



**Circus: genealogies,  
imaginaries, translations  
International Academic Conference  
organised as part of the cycle:**

## **‘IN THE WORLD OF SPECTACLES’**

**Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute  
Institute of Western and Southern Slavic  
Studies at the University of Warsaw  
Institute of Polish Philology  
at Maria Curie-Skłodowska  
University in Lublin**

**When: May 6-8 2020  
Where: Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute  
im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego**

Academic research related to the circus is hardly a well-established discipline in Poland. Generally, scholarly undertakings focusing on the circus are supplementary to the studies of history of popular culture, anthropology of performance, performance studies, animal studies, urban studies or film studies. The circus has been almost entirely absent from the current, continually reproduced cultural hierarchies and distinctions. Meanwhile, the transformation of the loosely defined field of 'the circus arts', juggling and dell'arte into a distinct institution of the modern circus and an autonomous field of art was one of the turning points in the formation of *modernitas* within contemporary urban culture. Typically considered as the lowest in the hierarchy of arts or eliminated from it altogether, the circus also played the role of an inspiring repository of forms. It functioned on an *ad hoc* basis as a laboratory for technological innovations or an educational quasi-institution. The circus was also the precursor in propagating the standards of modern living: social mobility, physical training and aesthetics of corporality, the worship of celebrities and superheroes. It also played a significant role in the emergence of modern-day media and professional sport.

We propose a return to the ever-unresolved question of the position of circus within the Central European variety of modernity. On the one hand, circus was an institution of social life, subject to transformation and possessing its own, insufficiently described and documented and yet rich history associated with specific people and places. On the other hand, it was an imaginary that has grown with the passage of time: an archive of forms, images, cultural patterns, symbolic links and cultural practices. The circus has left its mark on all types of art and almost every kind of artistic production. Its civilizational and cultural position was based on dynamic, disturbing paradoxes: it was influential and marginal, and simultaneously aroused fascination and contempt. The circus was the realization of the civilizational dream of egalitarian art, and at the same time – as Starobiński writes in his essay 'Portrait de l'artiste en saltimbanque' [Portrait of the Artist as Saltimbanque] – provided modern thought with an image of a 'hyperbolic leap beyond any reason.' Today circademics – the officially non-existent and yet practiced by many – branch of academic studies can provoke and inspire. Its interests include, after all, a long list of currently discussed topics, a rich catalogue of the obsessions of contemporary times.

We hope that the conference will foster dialogue across and beyond the various academic fields and disciplines. Therefore, we invite theatre researchers, philosophers, historians, art historians, anthropologists, sociologists, literary scholars, and media scholars to attend.

**Themes:**

- Circus: archaic today and proto-modernist at the cusp of the modern era
- Circus – a media archaeology perspective
- The unwritten history of the circus in Central and Eastern Europe
- The micro-histories, local stories, and personal tales of the circus

- The institutionalization and social history of the circus
- Philosophical considerations, the circus metaphor in the language of philosophers
- The languages and forms of the circus (space, music, image)
- Scientific and technological achievements in the circus, circus and the idea of progress
- Theatricality of the circus – circus and theatre
- Circus and the birth of film, contemporary dance, and cabaret
- Circus and sport
- Circus as an archive of motifs and quotes used in literature, theatre, visual arts, film, graphic novels, advertising, etc.
- The religious roots of circus, circus and ritual
- Political ideologies within the circus arena: the circus and the idea of the nation state, colonial conquests, fascism; circus during the communist period
- Counterculture and the new circus, circus as a form of critical art
- Circus audiences
- The unapparent links between the circus and the carnival, the ludic aspects of circus
- Circus as the imaginary of modernity and postmodernity: a repository of symbols that have fascinated the romantics and modernists (Starobiński), an impulse for the avant-garde (Peiper), a frenetic experience of the metropolis (Krakauer, Benjamin), one of the mythologies of modernity (Barthes)
- Circus as a space of nostalgia, transgression, panopticon

An abstract of no more than 300 words and a short biography should be sent by 16 March 2020 to the following email addresses: gkondrasiuk@instytut-teatralny.pl and s.siedlecka@uw.edu.pl.

Deadline for confirming participation in the conference:

**23 March. Conference fee:**

PLN200/ EUR47 (academics), PLN100/ EUR24 (PhD students). Conference languages: Polish, English. Selected articles will be published in ranked academic journals.

**Selected bibliography:**

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