

Clowns: a route to the hospital stage

Figuras palhacescas: um percurso até os palcos hospitalares

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to investigate the comic figures, especially the clowns. For this, qualitative, exploratory and bibliographic research were carried out, taking published works – such as books, articles and online publications – as the main sources of research. We concluded that a route of these figures can be traced to hospital stages, where they simultaneously generate new knowledge in the area of scenic performance and its relations with daily life.

Keywords: Comic figures. Art of clown. Hospital stages.

Resumo

Este artigo busca investigar as figuras cômicas, em especial as palhacescas. Para isso, realizou-se pesquisa de natureza qualitativa, exploratória e bibliográfica, que tem em obras já publicadas – como livros, artigos e publicações online – suas principais fontes de pesquisa. Chegou-se à conclusão de que se pode traçar um percurso dessas figuras aos palcos hospitalares, onde contemporaneamente geram novos saberes no campo da atuação cênica e de suas relações com o cotidiano.

Palavras-chave: Figuras cômicas. Palhaçaria. Palcos hospitalares.

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Introduction

José Luís Castro, the neighborhood carpenter, has a very good hand. The wood, which knows he loves it, allows to be made. José Luís' father had come from a village in Pontevedra to Rio da Prata. The son remembers his father, his face lit beneath his Panama hat, his silk tie on the collar of his celestial-blue pajamas, and always, always telling funny stories. Where he went, his son remembers, laughter followed. People came from everywhere to laugh, when he told stories, and the crowd would get together. In the wakes it was necessary to raise the coffin, so that everyone would fit – and thus the dead stood up to listen with all due respect to those things, spoken with such grace. And of all that José Luís learned from his father, this was the most important:

- What is important is to laugh –the old man taught.
- And to laugh together (GALEANO, 2015, p. 215).

In Galeano's text, in the middle of the succession of facts arranged as trivial, those that occur due to the neglect of coherence stand out. The events that happen beyond the daily life allow us to bring new configurations to reality, generating new perceptions for the subjects who observe them. In a wake, for example, we find a territory permeated by feelings predominantly opposed to the development of comedy. Still, José Luís Castro's father transgressed this logic, connecting the present beings with the atmosphere of laughter.

In theatrical stages, circus, squares, hospital corridors and other spaces of society, there are beings who resemble the father of José Luís Castro, who promote comedy even in environments that are not intended for that purpose. Contemporarily, in the field of performing arts, there are vast artistic initiatives that seek comic composition beyond the conventional stages, dialoguing with people's daily lives, causing scenic interruption to which they can interact with.

In this study³, we aim to approach, among the theatrical initiatives that emerge in the daily life of society, the clown performance, especially the one that occurs in the hospital context. In these environments, these comic figures may, depending on their proximity to the spectators, constitute a link expressed by the look and the way of putting themselves in time and space through an opening created for others. Thus, we initially carried out a dialogue with the historical characteristics of the comic figures that possibly influenced the development of the clowns, and then contextualize the performance of these figures in hospital stages, highlighting the work of the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) *Doutores da Alegria*.

3. The study carried out in the construction of this one is part of a Master's research in performing arts that is in progress.

Clown's existence

Having the body mask by expression, clowns, jesters, eccentric, augustes, comedians, buffoons, among others (CASTRO, 2005) are strongly tied to subversion in humanity. These figures travel through the world and seem to renew over time, adapting to the society's perspective and entering new spaces of action.

For the researcher Luís Otávio Burnier, the comic types bring with them elements of a genealogy and bear recurring features throughout the millennia. According to Burnier's logic, these beings "have the same essence: exposing the stupidity of the human being, relativizing norms and social truths" (BURNIER, 2001, p. 34).

During religious celebrations and rites, as well as in the popular scenic representations of antiquity, for example, an oscillation between the sacred and the profane has always been present, a factor that authorizes coexistence with comedy. According to Burnier, this alternation is a fact that is repeated in diverse nations, "[...] from the Greeks to the aborigines of New Guinea, through the Europeans of the Middle Ages or the lamaists of Tibet" (BURNIER, 2001, p. 34).

The comic figures are part of a long tradition, and one of their oldest manifestations in the Western context may be situated in Atellan Farce. Emerged in the city of Atella, such theatrical manifestation is believed to be from the fourth century BC. The farces wore masks that concerned the physical types represented and dealt with stories of easy assimilation by the public, dialoguing with the social satire from the time when they occurred (DE FREITAS, 2008). According to the researcher Nanci de Freitas, the Atellan Farce would have been composed by the following fixed types/characters:

Pappus, a libidinous, good-natured and ridiculous old man, constantly in love with young girls and a victim of pranks; *Dossenus*, an astute hunchback and pretentious philosopher with a pompous speech, contrasting with the peasants' speech; *Baccus* and *Maccus*, a pair of gluttons, *Baccus* being a coarse, idiot, greedy and drunk peasant, unhappy in love affairs, while *Maccus* was a braggart type, smart and miser, always bragging about his turpitudes (DE FREITAS, 2008, p. 67).

The comedigrapher Plauto (255 BC – 185 BC), for the author, "[...] became famous for being able to give literary form to these old manifestations of popular theater, giving them character features" (DE FREITAS, 2008, Pp. 67). These

popular theatrical manifestations presented characteristics that later were rediscovered in the characters of the *Commedia Dell'Arte*, such as the popular connotation of the scenic actions, the theatrical representation, the social and human satire and the composition of fixed types or characters.

Arising in the sixteenth century in Italy, the *Commedia Dell'Arte*, as well as the Atellan Farce, wore masks and fixed types in its scenic construction. Originally, the *Commedia Dell'Arte* did not use dramatic texts, but rather scripts of intrigues that served as support for the improvisations, called *Canovacchios* or *Sogettos* (BERTHOLD, 2014). Through repeated representations, the actresses and the actors of *dell'arte* accumulated a personal repertoire of situations, comic resources and body techniques, becoming masters of their craft, as the researcher Dario Fo points out:

The comics possessed an incalculable baggage of situations, dialogues, gags, nonsense, litanies, all filed in memory, which they used at the right moment, with a great sense of *timing*, giving the impression of improvising every moment. It was a baggage built and assimilated with the practice of infinite replicas, of different spectacles, situations that occurred also in direct contact with the public, but the great majority was certainly the fruit of exercise and study (FO, 1999, p.17).

These comics often played the same role for decades in the representations, developing deep connection with the character interpreted. We can think of the organization of the characters or fixed types of *Commedia Dell'Arte* hierarchically and even divide them into three central groups: the servants, the nobles and the lovers. In the first group are *Arlecchino*, *Briguella*, *Colombina*, *Punchinello*, *Zanni*, among other popular characters, representatives of the lower classes of the population, necessarily insightful to ensure their survival, but also quite innocent when they should not be. In the second are *Pantalone*, *Dottore* and *Capittano*, representatives of the (often allegedly) wealthy, learned, educated, of noble origins, thirsty to assure themselves of a higher opinion than what is evident. Finally, in the group of lovers, there are the puerile young ones, moved by their innocence and their intention to remain with their beloved one. Normally they are daughters and sons of the noble *Dottore* and/or *Pantalone* and have a good nature, many times put in opposition to the nature of the nobles and the servants.

The exacerbation of defects and the search for comedy

have always been the driving force of the *Commedia Dell'Arte*, factors that “perspire in the pores” of its typified characters. Mocking the very social structure in which they were stigmatized, they repeat the events of human life, exaggerating them in order to make them present. The vices, the defects, the eschatologies, the falls, the stumblings, but also the virtues, the juggling, the acrobatics, were represented in a public square by comic figures strongly tied to the popular life.

This genre of theater, which spread throughout Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, influenced and still influences various theatrical creations. French playwright, comediographer, actor and director Molière (1622-1673) was strongly instigated by this theatrical movement, being recognized worldwide for transposing the dramaturgy from popular improvisation to the literary genre. Deepening the composition of the characters through their dialogues, as did Plautus from the Atellan Farces, Molière took up recurring elements in the history of comedy.

The researcher José Fernando Marques de Freitas Filho affirms the existence of recurring comic features when analyzing the plays “The Pot of Gold,” by the Roman comediographer Plauto, “The Miser,” by the playwright and comic actor Molière, and “The Saint and the Sow,” by the Brazilian Northeastern writer Ariano Suassuna (1927-2014). These texts, according to Freitas, demonstrate the recurrence of comic resources and the “[...] critical power of the genre, which exaggerates and distorts the real with the goal of better representing it” (FREITAS, 2012, p. 1).

Through the relation between such works, previously described by Sábato Magaldi (1997), Freitas affirms that “[...] denouncing human defects, the comic genre keeps a long and coherent tradition alive” (FREITAS, 2012, p. 1). This tradition is revived through the connection with a human defect: avarice, enlivened by the protagonists Euclíão (from Plauto), Harpagão (from Molière) and Eurico (from Suassuna). Plauto’s pioneering piece clearly inspired the other two authors, and for millennia, some of his principles had been maintained and revived in later comic creations, as in the case of Molière and Suassuna. In spite of this, the differences between the works, which, by movement of adhesion, open to the new times, are also significant (FREITAS, 2012).

From the analysis made by Magaldi and developed by Freitas, it is possible to think about the transformation of the comic features, as well as its conservation, which accom-

panies the changes present in society. Freitas's analysis is in line with the conception of historians who trace the beginnings of these figures, as well as their development, to Greco-Roman comedy, to the tradition of *Commedia Dell'Arte*, and to the link with popular culture. "The Pot of Gold," "The Miser" and "The Saint and the Sow" carry comic sequences that seem to find in the historical process their aspects of mutation and conservation.

In this same secular collective memory, still under the wrapping of the *atellanian* influences and later *dell'arte*, we find the figure of the popular actor Joseph Grimaldi (1778-1837), from London. Grimaldi was the son of the Italian actor Giuseppe Grimaldi, of *Commedia Dell'Arte*, as well as his father Giovanni Battista Nicolini Grimaldi, well-known *Arlecchino* of the eighteenth century. Descendant of this lineage, Joseph Grimaldi is considered the creator of the modern clown (BOLOGNESI, 2006).

For Alice Viveiros de Castro, the performance of Joseph Grimaldi, as well as:

[...] his graces, tricks, props and makeup have so marked the art of clowning that for almost a century his image has become the classic image of the clown. His face was painted white, with large red spots marking his cheeks, his red mouth giving the sensation of a forcibly ripped smile, and an unusual wig with his spiky hair producing a strange, stupid figure with a touch of cruelty (CASTRO, 2005, 62).

The author claims that Joseph Grimaldi was most responsible for the rise of the *clown* in the context of English pantomime. From his work, he was able to gain the leading role for a figure previously seconded, supplanting the Harlequin in the comic representations called Harlequinade (CASTRO, 2005).

Gaining more prominence, and, in a way, aesthetically delineating himself, the clown, from Grimaldi, is born from a kind of fusion between the comic type of the English *clown* and the characters of *Commedia Dell'Arte*. The result of this conjunction was the greater attractive potential for the public, as well as the prolongation of clown performance in the scenes of the spectacles (REIS, 2013).

In 1768, the English sergeant Philip Astley built an open-air amphitheater, space for teaching horseback riding and a space for the presentation of equestrian shows. At the same time in London, there were also other equestrian companies, such as Hayam, Jacob Bates, and Price (CASTRO, 2005). sergeant Astley, however, came to merge, in a 13-meter diameter circus ring, according to Castro, "[...] equestrian

exercises with the prowess of fair performers” (CASTRO, 2005, p. 53). This innovation caused a spectacle, according to the author, “[...] based on military discipline and on the valorization of dexterity and danger, making the audience very tense; It was necessary to create a moment of relaxation, to break the tension, leaving the spectator relieved, preparing them for the next emotions” (CASTRO, 2005, 53). It is in this context that, for Castro, the circus clown emerges.

The author also states “The first circus shows were a mixture of theater and riding stables, featuring pantomimes and melodramas that took place on a stage set in the background, and circus performances that took place in the ring [...]” (CASTRO, 2005, p. 55). The comedy of the first spectacles of the modern circus, for the author, was divided between two figures with different functions: the clown on horseback and the clown of the scene.

According to Bolognesi, as well as “[...] the circus itself, the art of clown owes its expansion to the British and French initiatives of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (BOLOGNESI, 2006, p. 61). Multiple artists flourished in this movement, inserting abilities of high physical skill in their games and, at the same time, exposing the human vulnerabilities, since they performed in an awkward way the circus feats. Several others were the possibilities based on the formulation of the circus spectacle in the universe of performance of the comic figures, historically present in humanity.

The circus stage also received the so-called white clowns and auguste clowns, one representative of the oppressor and the other of the oppressed, both composing a duo that continues to this day in the circus rings or on theatrical stages. The French historian Tristan Rémy, a researcher of the art of clown, refers to the clown as the authoritarian figure and to the auguste as the clumsy, subordinate figure. When referring to clowns in the plural, the author addresses the pair of comics, the White and the Auguste (RÉMY, 1945).

In his book *Les Clowns*, the historian separate the origin and development of the clowns from the comic figures of the *Commedia Dell’Arte*, which arose in Italy around the fifteenth century, but without relating the historical intermissions of these figures to medieval buffoons or Greek and Roman mimes. For Rémy, historical records lack evidence to support such claim. The author states that “[...] the clown of recent traditions had its constitution in a few generations” (RÉMY, 1945, p. 14).

For Tristan Rémy, there is a differentiation of the clowns in relation to the other comic figures that pervade the human

history. These figures or comic types, for the author, “were all born from the inherent necessity of human beings to laugh and to make some of their fellows laugh, this is the only continuity and the only reason for the appearance and disappearance of the comic types through the ages” (RÉMY, 1945, p. 14). The author also affirms that history, due to its many specificities, only allows us to consider the possible influences left by the popular comics in the composition of the clown’s work.

Although, as Rémy pointed out, the historical evidence lacks sufficient evidence to relate these figures as we conceive today, considering the multiplicity of strands that are currently in the process of flowering, it is undeniable the recurrence of resources related to comic figures of remote times. The author himself, despite the caveat, devotes one of the chapters of his book to analyze these recurring resemblances and influences.

As the author Alice Viveiros de Castro recalls,

To believe that the figure of the clown is unique to the circus is to deny a history of millennia in exchange for a mere hundred and few years of classical circus. The clown has its place of greater prominence in the circus, but the circus itself – the house of spectacles – is a relative novelty (great novelty!) That does not hold exclusivity as a space for the presentation of circus arts (CASTRO, 2005, p. 32).

Carrying millennial traits and reinventing themselves as the society developed, the clowns entered the theatrical stages. These spaces allowed the development of aesthetic refinement and the minimization of the actions of these figures, since the theatrical contexts are, in most contemporary cases, spatially smaller than those of the circus, also giving greater proximity of the artist to the spectators.

In this context, the Russian clown Oleg Popov argues for the need of the approximation of the clown with the spectators, warning that “[...] the spectator is a friend, but friends must be conquered” (POPOV, 1968, p. 26). In the theatrical stages, this conquest began to take place gradually, linked to the moment of meeting with the spectators and also to the past of experiences lived in the human and professional scope of each artist.

According to Káspér’s proposition, “[...] we can think of the clown from a certain policy of relation to alterity, performatively represented. The clown only exists in his relation to the other – this is one of his distinctive features” (KASPER, 2004, p. 18). Therefore, openness is imperative so that these figures can be affected and also affect others. The

exchange of thoughts and actions among individuals causes the creation of zones of convergence between the universe of the performing arts and the daily life. In this way, we agree with Káspér, according to whom “the clown works with the opening of possible worlds” (KÁSPER, 2015, p. 18).

For Káspér, the clowns act by promoting the creation of “ [...] other logics, other possibilities of life, ways of acting, thinking, feeling. The *clown* operates with the production of such modes. One of the fields explored by the *clown* is this: the production of its own logic” (Kasper 2004, p. 64). The vivification of these logics and possibilities in the action of the clown necessarily includes the other, because it is from him and from his reality that several scenic propositions depart. allied to the personal repertoire of each artist.

The clowns, working with human vulnerabilities, their weaknesses, their moments of failure, according to Káspér, have “the privilege of reviving mistakes, follies, stupidity” (Kasper 2004, p. 79). In their logic, these aspects of life, contrary to what is usually done in everyday life, are not avoided, but serve as a support for actions, since clowns value everything that is done in the present moment, including the error, the madness and the stupidity. This understanding is echoed in Miller’s thought, who explains that the clown deals with:

[...] all the misunderstandings that are the wounds of the human race. To be the ineptitude itself, this was something even the king of imbeciles could understand. Nothing to understand, when everything is clear as day; do not catch the trick, even if it is shown to you a hundred times; to grope like a blind man, when everything is shouting at him in the right direction: stubbornly trying to open the wrong door, despite the sign DANGER; hit the head in the mirror, instead of turning around; to look on the wrong side of a rifle... of a loaded rifle! “The good people never get tired of these absurdities, because for millennia human beings have mistaken the way, for millennia, all their searches and interrogations lead to the same dead end” (MILLER, 1953: 83, apud KÁSPER, 2004, p. 79).

Guided by the composition of a differentiated logic of action, clowns are capable of disrupting everyday life, imprinting on it what is clumsy, averse to the expected, generating new conceptions about everyday life. By putting failure on the scene, they propose a new perspective for an issue so present in everyday life: the mistake. They remember that life is not necessarily only made right. Acting in this way, clowns teach us to laugh at ourselves and to live with our mistakes (MILLER, 1953).

Incorporating the mistake into moments of action, these beings connect in an intense way to the present moment, whatever it is. Miller, in establishing relationships between the *clown* and the flow of life, states that:

Joy is like a river: its flow is incessant. I think this is the message that the clown tries to convey to us – to which we must participate through a movement and a continuous flow, that we should not stop to reflect, to compare, to analyze, to possess, but to go forward infinitely such as music (MILLER, 1953, p. 127, apud KÁSPER, 2004, p. 69).

For the author, the clown's performance is a capacity of delivery symbolically performed by the clowns, who live for the present moment. It does not mean that there is no previous preparation, but that the artistic capacities are open to the intersection with the nature of life (MILLER, 1953).

For Burnier, the clown's mask is that “[...] which conceals the least and reveals the most” (BURNIER, 2001, p. 218). Revealing the faults and human clumsiness, this mask carries comic traits historically preserved and revisited, in a wide range of comic figures, that pass through the millennia, resurfacing in new robes throughout the times.

The art of laughing is also channeled through these figures who are renewed with society. Rooted in the time and space in which they live, these beings constantly seek new reasons to exist, new spaces to fill, new customs to transgress from their multifaceted gaze for the encounter. Contoured by the specter of the past, they carry genealogical elements that are able to emerge reconfigured.

Hospital stages

The clowns, developed over millennia and reinventing themselves according to the demands and social needs, reach the so-called hospital stages. According to researcher Ana Wuo,

The comic types and their genealogy have been historically transformed by time and by the social needs of each time. As a consequence, the clown begins to cover its area of action, reaching the health institution (WUO, 1999, p. 16).

In the field of performing arts, hospital stages have been investigated in their relationship with healing since ancient times. Around 4,500 BC, for example, in the Egyptian civilization, the figure of a clown, Bess, the god of joy, used to vivify

the search for balance. Later, in Greco-Roman culture, in 400 BC, the Athenians sought the healing of body and mind in the sanctuary of Asclepius, god of medicine and healing. In this space, patients received, through humor, the benefits of healing (MASETTI, 2001).

For Doctor Peter Spitzer, clowns have been operating in hospital spaces since the period when Hippocrates lived, but only in 1908 this theatrical performance is recorded in one of the editions of *Le Petit Journal* (SPITZER, 2002). Also, noteworthy in this context is the initiative of Dr. Patch Adams, considered by Spitzer as the father of hospital tricks (SPITZER, 2002). For more than three decades, Patch Adams has worked with the art of clowns in caring for his patients, a story that is recorded in the American movie *Patch Adams*, directed by Tom Shadyac and starring actor Robin Williams.

For researcher Denise de Sant'Anna,

The hospital is certainly a place of extremes, but within it there is a constant search for the “good dose,” the restraint between radical measures, between the limits of life and death. It is, in short, a place full of experiences difficult to define or represent, for they emerge between fiction and reality, between war and peace, between audacity and the fear of making mistakes. In the end, it is between extremes, and not just at its vertiginous points, that much of human destiny is played (SANT'ANNA, 2011, p. 20).

Recently inserted in the hospital, this space where the extreme coexists, the clown has awakened to a new phase in its history, although carrying millenary traces. The contemporary phase concerns the investigation of the performance of the hospital, which closely combines artists and spectators. Through the parody of the doctor – or rather, Dr. Clown – proposed by the American organization *Clown Care*, from 1986 onwards, clowns began to go to hospital contexts.

Clown Care is a community program of the North American circus organization *Big Apple Circus*, created in 1986, which aims to bring the joy of the traditional circus to children hospitalized in pediatric centers in the United States of America. One of its founders, Michael Christensen, reports that the idea came about because of the desire to offer an exclusive service for young people in pediatric facilities (BIG APPLE CIRCUS, 2015). In Brazil, this proposal was brought by Wellington Nogueira in 1991, with the foundation of the NGO *Doutores da Alegria*, which stands out in the country and throughout the world for its artistic, trained and research actions.

There are currently more than 1,080 groups and orga-

nizations of clowns who work in the hospital context in a professional or amateur way in Brazil (MASETTI, 2014). The consultant of research and psychologist of the *Doutores da Alegria*, Morgana Masetti, traces the following panorama in this respect:

The movement of clowns is a very strong movement, it is something that has grown a lot [...]. There is disagreement as to how it began (in hospitals), but a strong reference is Michael Christensen (founder of *Clown Care*) in New York, Caroline (Simonds) who later went to France (and founded the group *Le Rire Médicin*), Wellington (Nogueira) who came here (and founded the *Doutores da Alegria*), Laura (Fernandez) who later went to Germany (and founded the group *Die Clown Docktoren*). Another actor went to Italy, another to Spain. All these actors drank from the same source and then spread a little around the world and gave continuity to this work with a near language, adapting, of course, to their reality and then making new discoveries. A dialogue, fortunately, is possible among all these groups. So, I think this has helped us to think that the clown's job at the hospital is now on the world map, and each country is dealing with it in a way (MASETTI, 2014, s/p).

The phenomenon described by the author, in the field of performing arts, generated a movement quite representative both in the Brazilian scene and in several other countries, such as the United States of America, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Argentina, among others (MASETTI, 2014).

As a result of the worldwide expansion of initiatives such as these recently, in 2015, Argentina took a major step towards the development of this hospital art in Latin America. The country established the Law 14,726, which, according to its Article 1, has as its objective “to incorporate into the Health System of the Province of Buenos Aires the work of the Hospital’s Clown⁴” (BUENOS AIRES, 2015, p. 2). It is stated in Article 2 of the same law that “[...] each Pediatric Therapy Service shall count on a work of specialists in the art of clowns or hospital clowns⁵” (BUENOS AIRES, 2015, p. 2). In this sense, the presence of professionals in the art of clowns is mandatory in all children’s hospitals in the province of Buenos Aires, the largest in the country. This fact was widely publicized by the media and can be considered as a significant advance for the area, since it makes it possible to strengthen the professionalization of clowns who work in the hospital context.

For researcher Morgana Masetti, the insertion of the clown in the hospital context creates a space for listening and can be concretized as a proposition of an “ethics of the encounter.” According to the author:

4.
Free translation.

5.
Free translation.

The clown incorporates facts that have been refused or little spoken at the moment, favoring the possibility of dealing with events that generate tension. It helps to deal with the vulnerability of the human condition, in an environment where perfection is required, thereby favoring the expression of conflicts and difficulties. It leads us to come into direct contact with our feelings without analysis. In this way, it stimulates the ability to experience our emotions and accept different possibilities of reactions, expanding the limits of our behaviors. His action teaches that nothing persists and favors our connection with the present event. Through this philosophy of action the clown proposes an ethics of encounter (MASETTI, 2013, p.12).

For her, this ethic seeks to establish “[...] a situation of complicity and trust in relationships and creates the conditions for establishing internal spaces for reflection and learning” (MASETTI, 2013, p. 12). The researcher also comments that one should “Think of the ethics of relationships as a source of learning, where affections and body are important places of learning” (MASETTI, 2013, p. 12). Masetti considers the work of the clowns in the hospital context as always apt to be learned, in the sense that it is linked to human encounters in the world, generating from them experiences that cross the borders of reality.

Ana Achcar, in affirming the importance of the meeting in the art of clowns in hospitals, explains that in theatrical stages or circus rides “[...] the clown is the center of attention, and laughter depends on his ridiculous performance. In the hospital, although he is still the instrument of the laughable, it is the child, or the health professional, or the companion, the reason for his presence and existence” (ACHCAR, 2007, p.193). From the intersection with these hospital spectators, therefore, is that the clown’s action is constituted.

Weaving a connection between fiction and reality, the clowns are inserted in a place full of experiences, where, more than in other places of scenic performance, an extreme opening attitude towards the other. According to researcher Ana Achcar:

The hospital institution awakens the clown’s provocation force, giving it back the role of true incarnation of the festive, which enables us all, including him, to exercise liberating existence, which is so lacking in daily life. The hospital clown escapes the superficial and unbridled employability of advertising comedy, and is used to promote an idea of health and general well-being, which is related to the valuation of humanity in individuals (ACHCAR, 2007, p. 206).

From the valorization of time and space present, the

clown stimulates the participation of the individuals in the interaction, as well as their experiences, dispositions, propositions and reactions, assuming the liberation of the commitment with the real. Morgana Masetti's claim that the clown performance refers to an "[...] artistic proposal of the theater is a step further. Instead of the contemplative aesthetic experience of an audience sitting in the chair, it proposes direct and individual interaction in a crisis context" (MASETTI, 2003, p. 25).

Clowns contextualized in the hospital propose, through their daring logic of existence, meetings based on freedom of expression and on the transformation of reality. In a scope that, in addition to everyday life, becomes artistic and scenic, these figures aim to construct harmonic ways of intersecting art and nature.

In this breaking of frontiers, clowns act, according to the Brazilian researcher Ana Wuo, "[...] subverting and mocking the order of things so that the hospitalized child is adorned with the art of laughing at their own pain" (WUO, 1999, p. 45). This subversion is spatial, physical and sensitive, because clowns are inserted in the hospital space as human beings imbued with artistic tools that allow themselves to be permeated by the circumstantial flow of life.

For Castro, the presence of clowns in the Brazilian hospital environment is old and has a connection with the circus tradition, which since the earliest times proposes acts of solidarity with the communities in which they settle for indeterminate periods, being relatively frequent the performing shows in hospitals. The author affirms that novelty in Brazil are the *Doutores da Alegria*, who are a parody of the doctor (CASTRO, 2005).

This proposal, advocated by the NGO *Doutores da Alegria*, brings to the scene the figure of the doctor who acts by visiting children bed to bed, taking as a pretext to perform medical procedures, the clown extracts soft brains, squeeze loose laughs, sharpen tongues, perform musical ultrasounds, tighten loose screws, among other "procedures" added to the lexicon and to hospital routine.

In addition to performing with artistic professionalism, the performance of *Doutores da Alegria* has maintained since 2004 the *Escola de Palhaços dos Doutores da Alegria*⁶, which offers different courses in the language of comedy and clowning, contextualized or not to the hospital stages, besides monitoring the Groups that carry out similar activities in Brazil and in the world.

The nonprofit NGO "[...] promotes the quality of human relations and qualifies the hospitalization experience in

6. It translates to English as School of Clowns of the Doctors of Joy.

hospitals through the continuous visit of specially trained professional clowns in São Paulo and Recife” (DOUTORES DA ALEGRIA, 2014, p. 54). The Organization defines its basis of work as “[...] the rescue of the healthy side of life, even in adverse conditions, through the art of the clown” (DOUTORES DA ALEGRIA, 2014, p. 15).

In 2013, *Doutores da Alegria* computed one million visits to hospitalized children, companions, medical staff and hospital attendants, counted since 1991, the year in which it came into existence (DOUTORES DA ALEGRIA, 2014). The visits occur continuously, and the clowns make up doubles and act twice a week in the same hospital for about six hours a day. The pairs take turns, both regarding the hospitals in which they act and the partners of action.

The work of the *Doutores da Alegria*, due to the fact that it produced great artistic and social impact in Brazil, became internationally recognized and was included twice by the UN Habitat Division among the best global practices (DOUTORES DA ALEGRIA, 2014, p. 57). The NGO became a reference for the performance of clowns in hospital settings and received several recognitions, such as:

[...] the prize Universidade de São Paulo de Direitos Humanos in 2005, the Stockholm Partnerships Award in 2002, the Camargo Correa Prize in 2004, and the Dubai Prize, awarded by the United Nations (UN) Habitat Division, which ranked them among the 40 best social practices in the world, placing *Doutores da Alegria* on the list of the 100 global best practices in 1998 and 2000 (SENA, 2011, p. 34).

Through its publications, the NGO is attentive to the systematization and diffusion of knowledge and technologies experienced in its work. In addition, *Doutores da Alegria* take courses and lectures that aim at “... the study of the relations between art and science and the universe of the clown as a whole” (DOUTORES DA ALEGRIA, 2008, p. 8).

Although their work aims at “[...] the professional performance of clowns with hospitalized children, their parents and health professionals” (DOUTORES DA ALEGRIA, 2015), the NGO developed and develops actions beyond the hospital context, and is currently characterized as “[...] the only organization in the world that has evolved from hospital work to activities that also prioritize training, research and content generation for society” (DOUTORES DA ALEGRIA, 2015). In this sense, we highlight the contributions of the NGO *Doutores da Alegria* in Brazil and in the world regarding the solidification of the clown performance in the hospital, which diffuses in the contemporary field of the performing arts.

Final considerations

Possibly coming from a millenarian composition, the clown performance contextualized in the hospital propitiates the existence of a movement of approach between spectators and artists. It is not an exposition of the audience or a performance imposition, but an exchange of knowledge and existences that is established between the performing arts and life.

Upon receiving the permission to enter the hospital beds, the clown seeks a link with the children, with their companions, with the employees or with the medical team of the hospital. This connection may be able to establish a relationship of mutual trust, in which the beings in a situation of encounter can develop their powers through the theater. Thus, through professional clown logic in consonance with the hospital events, theatrical scenes are created in times and real spaces.

The clowns, as we have seen, go back to an ancestral tradition, always adding space to society and following its steps and transformations. When they arrived at the hospital stages, they established themselves, generating new knowledge in the field of the performing arts and in the hospital contexts. In these scenes composed by the concreteness of the daily life, the clowns bring theatrical inferences that amplify the possibilities of relation, going back, in this way, to the millennial characteristics of the existence of these figures.

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