



# Dramaturgy as a shaping element of the clown's repertoire

A dramaturgia como elemento formador  
de repertório do palhaço

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## ABSTRACT

The careers of two circus clowns – Roger Avanzi and Arlindo Pimenta – serve as a guide to observe how the theatricality acquired in the circus environment through the circus-theater is transposed into clown drama. The researches of the playwright and theater director Carlos Alberto Soffredini and Fernando Bolognese, together with my experiences, highlight the importance of circus theater in structuring the clown's poetics.

Keywords: Clown. Education. Training. Clown. Circus.

## RESUMO

*As carreiras de dois palhaços circenses – Roger Avanzi e Arlindo Pimenta – servem como guia para observarmos como a teatralidade adquirida no ambiente circense por meio do circo-teatro se transposta para a dramaturgia do palhaço. As pesquisas do dramaturgo e diretor teatral Carlos Alberto Soffredini e de Fernando Bolognese, juntamente com minhas experiências, destacam a importância do circo-teatro na estruturação da poética do palhaço.*

*Palavras-chave: Palhaço. Formação. Treinamento. Clown. Circo.*

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The circus repertoire is mnemonic, passed on to successive family generations. Among the companies there is a constant exchange of information, along with the consequent changes. Circus comedy drama (especially sketches) relies on short scripts, general reasons that lend themselves to the improvisation and creativity of the artists, especially of the comedy ones. The effectiveness of dramaturgy, therefore, obeys the creativity of each clown (BOLOGNESI, 2003, p. 172).

Theatrical art is very present in circus culture, an essence that manifests itself at all moments and performances of the show: from the opening, with the eloquent narrative of the Ringmaster about the performances to come, through entrées and comedy sketches starred by clowns and ending with exciting words that value the presence of the audience. It is possible to affirm that dramatic action was (and will be) built with strong theatrical bases that guide the performances of circus artists in their various techniques and languages.

In the case of circus artists Arlindo Pimenta (Pimenta the clown) and Roger Avanzi (Picolino 2 the clown), we have the direct formation caused by the circus-theater, which offered techniques and experiences that were transposed to their performance as clowns. The “gift of speech” is developed through the numerous assemblies and performances of the repertoire that these itinerant circuses offered to a diverse audience that looked forward to the artistic and exciting encounters that circuses provided.

The rehearsal directors’ work at the time was not just to put on a play; these artists were responsible for keeping the popular aesthetic of these performances and also for structuring the training of the actors performing in the plays. The theatrical reasoning seized with these plays’ experiences was directly applied to the comedy sketches.

The circus-theater, both in its dramas and comedies, used a typology for the structuring of the characters of its plays, which was densely understood and staged by circus performers. In the narratives of Roger Avanzi and Tabajara Pimenta (son of Arlindo Pimenta who was a juggler and manager of various circuses) we have found numerous facts related to rehearsals and performances that support the weight of theatrical training applied in circus training.

The issue of the typology of characters demonstrates a targeting and specialization of the studied artists, because each type gets a quality of apparatuses that will empower the actor’s performance: effects, breaks, triangulation, the scaling of the scenic truth, the empathy to be created by the romantic pair, the hate to be built by the villain and, mainly, the consciousness of being a supporting role with accurate wait

times in relation to the interpretation of the main character. This understanding is the same as seen in the comedy duo of clowns, named *escada* in Brazil.

The circus-theater's mechanics dialogue directly with the dramaturgy of the sketches performed by the comedy duo of clowns. The respondents based themselves on the comedy duo's techniques mainly with regard to the polarity of the rational and intuitive, i.e., the White Clown and Auguste, respectively.

This convention is described by Roger and Tabajara as a starting point for the structuring of the dramaturgy of the clown and is based on the tradition and oral transmission of clowns from various times and places. The polarity of the comedy duo may have been born at the exact moment someone mocked others in a position of greater power; this irony was originated as thought and became a scene, and from there the "repressed" gained a horizontality that has guided the dramaturgy of all of humankind's clowns.

In this text, the relationship between the circus-theater and the clown's dramaturgy shall be delineated through the perspective of Carlos Alberto Soffredini, with whom I absorbed practices about the theatrical aesthetic that influenced my works with a clown-like language.

Carlos Alberto Soffredini stood out in the Brazilian theater scenario with his texts, well prepared with in-depth field researches. His artistic directions followed various paths, but the one based on popular aesthetics left us important benchmarks concerning the structuring of language. The artist prepared pedagogical procedures for training actors and actresses who could perform the circus-theater aesthetics in their theatrical performances.

The artist's research is made available here from two perspectives: a practical perspective, which includes the description of some experiences during rehearsals of the *Minha Nossa* play with the Núcleo de Estética Teatral Popular (Núcleo ESTEP) [Popular Theatrical Aesthetics Center]; and a theoretical perspective, with excerpts from his text "*De um trabalhador sobre seu trabalho* [From a worker about his job] (1980), which demonstrates the richness of the Brazilian circus-theater and how it is interwoven with the formation of circus clowns.

Another author that provides theoretical subsidies to demonstrate the importance of the theatrical structure of the clown is Mario Bolognesi, in his book *O Palhaço* [The Clown] (2003), which addresses issues pertaining to the comedy duo, which are reinforced in the interviews with Avanzi and Tabajara.

The White Clown and Auguste duo, thus, solidifies the comedy masks of class society. The White Clown would be the voice of order and Auguste, the outcast who does not conform to progress, machinery and the industrial worker's jumpsuit (BOLOGNESI, 2003, p. 78).

### *Entrées and sketches*

A circus *entrée* is a short sketch, starred by clowns, with approximate duration of 15 or 20 minutes, depending on the interaction with the audience, being mostly improvised. The origin of the term "*entrée*" is unknown. It may refer to circus parades, which were performed as a form of dissemination of the show, when the artists exhibited a demonstration of their talents at the front door of French circuses, hoping that the audience would buy tickets to watch it. Another likely origin of the word relates to the parodic brevity of the clowns' interventions in equestrian shows. In this case, however, the equivalent term, "*reprise*," would be the most appropriate, because the circus attraction would have been replayed in reverse. The participation of clowns, thus, would be a sort of comic interval between two serious attractions (BOLOGNESI, 2003, p. 103).

In 1978, Roger Avanzi began working as a clown and bicycle teacher at the Piolin Academy of Circus Arts (APAC) and stated that the best way of teaching the art of being a clown was through the study of *entrées* and sketches, as they encompass all of the basic concepts required.

This pedagogical choice by Roger is very relevant to our study, since it reveals that the theatrical consciousness of clowns is the basis of their creation and that bodily (mimes and acrobatics) and aesthetic (makeup and clothing) techniques that they choose to manifest them serve as support to his/her performance.

Through sketches and *entrées*, clowns define their language: body, verbal or musical language, and also their essence (as a White Clown or Auguste); finally, they define how they will perform.

It is true to say that Roger had multiple skills before being a clown: as a knight, cyclist, trapeze artist, actor and musician. He became Tony de Soirée because of these skills and took over the role of Picolino 2, the clown, to replace his ill father. Many rehearsals were developed with Circo Nerino's [The Nerino Circus] rehearsal director (who was also its clown) for this replacement; despite his familiarity with the artists involved in the change in his family's circus, Avanzi reported feeling nervous during his debut in his own circus.

In an interview with Val de Carvalho, Roger's demands for the rehearsals of entrées may be noted. She also narrates Carvalho's difficulty in absorbing the understanding of theatrical times for lines and actions, factors that compromised the total development and finishing of the performance. Val comments that her formation as an actress would often hold her back, for it reflected on her overestimation of the lines or on her need to design psychological justifications to some actions. Picolino used to say she "overthought things" when performing.

Carlos Alberto Sofredini will provide us an in-depth analysis on the issue of "overthinking things," in which we shall see that among his teachings on aesthetics and popular language, he would highlight that "when an actor is onstage, he does not think, he performs." To achieve this concept, he always emphasized that body preparation corroborated this understanding, a fact that we have proved after several researches that verticalized this idea.

Nemes Bastos conducted an interview with Fernando Sampaio, an actor from Cia. La Mínima who initiated his apprenticeship as a clown with Roger Avanzi and reveals a little of how classes were developed:

Actually, my first encounters with Picolino were unicycle lessons. When I attended that clown workshop with Val de Carvalho in 1988 she suggested I went to Circo Escola Picadeiro [Picadeiro Circus School] to have classes with Roger Avanzi [...]. It was a long class, with 2 hours duration. So in a day he'd teach me a sketch, tell me about Abelha, Abelhinha, about some entrée... It was just me and him. He would say "today I will tell you about a sketch." He talked, I listened and then, during 1 hour and a half, I'd take the unicycle and ride it. I had lessons on unicycles, bicycles, giraffe unicycles, two-meter, four-meter unicycles... Actually, for me it was important to be near him. I had, or rather, I have a very big admiration for Roger. [...] I was that guy who went every day to Roger's class, I made an effort to go. I wanted to please him, I had to please him in any way. I had to be near him, show interest... that was the only way I could captivate him. I wanted to captivate Roger. I wanted to be Roger (BASTOS, 2013, p. 239).

Sampaio's narration emphasizes the importance of sketches and entrées, both for the teacher, who elaborates his classes, and for the student, who is confronted with an oral methodology. The rehearsals' intensity denotes that the oral transmission of knowledge on drama and acting was operationalized through oral literature, which Roger would access in his memory. Being near Avanzi meant being available to teachings that were associated with the moment of learning and the student's attention.

Another learning aspect of Sampaio's contact with Roger, which corroborates the importance of entrées and sketches in the formation of the clown circus, is the practice of watching him performing as Picolino. It is during practice that the effects and the intensity of the clown's acting may be proved. Another excerpt of the interview illustrates the statement above:

Once I saw him and I was impressed. It was him and Pinguim [José Pereira dos Santos], his partner at the time. Pinguim was a midget. A genius too, a great clown! When I saw them together it was great. They performed this acrobatic act on a ladder. Roger would climb up one of those two-legged ladders, and Pinguim climbed too, they stepped down to pick up a can and went up again, Roger on one side, Pinguim on the other. They simulated a fight on top of the ladder and Pinguim would go inside Roger's shirt – Roger would be wearing one of those very wide shirts – and become kind of stuck, Roger descended the stairs and Pinguim would get out through the hem of Roger's pants. Before leaving, they took a picture. Imagine the scene: Pinguim's face appeared inside Roger's pants! Pinguim had a very good face, he was funny. The way he moved his body, the tiny little arms, like a pair of stumps. It was fantastic (BASTOS, 2013, p. 240).

Lilian asks Sampaio a question regarding imitation as a starting point in the structuring of a clown. This question makes us reflect on the learning that takes place when watching very experienced clowns, which stage their entrées with a lot of attitude and resourcefulness, demonstrating a full appropriation of drama techniques and resources; these performances serve as strong reference for beginners.

Sampaio's response reveals two important pieces of information: the first relates to how these experienced clowns inspire us, and the second concerns an ethical position on copying as a point of departure and arrival of the learning process.

I didn't even think about imitating him, as I've seen people reproducing the same mannerisms of another clown... You can perform the same entrée, but some people use the same jokes, the same mannerisms. I was not yet a clown. Roger was for me a source of inspiration, I wanted to be with him, even if it was during his unicycle lessons only. When gave bicycle classes only and none on clowns, for me there was no problem. I wanted to be by his side. It was passion, I was very in love with Roger (BASTOS, 2013, p. 240).

Arlindo Pimenta was not a teacher for clowns, but his trajectory as an apprentice reveals how theatrical procedures added value to his performance as a clown: this trajectory – which begins when he starts acting as the “spokesman” for promotion on the streets, followed by his work as circus-theater actor, ringmaster, then as a clown and, finally, as an entrée clown

– demonstrates that these stages of training are, in addition to being a live process, segments of a very specific training.

The trajectory of Arlindo Pimenta allows looking at the comedy duo from a specific perspective, because he practiced this polarity and sensitized himself to it for many years. The structure of Brazilian itinerant circus families already included the comedy duo which, therefore, used entrées and reprises to expose the characters in the shows. All Brazilian circus clowns obey this scheme as a starting point for the teaching and practice of clowns.

In Tabajara Pimenta's interview he says that Arlindo, despite being an experienced clown, struggled when rehearsing as a clown and that, when onstage, a radical change occurred in his vocal expression, for his voice turned squeaky and high like that of the former clown and, in the ring, it changed to a lower tone, with an Italian accent. Regarding the rehearsed script there were no changes besides those pertaining to the audience and to the triangulations that establish the scenic game at the time of the performance. Arlindo Pimenta also conducted his rehearsals directly with his future clown, who was also the circus' rehearsal director, a similar situation to Roger Avanzi's in his transition to an entrée clown. It is interesting to focus on and analyze the coincidence of rehearsal directors also being the clowns of future clowns, and the nervousness during the debut, despite all the familiarity with the environment and the artists of the comedy duo. The clown's importance to the circus' structure and how the creation and execution of entrées were given special attention is further emphasized.

A statement by Mario Bolognesi on the evolution of the term "clown" in the circus, and on how the comedy duo structured itself is emphasized below:

In the circus universe the "clown" is the comedy artist who participates in short sketches and explores a characteristic of eccentric nonsense in his/her actions. Until the mid-19th century, in the circus, the "clown"'s participation was exclusively parodistic of the circus attractions and the term thus designated all artists dedicated to satirizing the circus itself. Subsequently, this term began designating a specific type of comedy character, also called the White Clown, in reference to the color of his/her face, which has in the other clown, Auguste, his/her opposite. The plural "clowns" is used to designate the comedy duo. In Brazil, in the circus scene, it is common to hear the term "crom" in reference to the clown that acts as a "partner," or the secondary clown (BOLOGNESI, 2003, p. 62).

The comedy duo is of paramount importance for the development of dramatic action in entrées, and identifying the possibilities of the scenic game and of conflict gives the audience

an attitude of dramaturgical complementation, i.e., it assumes an active role during performance, imagining, intuiting, understanding the possibilities of each character in the duo; the audience becomes focused on the unfolding of dramatic action, transmitted orally or through mimes, through apparatuses or musically.

In the interviews with other teachers it was noted that the elaboration of sketches is an essential tool for the growth of each student/clown, because he/she has to deal with the all of the aforementioned issues pertaining to the comedy duo. In a scenic play between clowns, the understanding of who's who in the relationship becomes a requirement-basis for an effective development of the performance, beyond the understanding of dramaturgy and the order of actions in the scene.

Even when the student/clown chooses to perform solos, he/she applies the concept of the comedy duo through conflicts with objects, with the audience, with situations that have been previously established. A good example is a type of dramatic action I like to call the "Anti Performance," in which the clown announces that he/she will do something, but the attempt is what becomes the comedy focus, the difficulty is the actual performance. Many clowns, both from the French and circus scenes, developed sketches and entrées with this motto; I focus, in particular, on the concentration of the concept of the comedy duo.

A clown in a scenic game with another clown can fluctuate from the role of a White Clown to an Auguste, depending on the scene's proposal, and this can also happen in solo performances. In the examples with Roger and Arlindo this factor was not mentioned: the circus in which they worked opted to highlight the duo and present entrées based on this structure, even if the role of the White Clown was given to the Ringmaster, or to another figure that was identifiable by the audience: a cop or wife, for example.

Tabajara Pimenta exemplified this dramaturgy that is based on the comedy duo in an entrée in which he participated as a White Clown: the ringmaster would announce the presence of the circus' manager in the ring, who thanked the presence of the select audience, then went to the back curtain and started talking with the ringmaster. In the meantime, a clown entered with a ladder and asked the circus' manager to hold it in during his performance. The clown would then bring several glasses, a jar and a tray, fill the glasses with a colored liquid and climb the ladder. The performance consisted of balancing, with a stick, the tray with the glasses full of liquid while he climbed the ladder. Tabajara would become soaked because he was right under the glasses; the whole setup was actually tied by wires



and in the end, the clown would run away from the manager. In Pimenta's words: "The audience cracked up when someone in a tux was humiliated, we did it so the ringmaster would be ready to announce the next number... it worked. No one would laugh if it had been with a "prop hand" (crew member who helps artists set up the apparatuses for their performances). Him being an authority figure, the boss, was what made it funny."

Another observation by Mario Bolognesi indicates changes in the White Clown's form in modern circuses, but his dramaturgical function remains:

The research carried out in Brazilian circuses found no White Clown. His functions were absorbed by the Ringmaster or by a second clown, also an Auguste, called *escada* or *crom*. Brazilian clowns today do no longer bear the external characteristics of primitive clowns, even though they have absorbed many of the accomplishments achieved by them. The known and accumulated repertoire was incorporated by the Auguste. There is, in the Brazilian contemporary circus, a predominance of Augustes. The characteristics of the White Clown were incorporated by this figure. However, there is still a duo of clowns onstage, at least (BOLOGNESI, 2003, p. 91).

In courses promoted by me I have always regarded the creation of sketches an essential action, but also emphasized the importance of the understanding of the comedy duo, both as a tool for developing the scenic game and as a dramaturgical experiment. In the training of French clowns, more specifically with Gaulier, the term "protagonist of the scene" is used; the other would assume the role of *escada*, a term used in the Brazilian circus. The *escada* permeates popular aesthetics more vertically in characters and clowns who rely on wordliness, on the quick comedy of fast and accurate responses. The *escada* acts as a White Clown.

It is difficult to structure comedy duos when developing short, or even long workshops. The biggest reason is that students prefer to dedicate rehearsals to being more eclectic and interacting with whichever clown is available for the scenes; there is a copyright issue in which the student/clown creates his/her sketch with this structure of oscillation.

Bolognesi's statement corroborates this trend of clowns presenting themselves to the public in a less strict way as the duo shown in the form. The audience no longer has access to the beauty with which clowns made sure of presenting themselves, since the sublime was shown in great splendor. However, this adaptation brings practical advantages which are mainly revealed in dramaturgy and staging, as the clowns can combine sketches in which the scenic game of changes in

the roles of the White Clown and Auguste can be exploited to generate laughter.

As has been shown, the theatricality developed by clowns expands itself through several technical aspects: play-writing, form, material elements, body, voice, music and contact with the audience. Many focused on these aspects to carry this aesthetics to other languages and expressions. Further ahead, practical experiences that expose the power of this theatricality shall be exposed.

### *Circus dramaturgy and staging*

The spectacle of the circus-theatre has an immediate purpose: it is not made to be understood or evaluated by specialists, nor to be commented on at the tables of trendy bars, not even to become part of the annals of the history of spectacles. No: its purpose is pleasing the audience, so they will come back the next day and buy a ticket at the box office, to allow the artist to afford his/her daily necessities (SOFREDINI, 1980, p. 4).

Carlos Alberto Soffredini conducted a very consistent research on the structure of the circus spectacle, more specifically in relation to the circus-theater and its resources. His comments have been applied to the development of his play-writing and in the training of actors, which culminated with the spectacle “A Vida do Grande D. Quixote de La Mancha e do Gordo Sancho Pança,” in 1976, with Grupo Mambembe. This work guided and provided the structure of a language and theatrical aesthetics with a popular basis that guided works such as “Vem buscar-me que ainda sou teu,” “Minha Nossa” and “Na Carreira do Divino”, among many others which he executed along with groups in which he developed a research on popular aesthetics and the training of actors.

The importance of the perspective of this artist in relation to the circus becomes vital to the analysis of its formation, the research object of this study, as Soffredini structured a theatrical language fully based on the circus. The dramaturgy created by Soffredini has strong ties with the dramaturgy staged in circuses-theaters; this familiarity is found in the construction of the characters and the dramatic action, characteristics that were absorbed by Roger Avanzi and Arlindo Pimenta in the circus-theater spectacles staged by them. This experience was incorporated into their work as clowns, becoming a basic structure of creation and staging of sketches and entrées.

Circus procedures revealed in Soffredini's theatrical assemblies were observed and analyzed by him in the work of circus actors and clowns. It is possible to see in his drama-

turgy and staging a direct relationship with foundations used by the clowns analyzed in this research. Soffredini's analysis and practices for the training of actors, along with their use in the construction of the repertoire of sketches and entrées of clowns, is essential in the formation of any clown, because a circus clown is not established theatrically without these dramaturgic notions.

Another contribution of Soffredini to this work concerns the techniques for the interpretation and construction of scenes: the artistic conception of the plays he wrote and directed impelled him to develop a pedagogy for the training of actors who have not had the circus experience, but had to incorporate the techniques of interpretation from the circus so their dramaturgy could be established onstage.

I have worked as one of those actors who did not have the knowledge desired by Soffredini, I have experienced his didactic, desired by this popular actor, with an expanded body, to be impregnated with techniques such as mimes, triangulation, Commedia dell'Arte, allegorical characters and epic resources – very common procedures to the clown.

In the next few lines, I will make a description of the contact I have had with the pedagogy of transfer of language and popular aesthetics disseminated by Soffredini, for believing that his artistic methodology for directing the creation of a spectacle and the training of actors involved in the process has a scope similar to that of the creation of a circus-theater spectacle and of the entrées of clowns, in what concerns the discipline of rehearsals, technical practices (training) and the purpose of pleasing the audience.

It is important to note that the process of formation of the circus clown offers a system based on the everyday experience with the audience, with the material and artistic need to make the show day after day, in the renewal and adaptation of the aesthetic and cultural aspects of each performance and the commitment to traditional aspects, that are transmitted orally generation after generation. These factors are interwoven with Soffredini's way of making theater and in my training as a theater artist and as a clown.

The descriptions that follow explain the direct relationship of the items described above, which were absorbed by Soffredini and that subsequently became the basis of my training as a clown.

Soffredini structured his research in the 1970s, in continuous visits to circuses, and then systematized his aesthetic with Grupo Mambembe. From then on, he made sharing his research possible in other creations, which allowed a maturation that resulted in didactic techniques I could experience in an inter-

pretation workshop held at Fundação das Artes de São Caetano do Sul (FUNDART) in March 1985. It was another important meeting for structuring the understanding of popular aesthetics in the theater and of the circus clown who was to become my aesthetic reference in creations by “Cia. Picnic de Teatro”<sup>2</sup>.

In the aforementioned workshop, various resources researched and optimized by Soffredini were assessed; his foundations were exposed through evaluations of exercise skits, focused on the aspects of popular language: the farce; the triangulation; the structuring of a convincing stereotype; an expanded body expression; the study of types and dramaturgy.

The workshop’s duration was short (two weeks) and along with the workshop on clowns by Francesco Zigrino which I had attended two weeks prior, it promoted a series of reflections about my work in the amateur theater. I realized I performed for a popular audience, with a popular and labor-themed focus (as the groups I was part of belonged to unions), but the aesthetics of our stage plays was based on a realistic language, with a fourth wall. On the other hand, we performed plays on the streets that gained, from this reflection, an enhancement geared towards a greater search for direct contact with the audience, a factor common to circus clowns.

Still in May 1985 I was invited by Soffredini, along with other participants of Fundação das Artes de São Caetano do Sul’s workshop, to establish the Núcleo de Estética Teatral Popular (Núcleo ESTEP) [Popular Theatrical Aesthetics Center] and create the play “Minha Nossa,” by Soffredini himself, who was also its director.

In that same year we continued to work every night at Fundação das Artes, which at the time, offered free courses only. We became a special kind of course, because Soffredini brought professionals to qualify and prepare us: Ilder Miranda Costa, to give us musical training for singing; Paulo Yutaka, to teach us mime, along with Eduardo Coutinho; Eudisia Acuña to give us lessons on vocal expression; Fernando Neves, for body language, and Walmir Santos, for musical direction.

It lasted seven months of intensive artistic work, divided into training and staging. It was my first contact with a training program for actors and actresses which made me understand the importance of a technical training targeted towards the aesthetic needs of a specific show.

I was used to conducting field and desk researches, which I also did at Núcleo ESTEP. What was new to me were the issues associated with dramaturgical analysis, carried out by Soffredini with his own text, a very enriching factor. In relation to the process of the staging and production of “Minha Nossa,” the issues that helped me further develop the dialectic

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Cia Picnic de Teatro emerged in 1992 with the show “Um dia de Pic e Nic,” created by Chiquinho Cabrera and Edu Silva and was based on the knowledge acquired from Núcleo ESTEP, directed by Carlos Alberto Soffredini, which were incorporated into the clown training methods of Francesco Zigrino. The show is still playing and has held more than 1,000 performances. Other shows created by the company have also used the clown-like language: “Avoar” by Vladimir Capella, “Estação Pic Pan Pum,” “Conto de Encontro,” “Chapeuzinho Vermelho” and “À moda da Casa,” by Daniele Pimenta and Edu Silva.

tics employed in my career up to that moment were:

- Should we blindly abide by the Director’s instructions?
- Is there no limit to the dedication to research and to the study of methodologies?
- How to choose the techniques that are proper to the studied aesthetics?
- How much time should the structuring of a language take?

I consider the experiences of performing in regular seasons, in a single theater, and then leaving to travel around the country presenting plays, as part of the actor’s training. Being in touch with audiences of differentiated cultures enriched the techniques absorbed and trained by Núcleo ESTEP, which “triggered” the creation of another play with the same aesthetics: “Na Carreira do Divino.”

Soffredini qualified us with specific techniques that would be means to achieve an aesthetic that matched the poetics contained in his texts. Soffredini’s dramaturgy has strong bonds with the popular theater; in this way, it requires a certain understanding of Brazilian circus-theater and its foundations: the typology of characters; triangulation; the escada; effects; revelation; stereotypes (“[...] there are no bad stereotypes. There are bad actors”); pace of staging and visuals. The aforementioned points are very well explained in his text “De um trabalhador sobre seu trabalho” (SOFREDINI, 1980).

It was a very rich pedagogical experience, because these popular expedients that were captured and absorbed in circus rings and stages by Soffredinni were studied and subsequently contaminated dramaturgy and Soffredini’s way of directing, which motivated him to build this pedagogy for the training of actors and actresses originated from the realistic amateur theater.

Among all the theatrical learning I absorbed at Núcleo ESTEP, five focuses impregnated my way of understanding theater and, later, of understanding the clown’s training needs: mime, triangulation, effect, dramaturgy and form.

The body training of the cast that would take part in Núcleo ESTEP’s first play, “Minha Nossa,” was based on miming and on the conscience and “cleansing” that the technique imprints on artists who practice it. Paulo Yutaka<sup>3</sup> and Eduardo Coutinho<sup>4</sup> contributed to the training of actors and actresses also with regards to the structuring of a dramaturgy of the body, as they directed scene compositions entirely based on the mime technique which assigned a playful character that exposed the theatricality researched by Soffredini.

We practiced the basic elements of mime: weight, shape and spasm, to then employ them in scenes that required a complementation of scenographic elements by the audience. Thus,

3. Founder, in 1983, of the Ponkã Group along with Celso Saiki, Carlos Barreto, Ana Lúcia Cavalieri, Milton Tanaka, Hector Gonzales, Graciella of Leonnardis and Galizia. Their plays include “Aponkãlipse, O Próximo Capítulo,” “O Ballet da Informática” and “O Primeiro Capítulo.” In the late 1985s they staged “Pássaro do Poente,” a text by Carlos Alberto Soffredini, under the direction of Marcio Aurélio. The group was composed of children and grandchildren of Eastern and Western immigrants, and Ponkã, like the fruit it is named after (Ponkan, a tangerine and orange mix), sought to articulate a theatrical synthesis that expressed this condition.

4. Mime artist, studied in Paris with Ella Jaroszevski and the Théâtre du Moviment (1984) and, in Brazil, with Sotero (1978), Denise Stoklos (1982) and David Glass (1988). Has a master’s degree, with mime as a technique for the enhancement of theatrical representation as his object of study, and an Arts doctoral degree, with the body text in the scene as his object of study, both from ECA-USP. Is a professor in the Department of Performing Arts at the School of Communications and Arts (ECA) of the University of São Paulo (USP), and vice-coordinator of the Actor’s Scenic Experimentation Research Center (CEPECA).

Soffredini's text speaking of a kitchen in a narrative form, would have the construction of elements of that same kitchen performed through mimes. That language would manifest itself in a future show written and staged by me, which would be based also on the figure of the clown: "Um dia de Pic e Nic."

Triangulation is one of the most important techniques that I have absorbed and I consider it to be essential to the clown's formation simply because it puts the audience as the axis of all staging, as a partner that optimizes all the reactions of the actor and, in our case, of the clown.

Triangulation is a very popular communication technique used by actors of fairs and squares, by performances with masks and those with dolls as well. The circus clown triangulates all the time and "throws" his/her ideas, feelings, doubts, discoveries, fears and intentions to the audience. As with every technique, it should become organic to emphasize the dramatic action and not the virtuosity of the technique itself. In Soffredini's words, the technique is described like so:

No Stanislavski, no fourth wall. The actor does indulge, he does engage, but he never forgets he is on a stage, he does not ignore the public, not even for a second. On the contrary: most of the time he "acts alongside" the audience, establishing what we call the "triangle." Thus: two actors onstage; ONE must ask a question to the OTHER; ONE asks the question to the audience and not directly to the OTHER (so no eye-to-eye relationship); and the OTHER answers also through the audience. Sounds simple, but this way of acting always "through" the audience puts it at the center of the representation. Another way to establish the "triangle:" the actions and reactions of an actor (character) are always open to the audience (there is no psychology involved and therefore, no hidden games). If an actor, for example, reacts to another actor's line he "tells" (even without words) his reaction directly to the audience. In this way one can also, for example, add a lot of value to every nuance of the intention of an actor who speaks, through the reaction that he causes in his interlocutor.

But let us talk more about the process of the Triangle which is, we have seen, the basis of any kind of popular presentation.

The audience is the vertex that weights the most in the triangle. The audience is the ACCOMPLICE in the representation. It's HEART. The story is being TOLD to the audience, so the audience owns this story. Often the audience knows things about it that one or the other two vertices of the triangle (the actors) are not aware of. For instance, the nature and intent of each character, since every actor, when onstage, must have as a goal REVEALING his/her character, their intention and, of course, their action within the action (story). From this COMPLICITY with the audience, this CENTRALIZATION that is given to it, this DONATION to it of the action (story, representation) is that the basis of the theatrical game is established. The Greeks already knew that. And the old romantic plays opened room for this game through the APART, which ultimately is the unpolished way based on which the process of the TRIANGLE was formulated (SOFFREDINI, 1980, p. 5).

With the technique of triangulation, a mathematical character is applied to the act, giving the audience a constantly active role during the theatrical moment and, with Soffredini, we have exercised and then applied the form of triangulation which involved the entire cast in a single reaction, geared towards the audience: shock before a revelation, a collective expression of relief followed by a contradictory line by a character etc. Soffredini often used these triangulated mass reactions, and noted that triangulation is only effective if the actors truly look at the audience and capture its reaction, so it can return to the actor with whom we share the stage this truth; thus, the flow of the game gained a scenic force that was compatible with the language with which we worked.

The logic of combining triangulation and mime was visible in the formation of language, which also included the concept of setting up a good stereotype. The result was an expanded body, focused entirely on the audience, including the actor's gaze. Later I understood that the technique of triangulation had given me a resource for communicating very directly with this audience, enabling me to forge a mental map of the location of certain figures of the audience that could help me make the staging of a play more dynamic, with direct and specific comments: the lady who laughs very loudly, the child who comments on some scenes, the frowning gentleman, people who would be available for games and jokes.

I believe that this resource of "scanning" the audience is vital to the clown, who, without it, risks performing by and for him/herself.

Regarding the "effect" issue, Soffredini believed that it was a conscience that was essential to language and to the acting experience that the researched aesthetic required. One of the issues was searching for this consciousness in the actor so it would become a scenic action that revealed itself in the actor's body, triangulation and comments. In the words of Soffredini himself:

And here I am again addressing an extremely sensitive issue for the so-called Modern Theater, and simply abhorred by the sons of Stanislavski: the EFFECT. Effect is reminiscent of form. And at this point it would be good if we got to an agreement already: WE CULTIVATE FORM.

Ancient actors knew and improved a series of EFFECTS. They knew how to tell a joke, the exact value of a break, the way to position themselves onstage depending on the atmosphere to be created or the character to be revealed. It is no coincidence that the Circus-Theater still retains a central wing on its stage. It does not pertain to these modern shallow conventions, such as: "the left wing leads to the bedroom, the central wing to the kitchen, the right wing to

the street...” No. It is an exact awareness of the value (effect) of the actor’s entering or exiting the scene. Each character entering the scene, if the actor knows how to do it, can only excite the audience. Each character exiting the scene, if the actor knows how to do it, will leave the audience excited. If a character has a positive nature, when “arriving,” he/she will enter through the center wing: as if by magic the figure will appear in the middle of the scene. Similarly, if a character has a furtive nature, if he/she is being sneaky, he/she will enter or exit through the side wings. It may seem like a naive process, but the EFFECT is mathematical. It is known the “villains” of the old dramas not only entered the scene from the side wings but also while covering part of their face (nose down) with a black cape (SOFFREDINI, 1980, p. 6).

Soffredini applied the concept directly on the scene, through the directing of actors. The procedure of mechanical repetition that, on many occasions, had us exhausted, promoted the absorption of the concept. The actor’s attitude in performing the “effects” was motivated with these repetitions of the scenes’ actions, rehearsed with this goal in mind, and the techniques of triangulation as the trigger for the audience’s focus were combined with the mime techniques.

In relation to dramaturgy, the learning process was intense, as Soffredini, in addition to being a very competent dramatist, wrote for the language researched and, while reading what he had written, the dramaturgical procedures were revealed to us and then promptly rehearsed. We received the knowledge on the use of typology for the characters’ composition; how he researched these types in loco when writing “Minha Nossa;” how he built the epic narratives in the text; how he applied the epic, lyrical and dramatic genres and the goal he wanted to achieve with his choices. It is important to mention that Soffredini did not write while imagining or predicting how he would direct his texts, because those he directed at Núcleo ESTEP had already been performed by other companies.

Understanding the dramaturgy issue is vital to the clown, because, even when performing improvisations derived from the game with the audience, he/she follows a line of dramatic action and, without this understanding, he/she will have serious difficulties in applying triangulation and the effect. At Núcleo ESTEP we had several lessons on play-writing, in which Soffredini exposed his writing method, as for instance: writing the scenes independently, without worrying about ordering them in a sequence; assigning titles to the scenes to remember which dramatic action had been developed in them; pinning the scenes to the wall and then reordering and associating them.

This reasoning is very revealing to an actor who will seek



improvisation in his/her work, as it shows that the understanding of dramatic action allows us to play with it and build a sequence in accordance with the audience before us. Of course that was not how we performed Soffredini's plays; exclusions only happened after we had performed various presentations and rehearsals and verified the non-effectiveness of the scene – only then would he exclude it. This exercise of detachment is interesting for improvisation; making choices of what works or not is a vital attribute to the clown.

Finally, we get to the popular theater, with its types and pragmatic conventions found mainly in the circus-theater which Soffredini researched to understand how it communicated so well with a variety of audiences throughout the country. His efforts resulted in comparisons with other researches with other forms of popular theater as object of study: Brecht's and Japanese Theater, especially the Noh and Kabuki theaters.

Soffredini often used the resource of having actors enter and set the stage up in front of the audience, as if we were in a ring, placing (and taking) objects with the agility of a partner or acrobat, through small leaps, always looking at the audience and assigning value to the action, making the act a small show in itself. He liked to associate this with a figure from Japanese theater called *koken*, a stagehand who would put the objects into the hands of the extremely stereotypical characters without being noticed, but who everyone could see. This magical and highly theatrical form, as he liked to describe it, had the audience in a state of extreme attention, keeping it active during the presentation.

The importance I see in the issues pertaining to form are associated with the clown with regard to the study of the stereotype suited to the language in which you/character invest in to develop your dramatic action, your clothing (or body mask, as will be described below), your gestures, your verbiage, the construction of equipment and material elements used in *entrées*, *reprises* and sketches. Form is expressed in content.

What Soffredini proposed was the essence of a poetics in which the "theater of theatrical magic" would manifest itself, which he explained as follows:

There is an image that we usually repeat to try and explain what a game of perspectives is: A screen is placed on a stage. On the screen a road is painted in perspective, which starts on the stage and ends on the distant horizon, creating an illusory space, giving a sense of depth. An actor is then placed in front of this screen. The spotlight shines on him. His shadow will be then projected on a screen, revealing the painted cloth curtain that is the screen, revealing the real space. The result is the following: We see the shadow in two dimensions (the truth) revealing the real space, projected on the

big screen with the road in three dimensions (the lie) revealing the illusory space. These two images are juxtaposed. And we believe in both. That's it (SOFFREDINI, 1980, p. 4).

Another vital experience for my training as a clown was the exchange with Neyde Veneziano who, in 1985, directed the play *O Noviço*, by Martins Pena. Soffredini and Veneziano promoted and conducted a meeting between the two groups, who participated in a theoretical and practical workshop on *Commedia dell'Arte*. We performed an intensive work with the masks, which also incorporated another quality to our research on popular aesthetics.

This experience at Núcleo ESTEP repeated and crystallized itself in the creation process of the play "Na Carreira do Divino," which included a strong musical work, another feature of popular theater that I have developed over my career as a clown. I retired from Núcleo ESTEP in August 1987.

In short, I was highly contaminated by the training process developed by a pedagogical director who invested his aesthetic research in the education of young actors and actresses, with the goal of applying the results of his theatrical researches which had been previously developed in another theater group: Grupo Mambembe.

At the beginning of 1988 I decided to go down the road of theater direction and asked friends from the theater of São Bernardo do Campo to participate in a play named "Velório à Brasileira," by Aziz Bajor. I chose this text because it offered a very interesting type structure and its dramaturgy would allow me to apply the concepts I had absorbed at Núcleo ESTEP.

I came across the same situation found by Soffredini when working with the cast of "Minha Nossa:" the lack of technique and understanding of the language that I wanted to imprint in the play. Everyone had worked in amateur theater, but in performances with a realistic aesthetics, for which preparations were based a lot on Stanislavski's books and on the concepts of fourth wall and scenic truth, and what I intended to propose would be the opposite of all that.

Reading the text resulted in a political understanding of the tragicomedy in question, which reinforced the need for us to research resources from the popular theater. The first point to be addressed was the study of types the play proposed and which, therefore, led to the study of the form.

The first difficulty in studying the form was its relationship with stereotypes: the cast was not yet qualified nor used to such an extrapolated form of character. A process of expansion of the scenic body based on the

clown thus followed. I developed a reproduction of Zigrino's workshop, which is why I adopted the term clown (rather than palhaço, which is how it translates to Portuguese, the language spoken by the cast) in the first workshops.

As the creation process would follow the direction which would be supported by the placing of types onstage and, in the workshop I held with Zigrino, he asked for us to choose a type, I found a direct relation and we performed several theatrical exercises while wearing a clown nose, the first of them having derived from some resources provided by Stanislavski: we wrote the genesis of the characters; we performed the characters' routine activities (the women did housework and men worked in the water and sewage department); we held scenic truth games, looking for a winning lottery ticket as happened in the play etc.

Some mime techniques were rehearsed, in order to qualify them for the game involving the characters' routine activities; I would ask them to play with their body through the exaggeration of movements from various parts of the body: looking with the elbow, pointing at something with the chin or butt, walking with the hips etc. I slowly moved from chores to more recreational activities, such as dancing at a party, children classic games, practicing some sport. The important thing was that the actors' interior clown acted over their body, that we broke the barrier of realism that always appeared as an antagonist in the activities.

Still not rehearsing the play, we continued our study of the form with the making of the costumes, focusing on how stereotypes could be enhanced in this materiality. We began with a study of the frequency of colors with very high vibration, which could be expressed even by prints. We studied the deformations of the characters that could be applied in the models of the clothes.

I became acquainted with this procedure at Núcleo ESTEP thanks to costume designer Irineu Chamiso Jr.<sup>5</sup>, who guided us in the study of the form, based on a palette of colors that vibrated in accordance with the performance's tone, and we used various costumes and clothes from the Drama School of the Arts Foundation of São Caetano do Sul. Irineu asked that we brought to the stage all the clothing items that we found to be somehow appropriate for performing; and that we put these clothes on according to the composition of our characters, and then stand in a line. One by one, we would go to the auditorium and see the result of those choices.

Then he asked us to do adjustments by putting on overlapping pieces with colors and formats that adjusted the collective look and the vision of the costumes onstage. A repro-

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Irineu Chamiso Júnior (Santos SP 1949). Set and costume designer. Famous scenic and costume designer from the 1970s and 1980s, devoted to the research of popular sources of Brazilian visuality, collaborator of Grupo de Teatro Mambembe and Antunes Filho. Having started in the amateur theater in Santos, in 1968, he followed the director and playwright to São Paulo, working by his side in some of his creations.

duction of the procedure was applied until we achieved the result desired by the director and by the costume designer. It was a research that revealed to the cast the power of the aesthetics in which we were being initiated and, from this procedure, the group understood what would be configured in the makeup, scene objects, in our manner of speaking, in the sounds, in the searching for the effects and in the finding of the moments of triangulation.

In this first experience acting as a director, with very little practice (as I only had been Soffredini's assistant director in "Minha Nossa" up to that moment), I leaned on copying the actions of this director and also on what I had observed in Zigrino. I felt I had yet to completely master the methods due to total lack of experience; I fully understood the technical requirements inherent to the process and realized I would have to adapt all the ideas and actions to a new culture of performance.

Nowadays, terms such as "acting director" or "teaching director" better define this attitude of preparing actors and actresses for specific scenarios, which I have experienced as narrated above, and I believe they are concepts associated with orality. We would always base ourselves on some experience, either by observing or experiencing the application of procedures in a dialogical (with the executing of *ipsis litteris*) or dialectic (with adjustments) manner, which promotes a scenic process that generates new lines of creation.

The play "Velório à Brasileira," which I have directed, took part in several theater festivals. Within this universe we put ourselves in a position of listening to jurors and critics, which allows another kind of learning, different from what happens during the direct contact with the audience. Using a circus jargon: "the play was a success."

The presentations performed for a spontaneous audience gave us a very positive impression of our work, as opposed to an audience formed by experts, which had no unanimous opinion regarding the word "success." However, the discussions on the expressions I studied at Núcleo ESTEP and practiced in the show were very interesting. The issues were very much related to the popular aesthetics and a mist of prejudice and lack of understanding involving the attempts to try and master the resources associated with this aesthetics. Comments on the superficiality of the understanding of the popular aesthetics arose: "too exaggerated," "too stereotyped," "this constant contact with the audience is quite interesting," "the pacing is too fast" etc. At that time I was sure I was acting within the popular aesthetics

simply for having brought the play to the favelas, neighborhood communities and unions, and receiving a very positive return of communicability through types and form.

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