and the aesthetic of resistance

Rachel Marques

Lucas Nathan Vilela

This presentation underscores the interconnection between the body and circus architecture, which transcends physical boundaries, borders, and obstacles; it prompts contemplation on the dialogue between the body and ancestry, as well as its accompanying narrative. In Latin America, circus practices have assimilated improvised spaces and adapted structures, reflecting an aesthetic of resistance, improvisation, and subversion. In this vein, the discontinuity of public policies for funding and state support has posed a series of challenges for artists. Due to the lack of maintenance of artistic spaces, for instance, their projects are often derailed. Their reality can be characterized as a cycle of advancements and setbacks, continuities and ruptures, which shapes the aesthetic perception and dynamics of contemporary circus in the Global South. Bringing it into our context, at the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), artistic production persists despite the surrounding society, which underestimates its value. Thus, artists like Professor Monteiro, one of Brazil's first circus educators, actually subverted the dismantling at one time by creating a circus space at the University. A few years later, however, this space was demolished with no talk of reconstruction. Students organized to rejuvenate it, drawing on past knowledge as a starting point and incorporating contemporary circus knowledge into their productions.

Adding by removing – re-coding process of Rīgas Cirks

Elvīra Avota

Rīgas Cirks is one of the oldest, permanent circus buildings in Europe. Built in 1888 with its supporting structure made from railroad tracks and bricks, it is an architectonic gem that has continuously housed circus performances throughout different political conflicts, regimes, and sociocultural changes (Vītola 2024: 28). With its visually striking iconicity of circus and geographical location right at the urban center of Riga, it indicates the omnipresent role of circus in the local culture. Since 2017, there has been a double semiotic recoding of Rīgas Cirks: the official turn to the contemporary circus paradigm and the complete re-semiotization of circus as a space. The relationship between the audience and a circus space in modern tradition is often supported by a strong semiotic system of spatial borders that not only marks the hierarchical relationship between the artist and audience but also reinforces the romantic perception of the magical world of circus behind these borders (Bouissac 2010, 13). When the reconstruction of Rīgas Cirks finished in 2022, the building had been adapted to the necessities of contemporary circus; the semiotic values of the space had changed – zones of the venue that had not existed

in the cultural memory for over 100 years were now open to the public. In this paper, I offer a semiotic perspective on the re-coding of circus and how a space can reflect the shift of an artistic paradigm. This change will also be looked at in terms of Lotman's "cultural explosion framework": when a system change is violent enough to disrupt the cultural memory and complicate the re-coding of the new paradigm (Lotman 2013 [2010]: 64). Ultimately, the process used in the renovation process, called "adding by removing", signifies not the end of a tradition, but rather another chapter in its ongoing evolution.

Bouissac Paul 2010. *Semiotics at the circus*. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter

Lotman, Juri M. 2013 [2010]. *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture*. Brian James Baer (trans.). Tallinn: TLU Press

Vītola, Lauma 2024. *Salamonska cirks Rīgā*. In: *Rīgas cirks. Ieskaņa: 1888 – 1957*. Elvīra Avotaand Māra Pāvula (eds.). Riga: Latvijas Mediji

Outside the institution. Topographies of circus practices in Brussels

Antoine Pohnu

This presentation sheds light on the "tiers-lieux" of artists working outside of renowned institutions and specific performance venues. Training rooms in shared flats are reinvented as cabarets, street festivals are organized by self-managed art centers, where professional artists, students, and circus enthusiasts share the same stage: What is the topography of emerging creation in Brussels? This research is based on an earlier work I wrote that considered emerging theatrical creations and their relationship with the city. These ideas are visualized in documentary photographs that were taken over the last two years of numerous circus performances on the fringes of institutions.

Author Biographies

Bara Adolfova is a producer and curator of art events in contemporary circus, theatre, and youth arts. Adolfova conducts research on youth circus, youth voice, and arts management. She is above all interested in artistic projects with a social message, hence connecting the worlds of academia and practice and encouraging international collaboration.

Elvīra Avota joined the Rīgas Cirks team in 2017. Avota conducted research on the history of the Latvian circus; produced the contemporary circus and street art festival “Re Rīga!” (2022); and is the coauthor of *Rīgas cirks. Ieskaņa: 1888-1957* (2024). At the moment, she is continuing to develop the Rīgas Cirks historical archives and is exploring circus from a semiotic perspective at the University of Tartu, Estonia.

Florence Corin studied architecture at La Cambre, Belgium, and has been working in the field of dance for over twenty years. As a video artist, movement practitioner, choreographer, and editor at Contredanse Editions, she focuses on improvisation, space, somatic practices, and digital technologies.

Hannah Eßler studied theatre, literature, and deaf studies in Berlin, Rome, and Tlemcen, Algeria. Her research interests include the history of the circus; popular forms of theatre; nineteenth century stage technology and building; and postcolonial entanglements in the history of theatre. Eßler is currently pursuing a graduate degree at the School for Transdisciplinary Studies at Zurich University of the Arts. Her work examines phenomena transgressing the boundaries of sensual modalities and questions modes of knowledge production. She also organizes diverse circus (pedagogical) projects and trains aeriels (static and flying trapeze).

Teresa Fajardo studied architecture at La Cambre, Belgium. Fajardo has dedicated over a decade to urban innovation and projects focused on public space and citizen engagement. A few years ago, she discovered the potential of circus art to be an empowering medium that forges interdisciplinary connections between architecture and circus. Fajardo has been codirecting the *Ecole de Cirque de Bruxelles* since 2021. She works to develop the forty-year-old circus school into a magical, lively meeting place that facilitates dialogue about circus art.

Vincent Geens is a historian and independent cultural, heritage, and artistic project promoter. He has directed a cultural center, contemporary art biennials, and festivals for over 20 years. He recently published *Cirque et architecture en campagne. Le manifeste circulaire de Latitude 50* (2023). Together with Quentin Lemenu, he is responsible for the “Passe-Temps” project, which aims to safeguard and promote the archives of the circus and street arts in French-speaking Belgium. For more information about his projects, see www.tresorspublics.be

Julieta Infantino is a professor at the University of Buenos Aires. Infantino completed her doctorate in anthropology at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at the University of Buenos Aires. She is an adjunct researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) in Argentina. She is also a member of the Anthropology of Culture and Heritage Team (EACUP) (www.culturaypatrimonio.com.ar) and *Circainvestigación*, a circle for research on circus and gender (www.instagram.com/circainvestigacion/es). She specializes in the development of the circus arts in Argentina and across Latin America, studying their aesthetic, identity, and political aspects. She has authored books, edited compilations, and published articles in national and international academic journals.

Edgars Jane is an architectural designer and researcher based in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Parallel to his work at Kees Christiaanse Architects and Planners (KCAP), he collaborates with the Latvian Arts Academy Design Faculty and Rotterdam Academy of Architecture to develop projects of public architecture that are material-conscious and temporary.

Rachel Marques is a scene artist at UNICAMP, Brazil, where she works as a clown and dancer. Her scenography project “Cycles” (2023) was exhibited at the Prague Quadrennial. Additionally, she is a dancer in the Tukopamoja project, which, in partnership with Fazenda da Roseira, focuses on the training and exchange of artists in Brazil, Mozambique, and Norway. In 2022, she served as a director in the university program “Circus for Children” at the School of Physical Education at Unicamp. Marques is currently conducting research on the association between scenic dance and popular culture in the performances of the Folk Ballet of Bahia under the guidance of Grácia Maria Navarro, PhD.

Matthieu Meunier has been an associate architect at Atelier d’architecture Meunier-Westrade srl, Belgium, since 2000. He is a professor of architecture and teaches project management and professional practice at UCLouvain, Belgium. Meunier is the manager of AtelierMW: Design and production of layout and furniture. He practiced and taught street art, circus art, scenography, and theater from 1988-2003.

Jan Naets has worked as a circus technician for twenty years now. Some of the companies he worked for include Les Arts Sauts, Dragone, Buren cirque, and Studios de cirque de marseille (now known as Gratte Ciel). He later became a technical manager at Cirkvost, and has worked for Compagnie Basinga as co-artistic director and technical manager for the last ten years.

Paloma Leyton is a doctoral student in Arts Studies and Practices at UQAM / Performing, Visual, and Media Arts at UNIBO, and a student member of the Hexagram network. Her activity intertwines research, creation, and pedagogy in visual arts and aerial disciplines. Her research focuses on the movement of the body in suspension on unstable aerial apparatus, exploring the links between gravity management and the construction of imaginaries in aerial kinetics. The interest in her research also lies in how practices can transpose the concept of emergence – of the living body - to the creative process.

Miguel Manzano Olmos is an architect, a researcher, and cultural manager. He is a trainer of social circus trainers, an expert in acrobatics, a member of the Spanish Federation of Socio-Educational Circus Schools (FEECSE), and a circus scenography designer. Olmos is the founder and former academic director of the Latin American School of Circus and Arts in Jalisco (ELCIRCA), as well as the coordinator of the process of official recognition of circus training in Spain. He is currently working on the project “Está Pasando” in which he is mapping circus communities in South America.

Antoine Pohn is a writer and playwright working between Luxembourg and Brussels. He has published several short stories that have been published in various literary journals, as well as two novels, *La Quête* (2020) and *Parfois la nuit se tait* (2023). He holds a graduate degree in Performing Arts from the Université libre de Bruxelles and has worked on a number of theatrical projects, notably with the interdisciplinary collective Maskénada, the circus company Triovule, and the company XB312. He has also interned with director Léa Drouet and dramaturg Camille Louis, and is a librettist supervising a participatory opera project organized by the EME Foundation. He is active in the organization of the Festival Inclusif des Arts Engagés.

Yann Rocher is an architect and a graduate of the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris and École des hautes études en sciences sociales, France. Rocher devoted himself to the construction of stage venues between 1998 and 2008. From 2002 to 2011, he directed the Théâtre électronique collective and created a series of sound installations in France and abroad. He has been teaching at Paris-Malaquais school of architecture since 2005, and since 2019 has been codirecting “L'entour”, a seminar on exhibition scenography, with Thierry Leviez. In 2012 he was appointed curator of the Saline Royale d'Arc-et-Senans, culminating in the 2013 exhibition “Théâtres en utopie”. From 2015 to 2018 he curated the “Globes” exhibition at the Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine. His latest exhibition, “Moi cristal”, was held at the Centre d'art contemporain de Lacoux in the summer of 2022. Among his ongoing projects, he is currently writing on “the theatre that came out of the wood”.

Anne Schaap works as an architect together with her father, where they lead the architectural firm Schaap en Sturm Architecten, Netherlands. She also teaches on the Faculty of Architecture TUDelft and at Codarts Circus Arts Rotterdam. She made the programs at Rotterdam Circustad until recently. In 2013, she wrote her thesis on circus buildings at the Faculty of Architecture at TUDelft. In 2018, her firm entered the competition for Riga Cirks in Latvia. In 2020, she attended Patrick Leroux's course on creation in circus at Concordia University, Canada. And in 2022, she attended the Circostrada LAB, which addressed the use and design of circus tents.

Peta Tait, professor at La Trobe University, Australia, is an academic and playwright and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. She has written 70 scholarly articles and chapters, and her recent books include *Forms of Emotion: Human to Nonhuman in Drama, Theatre and Performance* (2022); *Theory for Theatre Studies: Emotion* (2021); the co-edited *Feminist Ecologies: Changing Environments in the Anthropocene* (2018); the edited *The Great European Stage Directors, Volume 1* (2018); the authored *Fighting Nature: Travelling Menageries, Animal Acts and War Shows* (2016); the co-edited *The Routledge Circus Studies Reader* (2016); and *Wild and Dangerous Performances: Animals, Emotions, Circus* (2012). Tait is currently co-authoring *Ecological Theatre and Australian Performance*.

Lucas Nathan Vilela participated in the panel “Circus Pedagogies Beyond Educational Paradigms” and presented his research “Circus: Decolonizing the University” at the fourth Circus and its Others conference in Bogotá, Colombia. He is the creator of Coletivo Circóia, a circus group at Unicamp, Brazil, and a researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), where he led the scientific admission entitled: “Circus at the Institute of Arts: the Student's Point of View”, which was guided by Grácia Maria Navarro, PhD.

Academic Board

Franziska Trapp is a researcher at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. She is the founder of the research project Circus | Studies; initiator of the Young Researchers Network in Circus Studies; co-initiator of the Circus Arts Research Platform; co-editor of the academic journal *Circus: Arts, Life and Sciences* (University of Michigan Press); and editor of the anthology *360° Circus. Meaning, Practice. Culture* (2023). Furthermore, Trapp is a freelance dramaturge working with international circus artists and companies all over the world. She received the DGS Young Researchers Prize in 2020 for her German monograph *Readings of Contemporary Circus. A Dramaturgy* (De Gruyter 2020), which was recently translated into English (Routledge 2024).

Jan Lazardzig, professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Berlin, researches and publishes on the history of theatre architecture, technology and knowledge. Lazardzig is currently Dean of the Department of Philosophy and Humanities (2023-2025) and President of the German Society for Theatre Studies.

Karel Vanhaesebrouck, professor of Theater and Performance Studies at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, has published widely within the fields of theatre history, performance theory, and dramaturgy. He also contributes his expertise to different theatre and circus schools (RITCS Brussels, ESACT Liège, Cirko Torino) and has worked with various artists and companies in Belgium.

