



**Circus and its Others 2020**  
**November 12-15**  
**University of California, Davis**

The Circus and its Others research project was launched in 2014 under the aegis of the Montréal Working Group on Circus Research to explore the ways in which contemporary circus artists and companies relate to difference in their practice. We have since hosted two successful international conferences and published a peer-reviewed double journal issue. What has resulted is an ever-blossoming inquiry that, along the way, has started to feel like a movement, in that the scholars and artist-researchers seem to be united by more than the same research interests. Circus and its Others participants share the desire to continue to establish circus studies as a field while at the same time resisting its full institutionalization, engaging in an ongoing reflexive inquiry that allows itself to query its own inclusions and exclusions.

The third Circus and its Others conference will be held at the University of California, Davis, on November 12-15, 2020. As with the previous two conferences (Montréal 2016, Prague 2018), the conference will run alongside a contemporary circus festival. The Davis festival involves two components: several indoor, ticketed shows organized by the Mondavi Center, UC Davis's performing arts presenting organization and curated in collaboration with the CaiO 2020 team; and a free outdoor circus festival curated by CaiO 2020.

A particular focus of CaiO 2020 is the interdisciplinarity of circus research and practice, putting into play foci of openness and inclusion. How can our ongoing inquiry be enriched by engaging directly with scholars and practitioners working in a wide range of fields? To that end, confirmed keynote speakers include Bojana Kunst, Professor at the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies at the Justus-Liebig University in Gießen, Germany; André Lepecki, chair of New York University's Department of Performance Studies; Jane Nicholas, associate professor of history at St. Jerome's University, University of Waterloo; and Susan Nance, professor of history at the University of Guelph.

CaiO considers circus as a boundary object (as theorized by Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer) with many and various entry points, welcoming a wide variety of spectatorial and theoretical approaches. Concretely, it is our aim to foster a place where we can address the aesthetic, ethical, and political potentiality of circus practices. We invite proposals for research talks that address questions of difference and otherness in the context of traditional, new, and contemporary circus. We further make explicit invitation for presentations from artists and practitioners who address such questions in their work, practice, and/or research-creation (our conference venue includes some space for performance).



For the 2020 conference, possible areas of inquiry might include, but need not be limited to:

### **Circus and Subjectivity**

What questions can be asked about the relationship between virtuoso work/labour and circus in a neoliberal context?

How is the contemporary subject already a circus artist (through the acts of juggling jobs, balancing work and life, the life journey as walking the tightrope, contorting to the demands of neoliberal paradigm, etc.), and what is the status of the circus professional amidst this profusion of metaphors?

What questions can be asked about circus becoming a technology for self (Foucault), a site for disidentification (Muñoz), or the undercommons (Moten/Harvey)?

### **Circus and Embodiment**

What are the implications of shifts in the mainstreaming of contemporary circus and related changes in skill, artistry, and training for circus artists including those who may carry historical baggage of “born otherness” with them?

What is required and expected of the bodies of today’s elite circus artists?

How do circus trainers as well as circus artists deal with questions and meanings of body image?

### **Circus and Race**

How has circus been implicated in the production of racial(ized) difference?

Is circus white? Are there hidden histories about circus and its relation to race?

How can circus studies engage with the Black radical tradition and other movements of resistance or protest?

### **Circus and Animal Studies**

Has circus confused, reproduced, and/or problematized anthropological differences?

How does circus engage with what might called zooësis, in terms proposed by Chaudhuri and Enelow as “the way culture makes art and meaning with the figure and body of the animal”?

### **Circus and Native American Studies / Circus and Indigeneity**

What is circus’s relationship to Indigeneity? Are there stories of indigenous survival, sovereignty, and resurgence under the big top (and in other circus spaces)?

What is the relationship between circus and colonialisms, including settler colonialism?

### **Circus and Feminism**

In what ways does circus (historically and in the present) serve as a space of professional and personal empowerment for women? In what ways has circus reinforced gender norms that limit and objectify women?

How are contemporary circus artists and companies creating work and professional circumstances that challenge and subvert gender binaries?

How does intersectional feminism complicate questions of gender inclusion/exclusion?



### **Circus and Queer Studies**

Where is the space for the queer in circus? What does the movement of certain circus practices into mainstream cultures mean for the presence of queer and alternative expression?

Do celebrations and/or exploitations of difference in certain circus practices carry particular meanings for queer performers or audiences?

What is revealed through queer of color critique of circus norms?

### **Circus and Utopia**

In the contemporary moment, what does it mean to run away with the circus?

What are the alternative spaces created under the big top (and other circus spaces)?

Can we glimpse, after Muñoz, a utopia of new communities, solidarities, and forms of resistance in our circus research and practice?

### **Circus and Science and Technology Studies**

What connections are possible between circus and science?

How does circus employ, explore, and exploit technologies?

How can we understand circus as technology?

### **Social circus**

What are the most recent currents of practice and inquiry in social circus?

What are the power relations between social circus and professional circus, and how do questions of race/class/gender/ability figure in this?

We invite 300- to 400-word proposals for 20-minute presentations. Please send proposals by March 15, 2020 to [CircusOthersDavis2020@gmail.com](mailto:CircusOthersDavis2020@gmail.com). Please articulate clearly in your proposal if you plan to make a formal paper presentation or if as a practitioner/creator/researcher you wish to engage in a hybrid practice/talk/research/creation exploration. We hope to reply to all applicants by the end of April 2020. The organizers are applying for financial support for the conference, but we regret that we cannot promise bursaries or travel grants at this time.

### **Circus and Its Others 2020 Academic and Creative Committee**

Charles Batson, Union College, NY, USA; Karen Fricker, Brock University, Ontario, Canada; Olga Sorzano, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK; Veronika Štefanová, Cirqueon, Prague, Czech Republic; Ante Ursić, University of California, Davis, USA.

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