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COVER SHEET

The Non-Human Animal Artist: Toward the Presentation of an Artistic Species-Companionship in Circus

Franziska Trapp, Natan Alberca, Sabrina Sow

Abstract:

How can we practice, think, and write contemporary circus beyond the human? What would it mean to create new modes of performance that would (re)valorize the animal in the ring?

This exposition presents an exploration of the inventive, creative, and active dimensions of non-human animals in the context of circus. In 2022, we — Natan Hansi Alberca (multidisciplinary visual artist), Franziska Trapp (dramaturge and researcher), and Sabrina Sow (equestrian artist) — came together to create a vivid dialogue between practice and reflection, artistic and academic research, informed and naive approaches.

We now exhibit our exchange through video installations, academic writings, and poems, that expand on, express agreement with, or contradict each other. Our intention is to make perceptible how artistic and reflective processes are fundamentally intertwined..

Keywords:

contemporary circus, dramaturgy, non-human, horses, dialogue, visual art, academic research, poetry

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Page description: On opening the page, above the title, a large, untitled video is playing.

Video description: A series of 'point clouds'; square pixels, partially distorted move from right to left, across a 3D dimensional space. At the centre of the image is an eye formed by a cloud of blue dots. The background is white. The music is melancholy, reminiscent of strings, and follows the movement of the blink of an animal's eye. It merges with a white shadow that suggests a soft, distinctive face.

The non-human animal artist: Toward the presentation of an artistic species-companionship in circus

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Questions. A Research Project in Dialogue

- Can we practice, think, and write about contemporary circus beyond the human?
- How can we overcome the pigeonholed idea that human and animal interaction in circus is limited to displays of human dominance over (wild) animals?
- What would it mean to create new modes of thinking and writing that would (re)valorize animals?
- How can we create artistic companionships between human and non-human animals?
- How can we bring ethical attention to these relationships in the dialogues between performing arts and research?
- What can we learn from each other?
- How would collectives of human and non-human performers work
- How can we create non-anthropocentric staging that focuses on the relationship between humans and non-humans rather than on human domination and binaries?
- How can we create a discourse on humans and non-human animals in circus without romanticism or prejudice?
- How can we challenge our perspectives?
- How can animal performances be discussed neutrally, so as to avoid promoting or prohibiting their place in performances?
- Can this research project become more than a political or ethical statement for or against the use of animals in performances?

This exposition presents an exploration of the inventive, creative, and active dimensions of non-human animals in the context of circus. In 2022, we, Natan Hansi Alberca (multidisciplinary visual artist), Franziska Trapp (dramaturge and researcher), Sabrina Sow (equestrian artist), and Bouboule (non-human animal artist) came together to create a vivid dialogue between practice and reflection, artistic and academic research, informed and naive approaches. Our main aim was thereby to examine what it might mean to create new modes of circus performances that would (re)valorize animals in the ring. Instead of merely advancing the common image of non-human animals as reified, passive entities, our objective was to

explore the inventive, creative, and active dimensions of non-human animals in the context of performances. We now exhibit our exchange through a collage of video installations by Natan Alberca, academic writings by Franziska Trapp, and poems by Sabrina Sow, that expand on, express agreement with, or contradict each other. Our intention is to make perceptible how artistic and reflective processes are fundamentally intertwined.

We invite you to find your own, personal way through the exposition. You are intrigued by the interplay between the various approaches to the topic of non-human animals in contemporary circus? Go through the exposition in a linear way and watch the videos, read the article, and switch to the poems at the proposed moment. You are especially inspired by the poems? Go for it! You love the way the videos and the article are relating to each other? Let this be your focus! You only want to dig into the performance *Dresse-toi*? Be our guest! Make this exposition your personal exploration tour that also allows you to become aware of your very own perspective.

[Preambels →](#)

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Page description: The four links to the four preambles are arranged in grid, each showing a preview image of the video that will be played when the preamble is opened.

Preambles

[Natan Alberca. Human Animal and Visual Artist →](#)

[Sabrina Sow. Human Animal, Equestrian Artist, and Author →](#)

[Bouboule. Non-Human Animal and Artist →](#)

[Franziska Trapp. Human Animal, Dramaturge, and Academic Researcher →](#)

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[Exposition →](#)

This accessible page is a derivative of <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1702122/3132721> which it is meant to support and not replace.

Page description: On opening the page, below the title, a large, untitled video is playing.

Video description: The movement of brightly coloured lines from left to right gives the sensation of wind across a field of wheat. The colours go from blue to ochre, vermilion red, yellow then mauve. The lines appear to be joined to one another and reacting to something invisible. The sound creates a cocooned feeling, a low frequency 'ohm', like a human voice resonating in the thoracic cavity.

Natan Alberca. Human Animal and Visual Artist

My name is Natan and I'm a multidisciplinary visual artist. I work with all kinds of materials and techniques. At the moment, I'm trying to combine the digital with the real to decode a visual and sound sensation. But I also paint, I make engravings, and I work on videos and video games.

Within this exposition, I explore visual and auditory sensations through what could become and belong to non-human animals and/or human relations. The videos refer to imaginaries and human and non-human interiors. They reveal previously hidden meanings that give rise to new realities and perspectives. Nature, technology, and artificiality intertwine.

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This accessible page is a derivative of <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1702122/3132587> which it is meant to support and not replace.

Page description: On opening the page, below the title, a large, untitled video is playing.

Video description: Thick vertical orange lines cut out in blue, partially obscure the moving image of a woman grooming the tail and pushing / stroking the rump of an immobile horse. The camera view moves around the animal as the colours change from orange to black and white. The lines change too, introducing distortion and variation forming pixels that allow the image to fall apart and recombine. The image is accompanied by the sound of gentle clicks.

Sabrina Sow. Human Animal, Equestrian Artist, and Author

My name is Sabrina Sow, and my stage name is La Négresse à Cheval. I inhabit the world through an animal relationship with my herd. I live in a yurt on a forty-hectare plot of land, a 'permaculture' place in the making, called La Bonnette. Solar panels allow me to generate my own electricity, I have a water supply equipped with a meter from which I draw about thirty liters per day for two people. We live on the fringes of the system in a form of semi-liberty. Fourteen horses are our companions in life.

One of the oldest horses in the herd slipped away one windy night. He was twenty-five years old and we had lived together for twenty-three years. You can never prepare yourself for death. Even though you know it's the common outcome, it always comes as a surprise. Until recently, my horses were between three and thirty years old. Recently a baby was born. Some of them are 'outcasts', individuals who have rejected the system in which they were to be confined. Others are lucky ones born in these meadows. They are my center, my source of energy, a kind of moving root that connects me to the living.

We 'work' together, or rather we interact in a system that we have created. A system that we often export to the city, a bubble of life and wildness that we stage in equestrian shows, in the open air and in the street or on theater stages. This is what keeps us going, what pays the bills. In concrete terms, we humans and they horses create artistic objects that we bring into the public space.

I am worried today about the pressure that a part of society exerts on those who live and work with animals, I am worried about seeing the relationship between humans becoming more strained and taking our relationship with animals and nature to task, I am simply worried that one day my way of life, as well as being marginal, will become illegal. This is one of the reasons for launching this hybrid study.

Also. I am a black, mulatto, mixed-race woman. Yes, but so what? My appearance, my blackness, my gender could make me the victim of several processes of domination that undermine our hyper-hierarchical society. And yet, I am not aware of having been a victim of racism or sexism. It was not until I was in my forties that I realized I was an exception. I recently met (at a hearing) with a group of racialized women of all skin colors, ages, and social backgrounds. These women told me about situations they had experienced so many times that they didn't even want to talk about them anymore. I cannot thank Rebecca Chaillon enough for making this meeting possible. She gave me a clearer picture: what I knew in theory, these women experienced in their bodies, on a daily basis. They all had a common experience, that of being judged, misjudged, prejudged on the basis of their physical appearance. And me, in what world had I spent all this time? In a parallel universe? Discovering my own incongruity, I tried to understand why this was so. Was this a form of blindness? Was I an exception confirming the rule?

The following reasoning came to mind: I think that my intimacy with the animals protected me, brought me to another place, to a kind of confidence in myself and in the other that defuses the oblique looks, the derogatory remarks. Interaction with horses has given me a kind of knowledge of non-verbal relationships, an attention to the other person and enough confidence to deconstruct aggressive relationships from the start.

I want to show here that another society is possible. We can get out of this system of domination and enter a new, fluid, constantly changing, and ever-changing system — that of cooperation.

When I met Franziska and Natan, I build the desire to show our mixed interaction through science, video-art, and text. We choose to connect with Bouboule to create a dreamlike object, a reflection of our link and friendship.

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This accessible page is a derivative of <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1702122/3132675> which it is meant to support and not replace.

Page description: On opening the page, below the title, a large, untitled video is playing. There is no further text on the page.

Video description: Using a cloud of white dots against a blue background, the video introduces a slowed down close-up shot in which a horse's snout is clearly visible, looking for blades of grass in the meadow. The original sound of the video creates a strange and grandiose effect, with the horse's breathing audible as it comes close to the camera.

Bouboule. Non-Human Animal and Artist

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This accessible page is a derivative of <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1702122/3132186> which it is meant to support and not replace.

Page description: On opening the page, below the title, a large, untitled video is playing.

Video description: Fading in and out to black, pixelated and abstract forms move across the screen in bright blocks of colour. A gentle soundtrack contains water-like sounds and melodic dreamlike tones. Paying close attention, a figure resting its hands on the back of a horse and smelling its scent can be discerned. The image has been distorted by a card-dancing technique created in the software. Here, the form of a line accentuates the shape of space in one direction, as the camera swirls insect-like around the subject.

Franziska Trapp. Human Animal, Dramaturge, and Academic Researcher

In January 2022 I was invited to be a participant in a yearlong collaboration with Cie Equinoctis to discuss what it might mean to create new modes of performances that would (re)valorize non-human animals in contemporary circus. My main mission was thereby to critically engage with a simultaneously naive and informed perspective. Outside this project, I am a dramaturge and circus scholar, trained in philosophy, literature, performance, and cultural studies. In my dissertation, I developed a semiotic method for the analysis of contemporary circus performances. My postdoctoral research is dedicated to the role of objects and apparatuses in circus performances in the context of the non-human turn. I have, however, never worked with animals onstage. Living in the city center of Brussels, I am rarely in contact with species other than human beings. Based on this background, I was invited to join the Cie Equinoctis while training, living, and performing at 'La Bonnette', the company's permaculture space and home since the fall of 2021, with their fellow non-human animal performers: horses.

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This accessible page is a derivative of <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1702122/1937362> which it is meant to support and not replace.

Page description: On opening the page, above the title, a large video is playing entitled 'Bouboule, 2023'. Keywords on the page are highlighted in blue and, when clicked upon, open up a window featuring a poem, in French, by Sabrina Sow. These windows show the printed poem and also contain a sound file of the author reading the poem.

Video description: Iridescent dots flow out from the centre of the image, outlining the form of a horse's ear, the points following the movement of the ear. The image changes to a horse's eye, and then to abstraction where what is being presented becomes unclear. The image sequence is underlain with a melancholy soundtrack.

Introduction. Animals and the Circus

If you approached a group of strangers on the street and asked them what comes to mind when they think about the circus, they would probably include a wild animal, a roaring lion, or a horse. This is not surprising, as the history of modern circus is filled with animals: Astley's circus, which is considered the first (institutionalized) circus in circus research, was originally an artistic riding school. Its shows were dominated by horsemanship and enriched by jugglers and fairground artists, and took place in the circular, eponymous ring. In the twentieth century, military horses were accompanied by wild animals such as lions, tigers, and elephants (Tait 2012). In France, owing to the omnipresence of animals in shows, circus was assigned to the Ministry of Agriculture instead of the Ministry of Culture until 1980 (Guy 2001).

Even though this is a very brief outline of animals in circus history, it seems to be uncontested that circus has played an important role in the history of [animal representation](#) 🍀.

Una Chaudhuri's list is fitting here:

there have been stretches, in the Western literary tradition, from Aesop's Fables to Will Self's *Great Apes* (1998); in the Western dramatic tradition, from Aristophanes' *The Frogs* (405 BCE) to Edward Albee's *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* (2000); in film, from Eadweard Muybridge's "zoogyroscope" in 1879 to Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man* (2005); in popular culture, from Mickey Mouse to the Animal Planet TV channel; and in popular performance from gladiatorial contests to the Las Vegas duo Siegfried and Roy. (Chaudhuri 2017)

Animals are nearly always present in popular culture circus representations, whether in films (e.g., *Water for Elephants* (2011), *Dumbo* (2019), advertisements (e.g., 'Gut gebrüllt, Löwe' (Amp 2016)), toys, or on children's clothes. Such popular representations most often reference

the peak phase of traditional circus at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, when animals, as a result of colonialism, were central to the shows.

Since the emerging animal rights movements in the 1970s, the presence of animals in the ring has been harshly criticized by organized opposition. More and more European countries, cities, and communes are prohibiting shows with animals, which has caused, on the one hand, the sizable disappearance of small family circuses, and, on the other hand, new forms of animal representation in traditional circuses (especially in the last five years), e.g., through holograms in *Storyteller* by Circus Roncalli or *Écocique* by Cirque André Joseph Bouglione. The renouncement of animals in these performances becomes a marketing strategy: Cirque Bouglione, for example, promotes its show while referencing the current ecological discourse, 'Plus qu'un cirque... L'Écocique. 100% humain' (Cirque André Joseph Bouglione 2018). The ethics of Roncalli's decision to perform with alternatives to non-human animals was lauded in newspapers: 'Hologramme im Circus Roncalli—Applaus für die neue Tierdarbietung' (Gensel 2019).

In contemporary circus, the absence of animal performances has become a fundamental aspect of its own definition: 'Circus—in its contemporary narrative-driven, animal-free form' (Leroux 2016: 3). One could object, claiming that otherness is still a major part of the circus's DNA (Fricker and Malouin 2018: 1), but the focus is no longer on the presentation of non-human animals as foreign or other; rather, the emphasis is on extraordinary bodies (including disabled bodies), cultural diversity, and alternative lifestyles.

Given the ubiquity of wildlife documentaries and traveling zoos, wild animals no longer represent what is different, alien, or other. At the same time, increasing urbanization means the cohabiting of human and non-human animals is literally disappearing before our eyes.

A fact that has been overlooked in the declaration of contemporary circus as 'animal-free' is that the leading institutions of contemporary circus still work with animals (especially horses) in their pedagogic programs. The Centre National des Arts du Cirque offers a 'Certification en arts équestres', and at the Academie Fratellini, in collaboration with Le Moulin de Pierre, one can specialize in equestrian art as a circus discipline. For a few years now, especially in France, animals have been appearing in contemporary circus, e.g., Cie Baro d'Evel performs with dogs, horses, and pigeons; Cie Sacekripa performs with a cat; and Théâtre de Zingaro, Théâtre de Centaure, Cavalia (CA), Cie Horsystèmes, and Cie Equinoctis perform with horses onstage and in the ring. The focus on horses and other domestic animals is attributable to the contemporary unease with using wild animals, in particular, to entertain.

What reunites the performances of the contemporary circus companies working with non-human animal performers is that the presentation of the talents of non-human animals, just as much as the demonstration of human power and dominance, is no longer the focus of interest. The objective is to create critical and experimental artworks that comment on society and discuss the relation of humans and non-human animals and technology. This kind of purpose is also recognizable in performances outside the circus, e.g., Joseph Beuys's *Iphigenie* and *I Like America and America Likes Me*, and Marina Abramovic's *Dragon Heads*, to name the

most famous. However, it is possible that circus artists might be able to work with domesticated animals with more care and knowledge than what happens in these other arts.

Given the increasing appearance of non-human animals in contemporary circus performances and other (performative) artforms, it is the aim of this article to take a critical, contextual perspective on the (re)valorization of non-human animals onstage. Thereby, the article is divided into three parts: an overview of the staging strategies of non-human animals in traditional and contemporary circus; an extended analysis of a contemporary circus performance that sets out to counter the human dominance of animals in performance; and reflections on further ways to decenter the human being and the anthropocentric telos in circus.

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Page description: On opening the page, above the title, a large video is playing entitled 'Hophop ! 2022'. Keywords on the page are highlighted in blue and, when clicked upon, open up a window featuring a poem, in French, by Sabrina Sow. These windows show the printed poem and also contain a sound file of the author reading the poem.

Video description: The camera looks down onto a horse's back from a standing rider's point of view. The horse is walking and the rider's bare feet and skirt are revealed as the camera angle swings from the horse's head and neck to its back. The rider's voice muffled by the gentle gong- or chime-like soundtrack, encourages the horse to trot, exclaiming Hop Hop! A cloud of dots is superimposed on the image, blurring the lines of perception.

Staging Dominance - Animal Performances in the Traditional Circus

In the animal acts of traditional circus, two main staging strategies were always present. On the one hand, wild and domestic animals were presented as dangerous. To achieve this impression, big cats were trained to roar on cue, horses were instructed to rear, crocodiles were made to open their mouths. Through whip sounds and big gestures, the human performer underlined the need for dressage and domestication. This mode of staging, according to Tait, alludes to a complicated emotional dynamic, 'when a big cat trainer describes enacting a persona of nervousness and fear to heighten the act's impression of danger for spectators, while simultaneously performing relaxed calmness towards the animal performers in order to mask any fear of them' (2012: 3). What becomes very clear in Tait's statement is the fact that these relations in circus are first and foremost staged, provoked by a specific dramaturgy and staging strategy. The actual relation between trainer, presenter, and animal performer is thereby not necessarily visible.

On the other hand, the animals of traditional circus are anthropomorphized, they 'are forced to perform us, to ceaselessly serenade us with our own fantasies: I want to walk like you, talk like you' (Chaudhuri 2017: 'Animal Rites'). The gestures of the humans onstage were downplayed, so as to increase the animal's anthropomorphic impression. One must thereby consider 'the process by which humans anthropomorphize [the animals...] with and through their emotions. Animal bodies became enveloped in human emotions' (Tait 2012: 1). The superiority of the human species here is hence based on an anthropocentric worldview.

Such staging strategies were strongly related to their cultural contexts, as the peak phase of traditional circus coincided with the industrial revolution, military campaigns, and colonialism

— in other words, with the peak phase of anthropocentrism. In this frame of reference, the work with animals was used to [underline human superiority and dominance over other species](#) ♣ (both human and non-human). Circus performances delivered ‘propaganda that encouraged the social acceptance of conquering military wars and oppressive practices’ (Tait 2021: 128). Tait argues that ‘big cat and elephant acts in the live circus changed in response to shifting social preferences influenced by the cinema and television of the 1960s and by animal rights campaigns from the 1970s’ (Tait 2012: 8), but most animal acts in traditional circus performances of the twenty-first century are indeed aligned with these very two strategies.

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Page description: On opening the page, above the title, a large video is playing entitled 'Circus stellar 2022'. Keywords on the page are highlighted in blue and, when clicked upon, open up a window featuring a poem, in French, by Sabrina Sow. These windows show the printed poem and also contain a sound file of the author reading the poem.

Video description: Within a wintery blue scene, underlain with the sound of orchestral strings, the image of someone standing on the rump of a walking horse becomes apparent. Pixels flutter down like snowflakes, and the horse circles, passing close to the camera. At this point a particular detail of the rider's legs comes into focus. There is a slight receding movement and a circle starting from the rump changes colour as it progresses across the rest of the canvas and makes the whole thing shine. At the end of the video all the lines and strokes expand and disappear in a final burst of light.

Contradictory Mastery. Animal Performances in the Contemporary Circus

And what about the dramaturgy in contemporary circus performances with non-human animals? If we assume that circus engages in a continuous dialogue with its historico-cultural context, we must ask how contemporary circus performances with non-human animal performers can be read as a response to current discourses and problems. According to Richard Grusin, 'almost every problem of note that we face in the twenty-first century entails engagement with non-humans—from climate change, drought, and famine; to biotechnology, intellectual property, and privacy; to genocide, terrorism, and war' (2015: vii). Consequently, he demands 'future attention, resources, and energy toward the nonhuman' (2015a: vii). This perspective is shared by many thinkers of our time: the so-called [non-human turn](#) ❀ encompasses a variety of ideas, such as new materialism (Barad 2007; Bennett 2010; Coole and Frost 2010), speculative realism (Harman 2018; Bogost 2012; Morton 2013), animal studies (Haraway 2020; Despret 2016), and posthumanism (Haraway 2004; Hayles 2010; Wolfe 2003). These thinkers focus on non-human entities, processes, agency, and performativity as a contra position to the dominance of [anthropocentric perspectives](#) ❀.

This turn is by no means limited to academia; it is also evident in artistic performance, which includes the contemporary circus. In contemporary performances, diverse staging strategies — ranging from the focus on non-human performers and objects, the use of nature as a performance space, to a specific rigging to underline the natural powers at stake, or immersive scenographies — are used to subvert the anthropocentric telos. Performing with non-human (domestic) animals can thereby be a means to 'challenge the unthinking anthropocentrism of

drama and theatre and ground a growing art practice that thinks humanity beyond the human' (Chaudhuri 2017: 'Introduction'). Therefore, the interplay between human and non-human animals onstage and in the ring becomes relevant in the frame of the 'nonhuman turn' (cf. Grusin 2015). In this context, non-human animals in performance might well provide:

- the possibility to focus on human and non-human relations in a way that transcends questions of climate change, environmental disasters, and technological enhancements, which are currently omnipresent in the discourse on the non-human turn
- a focus on the presence of non-human animals, which are vanishing in urban society and often limited to pets and zoos
- a possibility for animals to enter human cultural spaces such as theatres in non-voyeuristic ways, which allows a break with the nature/culture opposition and heterotopias of 'nature in culture' (Chaudhuri 2017: 'Animal Geographies')
- a conscious effort to avoid the reception of animals as nostalgic markers of a lost rural idyll or as representative of commodification and domestication of the alien, the exotic, and the natural
- the confrontation with possible alternative etymologies and ontologies by focusing on the animal gaze (cf. Chaudhuri 2017: '(De)Facing the Animal')
- a means to question human communities while observing herds and other animal forms of [animal cohabitancy](#) ❀
- an opportunity to create new forms of human and non-human animal companionship (cf. Haraway 2004)
- a high degree of non-human presence on stage (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2008)

Despite promising potential, the mere presence of an animal performer onstage or in the ring does not automatically create a non-anthropocentric focus. On the contrary, as noted in the previous paragraph, animal acts in traditional circus consciously underline human dominance over non-human animals, so that they become emblematic of an anthropocentric worldview.

In contemporary circus, there is the paradox that mastery in handling animals is required if mastery onstage is to be problematized or subverted. What does this mean? In contrast to theater performances of the 1970s, such as Beuys's *I like America and America Likes Me* and Abramovic's *Dragon Heads*, where artists with no training are performing with unpredictable and untamed non-human animals, (contemporary) circus performers usually have an established relationship with them. Human and non-human animals are taught how to work together, which mean *they* both share *mastery*. Both human and non-human artists draw on their performance skills. It could be argued that the relationship between human and non-human animals is never unilateral. In the words of Donna Haraway: 'We are training each other in acts of communication we barely understand. We are, constitutively, [companion species](#) ❀' (2020: 2). Or one could point out that the training of animals is fundamentally based on the input of each individual non-human animal; their impact on the performance outcome needs to be highlighted: 'Circus acts used an individual animal's capacity for performance, which prompted the larger underlying question of whether animals perform for

their own kind' (Tait 2012: 2). However, if we exclude the possibility of non-human animal improvisation onstage at this point (the topic of improvisation will be discussed later in 'further reflections'), it is the human animal directing the course of the performance. A non-improvised performance with non-human animals is determined by the cues of the trainer, who also provides the stimulating environment necessary to provoke a specific behavior on the side of the non-human co-performer. Human mastery is thereby required, so that the human being can be decentered only through specific staging strategies.

How and in what ways does the staging of non-human animals in contemporary circus differ from those of traditional circus performances? This question is going to be answered through an analysis of *Dresse-toi* (2018) by Cie Equinoctis. This performance has been chosen because it presents a variety of the most prominent dramaturgic strategies currently found in animal performances of the contemporary circus. The proposed reading is conducted by a circus scholar and dramaturge who has never worked with non-human animals. Even though I spent several weeks with Cie Equinoctis while working on this article, the insights on training and working with non-human animals that I gained during our collaboration are left aside at this point. The focus is on the reception of the piece.

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Page description: On opening the page, above the title, a large video is playing entitled 'Frotter 2023'. Keywords on the page are highlighted in blue and, when clicked upon, open up a window featuring a poem, in French, by Sabrina Sow. These windows show the printed poem and also contain a sound file of the author reading the poem.

Video description: Scribbled vertically with thick pixelated lines but keeping the real colour of the scene, the moving image shows an interaction between a woman and a horse. The sequence starts with the woman grooming the horse with a brush, she leans over to brush the legs and the horse scratches her back with his muzzle. Accompanied by a sparkling digital soundtrack, the images change shape and colour, going from black and white to the brighter colours of the woman's skin, and the grass on the ground.

Staging Strategies in Animal Performances of the Contemporary Circus: The Example of *Dresse-Toi* by Cie Equinoctis

[...] the self-identification as animal lovers that we perform every day in our homes (and on Sundays when we drag the kids around the zoo) is part of a paper-thin but rock-hard veneer on an animal culture of staggering [violence and exploitation](#) ♣. (Chaudhuri 2017: '(De)facing the animal')

At dusk, an audience is guided through a park, Le Jard Anglais in Chalons-en-Champagne, to the scene where *Dresse-toi* (2018) by Cie Equinoctis is being performed. In the center there is a ring that is divided into several areas: a ring curb, an inner ring made of sawdust, a ring of grass, and a sawdust circle, which immediately frames the performance's setting: a circus and riding show. In the background, three horses, two grays and a bay are leashed in front of a large white canvas. Surrounded by trees, the scenery is illuminated by various points on the ring curb and by three spotlights from above, casting the shadow of the horses on the canvas. A middle-aged white man dressed in a gray suit and white t-shirt, wearing a plastic neck brace filled with apples, stands between the horses. While the audience is being seated around the ring, they are invited to witness a joyful and intimate play between a brown horse, fitted with reins, and a dark-skinned woman, who is wearing a short black dress and a long red scarf blindfolding her eyes. Barefoot, she runs in circles around the ring, while her non-human animal co-performer follows her movements and instructions. In the center of the ring, the horse lays down, allowing his blinded co-performer to climb onto his back and start the presentation of a diversity of horse gaits.

After each successful trick, [the human and non-human animal share an apple](#) ♣. The man dressed in the gray suit enters the ring, reminiscent of the traditional circus ringmaster:

Bonne soir, Ladies and Gentlemen. Nous sommes la Cie Equinoctis [...] Je suppose que vous aimez bien les animaux. Je veux commencer ce spectacle avec un jeu sur la confiance entre nous, les êtres humains, et les animaux. Je cherche une assistante pour partager un moment. (*Dresse-toi*, 2018)

Dresse-toi (2018) is a performance created and performed by the French Company Cie Equinoctis, which was initiated by Sabrina Sow in 2006 and focuses on equestrian arts as its main circus discipline. Three human performers (Sabrina Sow as equestrian artist, Jakob Vandenburg as moderator, Victoria Belen Martinez — who pretends to be an audience member/*baronne*, model, and acrobat selected from the public) and four non-human animals (the horses Bouboule, Cynique, Babouchka, and Blossom) perform in the ring. A diversity of categories of equestrian acts are presented in the performance, namely, the high school (*haute école*) act, ‘a style of riding originating in the schools of classical equitation, in which a ridden horse executes complex steps. A contemporary descendant is competitive dressage’ (Baston 2021: 123); the liberty act, ‘unridden horses perform complex patterned movements cued by a human performer’ (Baston 2021: 123); Roman riding, ‘a solo performer rides two (or more) horses standing upright on their backs’ (Baston 2021: 124), and vaulting, ‘a fast-paced act in which the performer runs alongside the horse, vaulting over it and performing tricks’ (Baston 2021: 124). Like the company’s other works, the performance addresses the question of our relations with other beings — be they human or non-human.

Dresse-toi starts as a family show, presenting a beautiful, playful relationship based on mutual trust and sensitivity between humans and non-human animals. The human performer’s bare feet and blindness underline her physical vulnerability, which is heightened by the rigor of the horses’ hooves and the use of a *red* scarf. The dark, short dress showing much of her brown skin refers to the brown fur of the horse, approximating the appearance of the human and non-human animal performers; sharing an apple makes the two equals. As the sun sets, the performance increasingly becomes a critical commentary on contemporary society. The objective is to confront the discrepancies between human ‘self-identification as animal-lovers’ and the ‘animal culture of staggering violence and exploitation’ (Chaudhuri 2017: ‘(De)facing the Animal’), which is described in the opening quotation of this text.

Through the presentation of common cultural practices involving animals, the non-human animal is anthropomorphized and the human animal is zoomorphized. The parallels between human and non-human animals and the objectification of human and non-human animals are emblematic of the problematic nature of contemporary human and non-human animal relations. This chapter discloses the dramaturgic strategies used in *Dresse-toi* to achieve a better understanding of the specific staging of our contemporary relationship to non-human animals. What does it mean to create new modes of circus performances that would (re)valorize the animal?

This accessible page is a derivative of <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1702122/2057394> which it is meant to support and not replace.

Page description: On opening the page, above the title, two videos are playing entitled 'Dresse toi 2022'. Keywords on the page are highlighted in blue and, when clicked upon, open up a window featuring a poem, in French, by Sabrina Sow. These windows show the printed poem and also contain a sound file of the author reading the poem.

Videos description: Two videos are shown alongside one another in a square format. They represent the same video sequence, played simultaneously but in a different period. The abstracted moving image of the head and feet of a horse are depicted in white against a blue background. The shapes are constructed by contour lines in constant movement, at times rotated by 180 degrees. They are underscored with a shimmering sonorous soundtrack.

Dresse-Toi. A Presentation of Common Cultural Animal Practices

From dressage to cattle trade, house pets, domestication, and eating meat, *Dresse-toi* presents the most common contemporary western cultural practices involving animals. One main dramaturgic strategy in the performance is to apply these practices to interactions among humans. The strategy is already visible in the title: on the one hand, *Dresse-toi* obviously alludes to 'dressage'. At the same time, the title contains the request '*Dresse-toi*', which results in a reversal of roles. 'You, human recipient, *dresse-toi!*' Literally, 'stand up', alluding to evolution and the resulting discourse on human superiority owing to the upright gait as well as an invitation to stand up in protest. This [complex sign structure](#) ♣ found in the performance's title is taken up in every scene.

After greeting the public, the ringmaster selects his assistant from the public, which he does with a rough, cruel tone, creating the impression of a cattle market. Instead of selecting an animal on the market, he is looking for a 'human' animal:

Désolé on ne peut pas les enfants, les parents, il y a des dangers et des risques. Pas des enfants. Pas des hommes non plus. Je n'aime pas de soleil. Pas des parapluies. Tu connais des chevaux? C'est trop simple. Vous être de l'autre côté de la barrière. Ce n'est pas possible. Une jolie fille. J'ai dit pas des enfants. Combien de fois? Tu es un peu blonde. Non, désolé. C'est difficile. Je n'aime pas des blondes. Je vais choisir moi-même. Madame, tu veux venir sur scène? J'adore des hauts talons. Viens.

The reversal of roles not only illustrates the cruelty of the norms that we apply when selecting

animals (best in show) but also underlines how such selection processes are always also present among human animals. The rough tone calls to mind social Darwinism during the Second World War. The stereotypic selection criteria ('une jolie fille'; 'je n'aime pas des blondes'; 'J'adore des hauts talons') refer to a normative image of (wo)man that is omnipresent in our contemporary culture with regard to questions of gender and heteronormative bodies. At the same time, the moderator's strong English accent makes him an exotic figure. The cultural practice of cattle markets is thus led into absurdum when applied to human–human relations, and becomes emblematic of contemporary society.

In the second scene, the intimate relationship between one human animal and one non-human animal is staged in the center of the ring; the focus is the cultural animal practice of pet keeping. An "oedipal vision" ❀ (Wolfe 2003: 169) of the animal, one that 'results in thinking about nonhuman others in terms of validating them by proving that animals, too, can think or Feel' (Wolfe 2003: 169), is presented. The parallels between human and non-human animals are underlined, for example, the performer's black dress and dark hair and skin resembles the horse's coloring. Human and non-human animal cuddle and share an apple; they are engaged in a meaningful, intimate relationship. The non-human animal is strategically anthropomorphized through human-like postures such as sitting, sticking out the tongue, and yawning. These gestures cause the audience to laugh. As Tait puts it: 'In searching for ways in which animals are like us—circus animal acts exploit our predilection for mimetic reproduction of familiar physical behavior—we seek to confirm that animals' perceptual awareness and emotional relations mirror our own' (Tait 2012: 7). At the very end of the scene, the oedipal vision of the animal is led into absurdum. During intense cuddling, the horse's penis becomes visibly erect. Through the succession of a focus on anthropomorphization, the erection becomes the key to reading the performance: what began as an entertaining family show has become a critical commentary on socially taboo relations between human and non-human animals.

The third scene addresses our modern western understanding of non-human animals as part of 'the group of discursively colonized "others" ❀—the insane, children, "savages"—upon whom rationalism imposes its hegemony' (Chaudhuri 2017: 'Animal Geographies'). The human performers represent horses: the moderator enters the ring naked, illustrating the savage, impulse-driven, non-human animal. Victoria, the actress/*baronne*, who has been selected from the audience, clumsily balances on the side of the ring. When falling, she performs elements of contortion. She appears to be a conglomeration of drunk, insane, childish, and animalistic. This scene is commented on by the non-human animal performer who is shaking its head — an anthropomorphized comment — as the following song is sung aloud:

Qui est la plus noble conquête de l'homme ?
Qui a toujours été à ses côtés?
Qui pas à pas l'a accompagné ?
Qui a porté ses guerriers?
Qui a porté ses enfants?

Qui symbolise la liberté?
Qui est acheté et qui on vend?
Qui est harnaché, soumis, dressé?
Qui faut-il sans cesse surveiller?
Qui ne sera jamais l'égal?
Qui n'est qu'un suppôt du mal?
À qui dénie-t-on toute intelligence?
Qui est trop fou? Qui est trop vain?
Qui doit-on protéger de son manque de bon sens?
À qui rabâche-t-on qu'il vaut moins?
Qui est taxé de rebel, d'indocile?
Qui est maladroit et imbécile?
Qui est une proie dans l'ombre de l'histoire ?
Qui va sans rechigner à l'abattoir ?
De qui se sépare-t-on car trop âgé ?
Qui est-ce qui se cache pour pleurer?
Qui juge-t-on sans cesse?
Qui juge-t-on sans cesse?

The interplay and discrepancy between the bodily movements of the human and non-human animal performers with the lyrics impressively illustrate the inconsistencies in the western image of non-human animals, especially of horses.

Using the equestrian discipline 'liberty' ♣ in which the horse is loose, working without ropes or reins, the topics of bestiality and domestication are taken up once again. The input of the presenter thereby remains mostly invisible. The audience is given the impression that they are witnessing a wild and free animal. To reinforce this idea, the non-human performer rolls in sawdust, which illustrates its (romanticized) behavior in a natural environment. As the human performer, Sow, reenters the stage, equipped with two wigs, the horse starts running in circles, snorts, rises, rolls, and lunges backwards. The specific staging of these tricks is alluding to the bucking horse, the beast, that needs to be tamed.

The topics of domestication and (in its hyperbolic form) dressage are enforced when they are applied to the human beings onstage. Victoria, equipped with a whip and dressed in riding clothes — white jodhpurs and a black jacket — rides on the back of the moderator, who is dressed in a fur waistcoat and hot pants. The moderator imitates the horse's patterns. Victoria jumps on his back, executing vaulting tricks, and uses the whip to keep her co-performer moving. At the end of the scene, the moderator collapses in the middle of the ring and doesn't get up. What reminds one of the game children often play with each other is a very successful staging strategy. While applying dressage and vaulting to relations between humans, the absurdity and potential cruelty of these disciplines is set into focus.

Though horses are commonly disciplined with whips and are viewed 'essentially as a moving platform while the focus is on the equestrian' (Baston 2021: 108), these practices become

brutal when transferred to human–human interactions. The scene therefore brings about a new awareness of the power relations of equestrian art. This applies not only to the disciplines of dressage and vaulting but also to the mere handling of non-human animals. The performance causes us to contemplate the fact that when a female human performer is forced to blindly follow the instructions of the moderator and is nearly overrun by a circling house; we consider the performance to be irrational and dangerous. But why is this not the case in non-human animals? Why do we consider human beings vulnerable yet treat non-human animals like objects without agency?

The fifth scene illustrates the appearance of horses in mythology. In a white dress, Sow conducts Roman riding on two white horses, Cynique and Babouchka, equipped with a metallic chain. The white dress moves in a wind draft that has been created by the circling horses. The ring is fully lit with bright lights that contrast with the dark evening sky. The swirling sawdust causes atmospheric dust, which makes the setting almost mystical. For the first time, the act is accompanied by music: bass guitar sounds and the rhythm of the trotting horses create a ritualistic, spherical soundscape. Owing to the specific staging (i.e., the combination of white fur, flowing dress, mythical music, mist), the scene calls to mind Greek mythology: the horses are reminiscent of Pegasus, and the appearance of the human performer alludes to Athena, mistress of the horses. The divinity of non-human animals and their relation to human beings are emphasized. The moderator counterpoints the superior appearance of the equestrian artists. He follows his non-human animal co-performers, and offers his shoulder to the human Roman rider. In doing so, he limps, falls, and crawls out of the ring.

Another reading is possible. By accentuating the femininity of Sabrina through her costume and movement quality, the act creates a metadiscourse on equestrian circus:

The nineteenth century produced many female equestrians, such as the graceful ballerina dancing on horseback, who dominated the arena. A depiction of Palmyre Annato [...], posed delicately *en pointe* on her horse in the Cirque des Champs-élysées (c. 1850), is representative of what would become an iconic image for the circus. (Baston 2021: 111)

The metadiscourse offers a way to understand the following action: as techno music plays, repeating ‘cheval, cheval’, the moderator and Victoria enter the ring wearing white aprons and carrying saucepans. The two white horses are grazing peacefully. Sabrina, still wearing her white dress, is doused with blood by the moderator. Knives are sharpened on her skin, horses are smeared with blood. Sabrina takes off her dress and is left wearing a persimmon bra and black hot pants. She takes a skirt made of sausages out of the pot. Doused with blood, she starts a seductive dance.

This scene reminds us of the cruelties connected to our most common western cultural animal practices, namely, slaughtering, butchering, and eating meat.

Especially due to the symbolic value of the color ‘white’ (horses and costumes) and the focus on the divine image of horses, Chaudhuri’s quotation at the very beginning of this section

becomes manifest in the performance: our self-identification as innocent animal lovers is just a veneer, underneath which is an animal culture of violence and exploitation.

This reading was, according to Sow, very present in the reception of the performance. Several spectators came to see her afterward to thank her for insisting on the importance of becoming vegetarian or vegan.

But the interpretation of this scene is not at all limited to the critical presentation of the cultural animal practice of eating meat. The sausage skirt was reminiscent of the banana skirt of Josephine Baker, resistance fighter, and counterespionage agent, and first black woman in the Paris Panthéon. The performance illustrates, on the one hand, 'how aspects of gender and/or race identity converge with aspects of animal identity in live circus' (Tait 2012: 108). It 'delivers a conjunction of gender theory and speciesism' (Tait, 2012: 8, following Singer 1995) and alludes to the fact that the 'advent of the animal rights movement followed shortly after the women's liberation' (Tait 2012: 8).

We must reexamine the relations not only between humans and non-human animals but also among humans themselves. The performance therefore underlines the political potential of artistic work and the possibility to initiate social change through the circus arts — especially while working with non-human entities.

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Page description: On opening the page, above the title, a large video is playing entitled 'Toucher 2022'. Keywords on the page are highlighted in blue and, when clicked upon, open up a window featuring a poem, in French, by Sabrina Sow. These windows show the printed poem and also contain a sound file of the author reading the poem.

Video description: Accompanied by sounds of waves on a beach, or perhaps brushing noises, and a melodic, droning sound, coloured but not distorted images are superimposed over one another rhythmically. In light blue and mauve, a woman sits and lies on a horse, stroking its back and embracing it. The image of a hand is introduced and gives the impression that the woman is caressing both the horse and herself. Similarly, a transition from her spotted dress changes gently to reveal a starry night.

Dresse-Toi: A Contemporary Staging of Human-Non-Human Animal Relations?

How do the staging strategies of *Dresse-toi* differ from those used in animal acts in traditional circus performances? Put straightforwardly, they differ only slightly. *Dresse-toi* repeats traditional staging strategies while presenting a diversity of equestrian acts, e.g., the high school act, the liberty act, Roman riding, or vaulting; however, skills and equestrian techniques occur in a narrative context, so that the performance actually questions human superiority, ability, and dominance in opposition to underlining it. The hierarchical, anthropocentric relationship between human and non-human animals is revived to create a critical commentary: by anthropomorphizing the non-human animal and animalizing the human animal and objectifying both human and non-human animals, the performance makes evident the urgent issues regarding human–non-human animal relations in our society.

If we assume that the non-human turn is reciprocal, which means, on the one hand, that the performances, their dramaturgy, topics, and narrative context should change in order to be less focused on human needs, and that, on the other hand, the audience's perspective has to be disrupted as well, *Dresse-toi* contributes a less anthropocentric perspective. Furthermore, it illustrates [the paradox](#) ❀ that if animal handling is to be problematized, and eventually subverted, then it should also be mastered onstage. In its application of common western animal practices to human–human relations, it also visualizes that 'in looking at our relations with animals, we might understand how we remake the world around us through our subjective experience of emotions' (Tait 2012: 7).

It should be noted, though, that the performance does not present alternative modes of

(re)valorizing the animal onstage, a direction that it has in common with the other contemporary circus performance mentioned in the introduction.

In *Falaise* by Cie Baro d'Evel, for example, the horses and pigeons are a means to reinforce the fictional world:

Dans l'obscurité des cavernes, le son était pour les hommes une boussole, la lumière qui les guidait dans l'aveugle, le chant qui éclairait contre les parois. Il fallait crier pour se repérer. Il fallait chanter pour éclairer le noir. Ici aussi, ça crie, ça cherche, ça tâtonne. Ça avance du mieux que ça peut dans le tunnel de l'époque. Difficile de savoir si c'est le pied du mur ou le sommet du monde, si la vie y meurt ou si elle renait. Mais ça chute et ça se relève avec la même évidence, avec la même innocence, avec la même insistance. Ça veut s'en sortir. Coûte que coûte. C'est nombreux. C'est un troupeau. C'est une foule. Presque une famille. Et dans les interstices d'un monde en ruine, ça invente du nouveau. Une autre fin du monde est possible – elle a même commencé. Voilà ce que disent ces corps. Ceux de la vie qui luit, ceux de la vie qui cogne. (Baro d'Evel 2022)

The non-human animal performers are integral to the search for alternatives, they are part of the 'herd', 'the crowd', 'the family'. Their staging, however, is first and foremost used to provide 'a context for the social milieu' (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 102) or 'to enhance the atmosphere' (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 102). Regarding this dramaturgical function, *Falaise* takes up common dramaturgic strategies that have been used by fairground and some theater performances with non-human animal performers since the eighteenth century (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2008: 102).

In *VRAI—Objet Vivant Non Identifié* by Cie Sacekripa, the audience is literally confronted with its limited worldview: the stage area is walled off, leaving only a viewing slit placed at the bottom of the stage. The cat appears as a symbol of the isolation and solitude experienced by the main character. The main western symbols and images related to cats are picked up: a lonely 'cat person', being as stubborn as a cat, etc. Even though the cat appears to be undressed, and even though it could leave the impression of an improvising non-human animal onstage, it functions as a visualization of the inner world of the main character. Thus, here again, the non-human animal onstage is subject to the anthropocentric telos.

The point is that contemporary animal performances can 'present new narratives while performing acts with a long history' (Baston 2021: 108). Thus, the equestrian techniques and dramaturgic strategies have not fundamentally changed. Therefore, the potential of the interplay between human and non-human animals onstage and in the ring in the frame of the non-human turn is far from being exhausted.

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Page description: On opening the page, above the title, a large video is playing entitled 'Out of vision 2023'. Keywords on the page are highlighted in blue and, when clicked upon, open up a window featuring a poem, in French, by Sabrina Sow. These windows show the printed poem and also contain a sound file of the author reading the poem.

Video description: A single camera shot has slight distortion but relatively natural colour and sound (birdsong and flies buzzing). It introduces a horse in close up, tracking slowly from the eye and head to the rump. Responding to this movement, the colour changes from blue-grey to the warmth of the horse's coat, giving the impression that a ray of sunlight passes over the subject.

Responding to the Non-Human Turn? Further Reflections

Are there other ways to decenter the human being and the [anthropocentric](#) ❀ telos in circus? The final paragraphs reassemble a small collection of ideas by contemporary circus artists working with non-human animal performers.

What might come to mind is improvisation, a strategy that has been used in theater performances. According to Fischer-Lichte, however, such performances in the 1970s, e.g., Beuys's *I like America and America Likes Me* and Abramovic's *Dragon Heads*, escape the possibility of ascribing a 'set of meanings and functions to the animals present onstage' (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 102). In both cases, the human performers working with wild, untamed animals were inexperienced. In circus, however, as argued, if it is understood in terms of skillful ability, then the mastery of animal training and its subsequent presentation would be the prerequisite for subversion. Therefore, animals improvising in the circus would not just be 'thrown' into an unknown situation or space; it is rather the animal trainer's responsibility to teach them 'that performance space is a play space. A space in which each of its proposals is right and there is no right or wrong answer' (Dray 2022: 326).

The French researcher and equestrian artist Charlène Dray worked on training her non-human animal co-performers, Listan and Luzio, to improvise. She stated, however, that her horses usually use the improvisation space to 'do nothing' onstage. Therefore, the 'nothing' has to be transferred into 'something' by dramaturgical means (Dray 2022: 326). One strategy used by Dray in this context is the implementation of an onboard sensor system to transpose the horse's movement into sounds.

The 'correspondence' between movement of animal and the sound generated by our

device transformed moments of non-activity into musical silence. Each breath, each gesture, each sound became a kind of dialogue without words. Through our device, immobility suddenly takes expression of a gestural intention. In the studio or on stage, the suspension created by our companions immersed us in an active listening. (Dray 2022: 327)

Approaching a non-human entity by focusing on the diversity of human senses is a strategy that is currently also used in object manipulation. In this context, the juggler Ben Richter developed the phenomenological method, 'The Language of Objects', 'designed to facilitate sensitivity to the agency of objects' (Richter 2022). During the collaboration with Cie Equinoctis, we applied this method to non-human animals to reduce the associations, anthropomorphizing, and metaphors that are connected to our common cultural animal practices — while simultaneously erasing the possibility of an interspecies encounter. Sight, smell, taste, touch, movement, sound, and holding the horse were (re)discovered while submitting to the idea of 'knowing nothing' (Richter 2022) about horses. The visual artist Natan Hansi Alberca turned this approach into an artwork. It could be argued that this approach still focuses on human experience and is thus fundamentally anthropocentric, and I would agree. However, applying the Language of Objects to human–non-human animal encounters allows a subversion of the human telos and a perception beyond common western practices, be it regarding an oedipal vision of the animal or in connection to its symbolic meaning in our cultural context. At the same time, this act of dehumanizing the non-human animal while approaching it as an object could be fundamentally criticized. In this context, the question arises of how we can face the animal Other 'without either defacing it [...] or entirely effacing it' (Chaudhuri 2017: '(De)Facing the Animal'). Furthermore, we could move beyond the human gaze, which is a central aspect of the non-human turn, and focus inversely on the animal gaze (cf. Chaudhuri 2017: '(De)Facing the Animal'), which would offer a confrontation with alternative etymologies and ontologies. The idea that it is not only us looking at the non-human animal but also the non-human animal looking at us is thereby crucial. Staging strategies applied to allow a focus on the animal gaze often work with new technologies, especially video installations (see, e.g., the experiments of Cie Horsystèmes (www.charlenedray.com)). So far, they have been used in the context of laboratories and not yet turned into (reproducible) performances.

Lastly, I would like to draw attention to the fact that animal performances offer the possibility for interspecies encounters outside the shows, an opportunity taken up by Cie Equinoctis. A co-presence of human and non-human animals was established by inviting the non-human animals into the theater space, letting them walk around the foyer, and by welcoming human animals to observe open trainings while enjoying wine and snacks in the circus tent, which was installed at the very center of the grazing areas of the company's residency space.

The potential of interspecies encounters can be broadened while leaving the actual performance context: initiated by Elise Coudurier-Boeuf, Cie Equinoctis is currently creating a permacultural space entitled 'La Bonnette', located in Saint-Marcelin de Cray, Bourgogne. On forty hectares, the space has a circus tent, a farmhouse, an artistic residency space, a metal workshop, a yurt for writing residencies, immense grazing areas for the company's twelve

horses, a beekeeper, and a home for five chickens. The overall project is dedicated to the realization of smaller projects and artworks 'en lien avec le vivant et sortant des processus de domination' (Coudurier-Boeuf 2022). Based on the cohabitation of human and non-human animals in the context of art and performance, 'La Bonnette' offers the possibility to question human communities while observing herds and other forms of animal cohabitancy; it offers the opportunity to create new dimensions of human and non-human animal companionship.

Still in the beginning phases, this space — just as much as all other projects dedicated to the subversion of the staging of traditional human dominance in animal circus performances — gives us reason to assume that other modes of performances and artworks (re)valorizing the animal and redefining human and non-human animal companionship will appear in the circus.

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Films

Dumbo, dir. by Tim Burton. 2019. Produced by Justin Springer, Ehren Kruger, Derek Frey, and Katterli Frauenfelder. Starring Colin Farrell, Michael Keaton, Danny DeVito, Eva Green, and Alan Arkin (Walt Disney Pictures)

Water for Elephants, dir. by Francis Lawrence. 2011. Produced by Gil Netter, Erwin Stoff, and Andrew R. Tennenbaum. Starring Reese Witherspoon, Robert Pattinson, Christoph Waltz (20th Century Fox)

Performances

Abramovic, Marina. 1990. *Dragon Head*. Performed by Marina Abramovic and a snake

Beuys, Joseph. 1969. *Iphigenie*. Performed by Joseph Beuys and one mold

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Cie Baro d'Evel. 2021. *Falaises*, dir. by Camille Decourtye et Blaï Mateu Trias. On stage: Noémie Bouissou, Camille Decourtye, Claire Lamothe, Blaï Mateu Trias, Oriol Pla, Julian Sicard, Marti Soler, Guillermo Weickert, one horse, some pigeons

Cirque André Joseph Bouglione. 2018. *Ecocique*, dir. by André Joseph and Sandrine Bouglione

Cie Equinoctis. 2019. *Dresse-toi*, dir. by Sabrina Sow. Performed by Sabrina Sow, Jacob Vandenburg, Victoria Belen Martinez and four horses, namely Bouboule, Cynique, Babouchka and Blossom. Light by Cilles Faure. Sound by Tatiana Paris. Scenography by Xavier Mertens

Circus Roncalli. 2019. *Storyteller*, dir. by Bernard Paul.

Companies

Cie Baro d'Evel www.barodevel.com

Cie Sacekripa www.sacekripa.com

Théâtre de Zingaro www.bartabas.fr

Théâtre du Centaure www.theatreducentaure.com

Cavalia www.cavalia.com

Cie HorsSystèmes www.charlenedray.com

Cie Equinoctis www.cieequinoctis.com

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