

ARTICLES

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IMPROVISATION: NEITHER JAZZ NOR THEATER, BUT ITINERANT METAMORPHOSIS

Improvisação: nem jazz, nem teatro, mas metamorfose itinerária

Improvisación: Ni jazz ni teatro, sino metamorfosis itineraria

ABSTRACT

This article aims to understand how the improvisations performed by circus artists fit into the daily routine of circus and show management. Applying the qualitative research approach to multiple case analysis, data were collected through asymmetric observations of the routine of 31 traveling circuses in southeastern Brazil and semi-structured interviews with 116 circus artists. The data were analyzed using the narrative analysis method. The improvisations occur in both the management and performance of the circus show and are linked to its power to affect (or to not affect) audiences and fill a void in the conduction of the circus performance, which creates the conditions for potential plots. Therefore, the circus spectacle morphs into various possibilities, whether shortened, expanded, rushed, or split into parts, and these assemblages ingeniously allow the occurrence of improvisations and different show designs.

KEYWORDS | Improvisation, circus, management, assemblage, Deleuze.

RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo foi compreender como a improvisação realizada pelos artistas circenses se insere no cotidiano da gestão do circo e do espetáculo. Sob a perspectiva qualitativa de investigação aplicada na análise de multicasos, os dados foram produzidos mediante observações assistemáticas no cotidiano de 31 circos itinerantes localizados na região sudeste do Brasil e de entrevistas semiestruturadas com 116 artistas circenses, e a análise de dados foi feita por meio da análise de narrativas. As improvisações aparecem tanto na condução do espetáculo como dentro deste. Elas estão vinculadas ao poder de afetar ou não o público que assiste às peças e de preencher um vácuo na condução da performance circense, que cria condições para possíveis enredos. O espetáculo se metamorfoseia, então, em várias possibilidades: encurtando, empurrando, apressando, picotando. Agenciamentos esses que possibilitam maliciosamente a improvisação de ocorrer, desenhando outros espetáculos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE | Improvisação, circo, gestão, agenciamento, Deleuze.

RESUMEN

El propósito de este artículo fue comprender cómo la improvisación realizada por los artistas circenses se inserta en la rutina diaria de la gestión del circo y del espectáculo. Desde la perspectiva cualitativa de la investigación aplicada en el análisis multicaso, los datos se produjeron a través de observaciones no sistemáticas de la vida cotidiana de 31 circos itinerantes de la región sudeste de Brasil y de entrevistas semiestruturadas con 116 artistas circenses, y el análisis de datos se realizó por medio del análisis de narrativas. Las improvisaciones aparecen tanto en la conducción del espectáculo como dentro de este. Están vinculadas al poder de afectar o no al público y de llenar un vacío en la conducción de la performance circense, lo que crea condiciones para posibles tramas. El espectáculo entonces se transforma en varias posibilidades: acortadas, expandidas, apresuradas o desmembradas, y estos agenciamentos permiten maliciosamente la aparición de improvisaciones y diferentes modelos de espectáculos.

PALABRAS CLAVE | Improvisación, Circo, Gestión, Agenciamento, Deleuze.

ALEXANDRE DE PÁDUA
CARRIERI¹

aguiar.paduacARRIERI@terra.com.br
0000-0001-8552-8717

EDSON ANTUNES QUARESMA
JÚNIOR²

edsontunes@hotmail.com
0000-0001-9450-9753

JOSÉ VITOR PALHARES¹

titopalhares@hotmail.com
0000-0002-9190-3875

ANA ROSA CAMILLO AGUIAR¹

rosacamillo@gmail.com
0000-0001-6488-5651

¹Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Centro de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisas em Administração, Belo Horizonte, MG, Brazil

²Instituto Federal do Norte de Minas Gerais, Montes Claros, MG, Brazil

INTRODUCTION

This article reflects on the concepts of management and improvisation and aims to investigate how the improvisation of circus artists relates to the everyday management of the circus and its show, especially given that circus artists' work allows them to travel the world. To this end, we adopted Deleuzian observations as our conceptual foundation and the idea that social (or power) relationships enable people to create cunning ways of being in the world (Deleuze, 2006, 2013; Deleuze & Guattari, 1997). We observed the everyday management of itinerant circuses in the southeastern region of Brazil, which resulted in a search that was based on more differences than regularities and novelty rather than stability.

Despite its status as a complex, interdisciplinary concept that acquires different meanings, improvisation is typically associated with the notion that intuition spontaneously guides one's actions (Crossan & Sorrenti, 1997), considering aspects such as novelty, resource availability, knowledge, spontaneity, and flexibility. Improvisation has increasingly been recognized as a relevant research topic in administration, and the works of Weick (1979) have been regarded as pioneering for their focus on the role of improvisation in management theories (Leybourne, Lynn, & Vendelø, 2014). However, the number of empirical studies and conceptual structures that address the subject is still limited (Hadida, Tarvainen, & Rose, 2015; Leybourne et al., 2014; Vera, Nemanich, Vélez-Castrillón, & Werner, 2016). Furthermore, the literature on improvisation has typically focused on its antecedents, type of stimuli, and the typification of constructs, and has devoted scant attention to its process (Abrantes, Passos, Cunha, & Costa, 2018). We also emphasize that Brazilian studies on the subject are restricted to a traditional organizational context and theoretical scope; therefore, relevant empirical studies are scarce (Arantes, Freitag, & Santos, 2018), which demonstrates a gap in the field.

This article contributes to this field by seeking to fill such gaps. Further, it also aims to advance the debate on improvisation, which has proven increasingly important today, given the existence of international financial crises and social change. The learnings from this work can support efforts to understand organizational processes in turbulent times, during which the relevance of improvisation increases, even as it relates to business survival. This research is also theoretically justified by the expansion of studies on improvisation undertaken by authors such as Deleuze and Guattari. It also advances the search for intermediate structures that involve improvisation, as proposed by Cunha, Clegg, Rego and Neves (2014) and Cunha, Clegg, Rego and Story (2013).

Traditionally, research on improvisation in organizational studies has been associated with metaphors, particularly jazz and theatrical arts. However, as pointed out by Zourabichvili (2005), we believe that despite its ability to facilitate understanding and appearance, the metaphorical use of improvisation gives rise to pseudo-concepts that delude us into perceiving management through the lens provided by models, writing, or thinking, which pertain to a specific social class or the administrative mainstream. According to both Zourabichvili and Deleuze, the metaphor is therefore a hoax, as it reduces the world's richness and complexity to a single image. In this sense, metaphors guide our senses and create an image that continuously evolves, thus simplifying the world's reality.

Given this fact, we took the understanding of circus know-how and the contributions of Deleuze as our theoretical frameworks and adopted the concept of metamorphosis to address that of improvisation. DeLuca, Rocha-de-Oliveira, and Chiesa (2016) and Kravchenko (2017) have explored the concept of metamorphosis and express reflections similar to those of Deleuze and Guattari (1997) when they highlight the field of possibilities that ultimately emerge for subjects. "It is something that is given, but which, at the same time, undergoes reinterpretations in different contexts, thus demonstrating the individual's potential for metamorphosis" (DeLuca, Rocha-de-Oliveira, & Chiesa, 2016, p. 460). This paper addresses improvisation and management along these lines, that is, it explores them as fields of possibilities that are presented to subjects, derived from socio-historical processes, and allow the creation of new meanings.

We begin with the idea that reality is a convolution of forces engaged in persistent interaction. In this sense, its operation arises from two spheres: that of the organization (or molar) and that of immanence (or molecular). While the rigid or break lines predominate (crystallized and stratified lines enabling norms and standards) in the foreground, and are responsible for the norms and binary perspective of the phenomena (right or wrong; men and women; art and management), a flow of forces capable of elucidating life, differences, and novelty predominate in the background. The authors understand the importance of the two spheres' existence but problematize the risks presented by the progressive rigidity of the organizational sphere, which, in turn, holds space for immanence, that which is different, and the circulation of life (Deleuze & Guattari, 1995a, 1995b). From an organizational standpoint, one possible interpretation holds that this creates a situation in which structured management models are increasingly favored to the detriment of more inventive perspectives regarding everyday management.

The itinerancy of the circuses surveyed in this study allows circus subjects to alter their plans along their respective trajectories and negotiate their reality, which is mediated by the other plans created by individuals or groups encountered along the way. Parker (2011), Quaresma, Silva, and Carrieri (2014) and Aguiar and Carrieri (2016) have demonstrated that without a fixed address or headquarters to which an organization may return, its management is metamorphosed based on power relations, land conditions, and legal impositions by municipal bodies, the lack of an audience, weather conditions, etc. Meanwhile, improvisation is based on the circus art tradition, that is, the know-how of those living and working in the circus and interacting with the most varied audiences. Improvisation “results” from these interactions with the social element and the possible (re)cognition of a scenario that demands the invention of something new.

NEITHER MUSIC NOR STAGING: TRANSFORMATION AS THE FOUNDATION FOR UNDERSTANDING IMPROVISATION

Typically, the primary device used to address improvisation within organizations is the metaphor. According to Cornelissen (2005) and Cassell and Bishop (2018), metaphors are a valuable resource for the development of knowledge, especially in the scope of administration and organizational theories. In organizational studies, references to metaphors are often adopted to achieve certain interpretations, a didactic or critical effect, and even the adaptation of a historical context. For example, when conducting research in the field of organizational strategy, Sanabria and Moreno (2018) resorted to improvisation as a primary topic of study when they contrasted the concept of planning with that of musical improvisation.

The jazz metaphor is commonly used to investigate improvisation (Cunha, 2002; Flach, 2012; Weick, 2002). Indeed, several studies have adopted this metaphor to bridge musical and managerial improvisation. Nevertheless, metaphors are accompanied by a significantly sexist and elitist bias (Hatch & Weick, 1998). The idea of elitism is associated with the production of knowledge for the appreciation and comprehension of a given social class. Meanwhile, sexism arises from the reproduction of a sexist/patriarchal paradigm in which white men hold primacy over improvisation.

The theater is another metaphor that is often used in studies regarding improvisation. In this regard, improvisation is more closely related to conceptualizing a structure as the context in which improvisation occurs through the various processes

involved (Vera & Crossan, 2004). According to Buras (2017), replacing the jazz metaphor with theater has resulted in positive gains. The theater metaphor is associated with collectivity and team performance, rather than individual performance, the latter of which is almost always the case with jazz.

However, recent studies (Afkhami & Shakiba, 2018; Müller, 2018) have criticized both streams. These works do not reference jazz or theater metaphors, but instead focus on the limitations inherent to an explanation of the improvisation processes via the adoption of metaphors. Furthermore, in this view, metaphors provide a naive means of addressing the topic, as no improvisation is politically neutral, and all constitute a simplification of the reality of organizational life. In addition to simplifying social relations, the use of metaphors is also perceived as a form of domination or oppression. Likewise, this prerogative has been used to disqualify all forms of knowledge except that related to science, and, more precisely, the administrative mainstream.

In Deleuze’s view (2013), metaphors portray historically dated visibilities and enunciations and are the product of a historical formation defined by their enunciated truth and based on a regime of self-statements. Therefore, the image of the metaphor references a certain manner of perceiving an object, which generates a classification or norm when enunciated, hence defining the object in question at that very moment and in that specific place. In this sense, the visibilities serve as the conditions, because all that is done in a given era presupposes a regime of light while all that is thought during that same period presupposes that of statements and truths.

Thus, conceptualizing improvisation as a metamorphosis supports us in considering everyday management as a possibility for change. Authors such as Costa (2006) have shown that by resorting to Deleuze and Guattari (1997), we produce the ethics of improvisation. That is, these ethics arise from the idea of an ongoing daily improvisation in which the subjects continuously experience creative acts arising from their quest for survival.

For these authors, unforeseen events can provide a field of possibilities that emerge in everyday interactions. According to DeLuca, Rocha-de-Oliveira, and Chiesa (2016), subjects can change their trajectories in this field of possibilities, as well as their plans and decisions, and create new forms, actions, and approaches to management because “when a series of possibilities is exhausted and the impossible is obtained, everything becomes an event, and each movement is a metamorphosis” (Agostinho, 2017, p. 620). Improvisation predominates at the molar level (the sphere of immanence), which pervades the organizational sphere. In this sense, we draw on the Deleuzian idea which asserts that art does not reference the creation or reproduction of pre-

existing forms, but the capturing of forces which, owing to their free-flowing nature, can allow the emergence of that which is new and different (Deleuze, 2006).

However, we do not discuss metamorphosis as it is presented by Kafka (2000), that is, as “the weight of suffering in repetitive work and the effects of precarious employment in a society of the pasteurization of acts, which are devoid of meaning and loaded with boring automation and repetitions” (Soler, 2016, p. 133), by which contemporary work relations almost necessarily culminate in the massification and elimination of creative spaces. We construe metamorphosis as a form of creative transformation that is based on possibilities arising from the actions of (circus) subjects.

Along these lines, improvisation is based on the appropriation of this field of possibilities (and impossibilities) by subjects and takes place and depletes in everyday life. The unforeseen produces the deterritorialization of subjects, albeit momentary, and improvisation reterritorializes them (i.e., the former territory) or even produces a neoterritorialization (the creation of a new territory). Deleuze and Guattari (1997) address aspects of territorialization in the sense that the meanings attributed by subjects are transformed into their everyday reality.

This process of territorialization (including both the forms of “de” and “neo”) occurs amid the assemblages, which constitute the meeting of the forces that comprise reality. In this sense, these encounters can, on the one hand, concretize already stratified life forms (the established laws and norms) or, on the other hand, enable other new and possible forms (Deleuze & Guattari, 1997). Along these lines, according to Zourabichvili and Goldstein (2004, p. 16), the assemblages can lead to relatively stable social forms, which are endowed with a reproductive functioning that reduces the field of experimentation and defines the socially available ways in which individuals can model their existence based on the status quo. Nevertheless, this does not prevent the introduction of small irregularities; thus, possibilities for improvisation are created. The so-called identity assemblages, that is, how one can participate as part of a group, family, organization, ethnicity, or gender lead subjects to experience and negotiate their decisions and actions with other subjects and change their trajectory of experimentation, while also allowing the various manners of being in the world to metamorphose.

According to Carvalho (2011, p. 29), this potential to affect and be affected creates the possibilities for improvisation and innovation. Through the power to affect and be affected, which is given by the conditions of society, history, work, gender, ethnicity, family, and the various ways of being in the world, as well as the depletion of the meanings associated with everyday life, we devise other possibilities. These possibilities “show a situation

of need and something to be invented,” that is, transformed, or metamorphosed. For Deleuze (2006), every thinking act is also a creative one; further, it is an act of improvisation.

Therefore, examining improvisation in the context of itinerant circuses is consistent for three fundamental reasons. First, the number of studies on improvisation has grown in the field of management. Therefore, as an organization in its own right, the circus also justifies the adoption of this approach. Second, previous studies have revealed the significant indebtedness of theories on improvisation to certain artistic fields, such as music and theater, which are crucial elements of circus shows. The third reason regards the very development of the debate on improvisation, which has drawn increasing attention to its processes and the power relations involved therein (Cunha et al., 2014).

THE RESEARCH BACKGROUND

This article is based on the qualitative tradition of research applied to multi-case analysis. The research subjects are artists and employees of 31 itinerant circuses located in the four states of the Southeast region of Brazil: São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and Espírito Santo. The circus organizations in the sample were selected through snowball sampling, which is a widely used technique in qualitative social surveys (Suri, 2011). Therefore, participants were identified based on the recommendations made by individuals who maintain relationships with circus art, whether they are crew members, artists, people working with the circus language, or representatives of artists' unions.

During their visits to the circuses, the researchers systematically observed the everyday lives of the circus crew members. To this end, notes were taken on their daily chores to capture the ways of being and doing that such social actors attribute to the practices in which they engage. These practices were then described in field diaries. At a later stage, we conducted unstructured and semi-structured interviews with 116 circus artists regarding the organization of their lives; research subjects ranged from circus owners (who also worked in the shows) to their relatives and hired artists. Data were collected from June 2015 to February 2016, and further visits were conducted in 2017 with at least half of the circuses in the sample to ensure the continued relevance of the data.

The respondents were identified by the codes Ro1, Ro2, and Ro3, etc., in which the R indicated “respondent” and the number indicated the specific participant, who was otherwise treated as anonymous in the dataset. They were invited to discuss circus life in interviews that addressed various themes, beginning with the

following “provocative statement”: “Tell us about the circus life.” The few predefined questions following the initial statement left the research subjects free to improvise during their interviews. All interviews were recorded in both audio and video formats when allowed. The data from the interviews and unsystematic observations were transcribed and analyzed verbatim to preserve the discursive structure produced by the subjects. Therefore, the selected fragments and their translations are grammatically and semantically faithful to the circus workers’ statements.

The collected material was treated through narrative analysis (Matos, 2017) by articulating narrative temporality and Deleuzian theory. The analysis entailed reflections on the construction of the narrative created by the respondents themselves. Given the corpus of speeches obtained regarding everyday life of the circuses surveyed, several readings were performed to identify certain discursive fragments. Meaning categories were created to connect the stories and events that related to similar themes. In this sense, the analysis of the discursive statements was conducted specifically based on the systematic identification of the lexicon, the primary discourses present in the text, the themes and figures, the implicit and explicit aspects of the discourses, the discursive syntax, and the ideological aspects present within the fragments, as described in the next two sections.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN... PLEASE WELCOME THE ITINERANT CIRCUS!

It is paramount to understand that the product of a circus is its show and the service it sells is entertainment. Thus, when improvisation occurs during a performance, there is a risk that an unrequested service will be provided. The circus also sells the maintenance of a way of existing, i.e., the itinerant and nomadic life. Like *Deleuze and Guattari (1997)*, *Costa (2018)* has shown that “the nomad is a deterritorializer *par excellence*; he may even settle in a given territory, but only to extract bodily experiences from that space, along with the colors, the sounds, the dreams of existing and becoming another, and what is to come. But soon, they will leave for other experiences, other spaces, other worlds, other dreams to be dreamed” (p. 8). In this specific case, these reference future audiences that will be reached and shows that will be created.

The circus always sells a (visible) service, which is entertainment. However, it also sells the implicit ideas of itinerancy, life on the road, journeys, places, and a life without a routine.

(001) The circus provides the show that everyone sees. [...] but there’s [also] what you don’t think

about, which has always been the idea of a life without a routine, and without stops (laughs). (R86)

In the fragment above, the owner and manager of a circus discusses the visible theme of the show and the (utterable and pondered) idea of a life without breaks or an established routine. However, in the respondents’ view, this does not correspond to the truth (as indicated by the laughter at the end of the sentence), as, before performing a show, it is first necessary to put it together.

(002) The show, our performance, that’s what we are circus artists for. However, before it can take place, we always have to think about the journey, where to assemble the canvas, get permits, and even kiss the priest’s hand. (R02)

This fragment reveals how itinerancy is planned, as well as the places to which a show travels. It constitutes a strategy that can involve requesting the local priest’s blessing to perform the show, because, as pointed out in (001), the circuses and their members have an established social imaginary. According to *Morais-Storz et al. (2018)*, these strategies emerge from the manager’s knowledge and a form of management that metamorphoses based on power relations. Moreover, these reveal an identity assemblage between a person’s role as a circus artist and the show itself. In turn, this assemblage defines the ways of being associated with the circus life, which are not commonly accepted, even by the city priest.

(003) You know when an artist doesn’t come from a circus family, when he’s got no tradition. He has no sand in his blood. He may have the mojo, but he’s not a circus guy. [...] To be a circus [person] is to have the tradition of traveling, family ties, working as a collective. (R25)

The fragment above depicts the construction of an identity discourse. Family, tradition, itinerancy, and collective work comprise the circus show and its everyday life and were mentioned as relevant elements by almost all respondents. For the traditional circus artist, the circus is an identity assemblage and a way of being and existing.

(004) [...] There are several artists in a circus. There are big and small circuses. There are variety show artists. Some circuses have musical bands, while others perform a staged play. There

are circuses in which the clown is the soul of the circus. (R31)

R31 lists the artistic possibilities of the circus, and the types of shows that may be presented are implied. Bolognesi (2005) created a characterization to differentiate circuses based on their shows. The theater-circus is understood as that in which several theatrical genres are performed. According to the author, the circus of attractions is the most conventional category, in which various circus skills are presented, such as acts of juggling, contortion, acrobatics, illusion, trained animals (now outlawed), etc. Finally, a circus featuring a variety show is characterized by the presentation of skilled acts, along with musical shows, comic sketches, etc.

The shows are designed and maintained by a group of people whose members range from the very families who live in the circuses to freelance artists hired specifically for certain shows. Quaresma et al. (2014) remind us that today's circuses make strategic alliances to associate the names of famous and trendy artists and characters with their shows and thereby attract audiences. These alliances, in turn, emerge as a means of ensuring the survival of circuses confronting the advancement of television and the Internet. Therefore, children in the city of Crato, Ceará, for example, were able to see the characters Lottie Dottie Chicken, Peppa Pig, and even *Turma da Mônica* ("Monica's Gang") performed live.

In a show attended by the researchers, a performer played the character of Lottie Dottie Chicken "cover to cover." As he danced, he he succeeded in impressing the children's audience with his performance, but at another moment of the show, Lottie Dottie Chicken fell off the platform that was mounted onto the circus ring. The audience became scared, the narrator screamed, the music stopped, and an almost sepulchral silence ensued. However, shortly thereafter, the Chicken stood up (with difficulty, because of the costume) and danced away with members of the audience. When asked about this incident, the respondent argued that everything that transpired was a function of improvisation, as falling off the stage was not part of the scene:

(005) The actor fell from the ring and scared the audience to death. Some people screamed, the children cried, but the actor improvised, got up, and "chicken-walked" away with the children in the audience. We ended up incorporating that into the show and it was an improvement, wasn't it? But it wasn't there before. (R57)

IMPROVISATION AS AN IDENTITY ASSEMBLAGE IN CIRCUSES

(006) You know... There's this charm about circuses. But it's not just about music and variety, music and shows, music and theater, or music and laughter. It's magic, but not only that. (R20)

In the above fragment, R06 explains how staging and music are important in the design of circus shows. The respondent summarizes the various interviews in which music, theater, and variety shows operate as co-producers of the laughter and magic that circuses convey. In general, the surveyed circuses offered a blend of music and theater and short comic sketches, as well as various performances involving the body, such as dance and acrobatics. Music and theater create an atmosphere that captures the audience's attention and can define how the show will impact them. However, respondent R20 also reminds us that circuses not only relate to charm and enchantment. They are organizations in which people live and work, and are embedded in power relations, labor contracts, and the management of an everyday itinerary, which, in turn, creates a routine of "disassembling the canvas-traveling-assembling the canvas," visiting local authorities, advertising, eating, dressing up, rehearsing, and finally, performing.

One discourse that was rendered more explicit during the narrative on screen, and also in several others, concerns the extent to which improvisation is focused on the audience. Indeed, some challenges faced by the artists (particularly the clowns) during their performances draw attention, as they must interact directly with the audience.

(007) Clowns are the soul of the circus, aren't they? (R35)

(008) The clown [...] exchanges with the audience all the time. (R11)

(009) You have to be ingenious [...] you have to have a natural-born talent. (R6)

(010) [...] This is the most difficult thing for clowns to learn, that interactivity between the audience and the artist, because you have to know how to make fun of people without insulting them, without making the person... It's about interpreting it as mockery, not as an insult,

so you have to have this timing, you know? You have to know how far the mockery can go. (R22)

The fragments above call attention to temporal and spatial dimensions. In the scope of the utterance, the temporal location is anchored in the present and pertains to having the correct “timing” “all the time.” Nonetheless, having the correct timing all the time is more than a simple indicator of temporal awareness, as it is a metaphor that relates to a set of know-hows. R6 and R22 advocate different ideas about how “maliciousness” and artfulness are acquired, as well as how to set limits on the interaction. When improvisation takes place during a performance, there is a risk that the wrong service will be provided, as evidenced in the fragment by O10. Mockery and insult can be two sides of the same coin, and this ambiguity creates difficulties for artists during their shows. Mockery and insult are devices (Deleuze, 1991; Foucault, 1979) that the clown can use to cause the audience to (re)act. This audience (re)action reterritorializes the clowns, who can either continue with the act by creating new jokes, or deterritorialize it by improvising such that the audience is also deterritorialized, which then allows them to continue with the performance.

The time between the deterritorialization and reterritorialization must be as short as possible. The audience should not ponder the insult. The answer has already been given, and the clown must lead his audience on to the next charade. The audience’s reaction forces the artists to proceed with another charade (reterritorialization); otherwise, they will have to retreat. If this happens, their freedom to act will be curtailed, and the artists will be deterritorialized. Therefore, timing operates as a limitation that can also constrain the artist subjects (in this case, the clowns), thus hindering their action.

The clown balances on a tightrope between mockery and insult, and that balance is learned from the circus experience itself, as explained by R22, when commenting on the possibility of learning the clown craft in practice. Alternatively, R6 claims that such talent is a gift, which, in turn, presupposes the idea of innate talent that is implicitly associated with one’s birth, or is even a form of identity assemblage. Contrasting perspectives aside, both respondents conclude by using the same modality, words, and imperative vocabulary: “You have to have it.” This is the requisite premise for an artist’s ability to “mock them without insulting them” and “know how far the mockery can go.” For both respondents, the present, or the moment in which the decision regarding the future is made (that is, knowing how far the mockery can go), requires a trajectory constructed within and alongside the circus. It is either “something you’re born with” or something that can be learned, which has taken place and continues. Regarding

learning, Crossan and Hurst (2006) clarify that improvisation requires a certain solid basis of technical skills and experience in the domains in which it will be applied. Moreover, the issue of time is relevant to improvisation, as it references spontaneity.

During the shows, it became clear that the physical dimension of space can intensify embarrassment. In the surveyed circuses, the stage was in the center of the ring surrounded by chairs arranged in a semicircle to maximize the visibility of the audience. During the shows, the circus artists wear their own outfits, with sparkles and colors that are highlighted by the different shades of stage lighting during the performance. The level of intensity is high and flashing lights flicker, which draws even more attention to the stage. The backstage, also called *reservado* (“the private room”), is covered by a curtain that prevents the audience from seeing the artists before they go on stage. While the artists perform, the audience remains in darkness the whole time, which even makes it difficult for the viewers to see those sitting next to them.

However, the stage is not only physically central; it is also the center of attention and is therefore the focus of the audience’s gaze. While performing their acts, the artists are continuously and intensely exposed. In this sense, this overexposure has disciplinary effects, as illustrated by Foucault (1979), for it submits the artists to control, which, in turn, causes them to control themselves. In this case, the control is exerted by members of the audience, who restrict the artists’ freedom during their performance. They, in turn, remain under permanent “interactivity” and exposure.

In other words,

(O11) If the clown doesn’t feel the exchange with the public, if you can’t feel that, you can’t connect with people, you are defeated. You think: “Man, [...] nobody looked at me, nobody laughed at me.” (R11)

Indeed, failing to attract audience members’ attention or interact with them is synonymous with defeat, because this means that the sketch did not produce the desired response. In this case, members of the audience have deterritorialized the artist, for they have not gazed at him or her, nor have they taken part in the act, much less laughed at him or her or the performance. According to R11, a game is played implicitly between the audience and the artists and, like all games, it has losers and winners. From the hyperboles “nobody looked” and “nobody laughed,” it is clear that to be gazed at (i.e., to keep the spectators’ attention) and to make people laugh means to win. In this game, the clown

mocks members of the audience to attract their gaze and smiles in return: this is the “exchange.”

Meanwhile, despite experiencing feelings of awkwardness and embarrassment because “nobody laughed,” the artists can always improvise and regain the audience’s attention. In other words, they can reterritorialize the show, as some of the clowns participating in this research shared with us:

(012) [...] So you mock them, you mock the children. You mock the people. (R6)

(013) I mock them, I mock the children. I go up to the bleachers and play with one or another, even when I’m doing a comedy, I play with one or another, I interact [...] (R45)

The verbs chosen by respondents R45 and R6 denote the character of their interaction with the different audiences. The restrictions perceived as imposed by the audience are intended. By mocking the children (and even some adults), the performer can proceed with the show’s initial planning. Indeed, the circus magic seems to work best on children, who respond more spontaneously to mockery.

Once they are on the stage, the respondents proved capable of guiding the interactions in several possible ways within the length of time permitted for the show; in the circus, art is constrained by a certain space and time:

(014) I think the only thing that still worries people is the time because our show lasts two hours [...] But you have the freedom to do things in that [length of] time. If you want to do a thousand things during that time, that’s fine, I think you have to fill the time, especially because there’s a lot of improvisation. Sometimes you can’t, as I said, you can’t know how the crowd will react. (R21)

(015) [...] If you take too long, you end up “growing a tummy in the audience,” as we say here, right? The audience is there, then you delay things, then people will sit there and “grow a tummy,” so you’ve already lost the audience. (R52)

(016) When I see that the empty space is... If the act is not pleasing too many, we go ahead and chop or cut it. There are people that we don’t

even try to please if we see that it isn’t... We’ll have to work faster, you know? So that it doesn’t get tiresome for the audience. You have to be ingenious. If it’s pleasing [the audience], you can keep on pushing. (R46)

The fragment above reveals how the circus subjects relate differently to the duration of the show. Both R21 and R52 reveal the existence of a third agent that is collective in nature, which is “the crowd” or “the people,” who manage the show and is concerned with its length. The time limitation for circus artists concerns their perception that the show may or may not be pleasing to a given audience. The idea is to please the audience or the crowd, regardless of its size, at all costs. Therefore, the show can be metamorphosed into several possibilities, whether it is shortened, delayed, or edited. These forms of assemblage allow artists to ingeniously improvise and “do a thousand things within that period of time.” In turn, R46 arranged his sentences to convey the idea of public perception without referencing a third agent, who could potentially be concerned with the fact that the performance may or may not be delayed.

Due to the complexity of everyday circus life, improvisation emerges from several groups of artists, as shown by the following statement from R08: “The ringmaster is there... If something goes wrong, you have to improvise; you have to find a way for the audience not to notice.” The performance is indeed a collective work. While the ringmaster, who is also known as *mestre de pista* (“stage master”) may improvise a new sequence without the audience realizing it, the artist knows that if “[...] the song was played and someone didn’t go on stage, the clown must always be ready for anything, [...] If there’s an accident or something, he must do all that he can to fill that empty space. He’s got to be ready for anything” (R26).

Therefore, the improvisation discourse is again associated with the artists’ potential to read (or not read) the audience’s affectation. In the case of ringmasters, adaptations to the initial plan are necessary. If previous plans go wrong, they must devise other possibilities, improvise new sequences, and carry out metamorphoses so the show can continue without negatively affecting the audience’s perception. Among the aspects that can potentially go awry, the statement by the clown enumerates the absence of someone who should have gone on stage but did not, and even a potential accident. The mistakes created an “empty space” and affected the planned pattern, but also created new possibilities. It is necessary to remember that these possibilities are replaceable and interchangeable.

That which is possible is always limited and condemned to be repeated within a margin of variation, which, intending to encompass the one and the other, is always dual, but never multiple. Suddenly, when a series of possibilities is exhausted and the impossible is achieved, everything becomes an event and each new movement is a metamorphosis. (Agostinho, 2017, p. 623)

The empty space and the audience's affectation (or lack thereof) creates possibilities for the show to metamorphose according to projects, preferences, objectives, identities, the number of artists, and the circus's size, as well as the presence of artists who are "ready for anything" in the crews. Agostinho (2017) reminds us that such possibilities are limited but interchangeable, and imply the exclusion, substitution, or adaptation of an element of the everyday life of that social group, whether the group is a circus, an NGO, a private or public organization, etc. Here, the fact that the artists are "ready for anything" denotes a demand for adaptation, which is admittedly a form of improvisation. However, adaptation and improvisation are independent processes; occasionally, the need for adaptation is so urgent that the circus artists have no time to organize a new plan before implementing it. In this case, they must simultaneously merge planning and execution, that is, they must improvise (Abrantes, Passos, Cunha, & Santos, 2018).

This study has empirically addressed improvisation using a sample of itinerant circuses, their management, and their shows. The preferences adopted in this study follow a different form of writing that is more coherent with everyday circus life, more focused on the sites at which improvisation takes place, and closer to the artists' lives. The unforeseen events that happen in everyday circus life experienced by the subjects produce a momentary deterritorialization, but also allow the subjects to improvise and reterritorialize the circus; after all, the show must go on. Further, such continuity offers two possibilities: one emphasizes that the itinerancy must go on, while the other dictates that the show must begin and end at a given scheduled time.

FINAL REMARKS

This article has proposed a reflection on improvisation, which is an important topic for management that has commonly been anchored by metaphors in the relevant literature. In organization studies, jazz and theater have been used the most widely as

metaphors to address improvisation. Nonetheless, this paper has revealed the limitations of relying on metaphors to explain the improvisation processes. Metaphors, whether they related to jazz, theater, or other disciplines, constitute a naive approach to addressing the topic, as no improvisation is politically neutral.

Given this, we have adopted the concepts of metamorphosis and transformation to approach improvisation. Based on Deleuze, we have articulated the idea of assemblage and the possibilities of everyday life, not to confine management to a model but to open the potentialities of know-how, as well as the potential to affect and be affected in and by people's everyday lives.

Along these lines, we have concluded that improvisation in itinerant circuses emerges from the nomadism that is inherent in this art form. Itinerancy produces multiple circuses that may be the same, but change according to their socio-historical conditions. Further, circuses constantly deterritorialize themselves, although they provide a territory for the circus artists. Every day, circus workers manage contradictions related to the extent to which they are welcomed by local authorities (including the local priest), the availability of a location in which they may put up their canvas, the presence of an audience, whether they are applauded or booed, and also whether they experience laughter or sadness, surprise or sameness, and confidence in their art form or suspicion conditioned by prejudice. These contradictions result from the power relations according to which the circus agents and management coexist in their itinerancy. In this sense, itinerancy, family, tradition, and collective work comprise the everyday routine of circuses and their shows. As an identity assemblage, the circus creates several possibilities for being and working as an artist, as well as creating dissimilar shows in distant places with different audiences.

Improvisation may arise from either a sort of "gift" or a learning process. It connects with research on improvisation in organizational studies, as it constitutes a compression of the past, present, and future; in other words, it depends on previous learning (the past), at a given moment in the present, and aims for future results. This foundation of techniques and developed skills conditions the extent to which artists affect their audience. Artists "must have" a notion of how far mockery can advance, as well as the extent to which external restrictions can be subverted, reframed, and understood as an insult. A specific element lies between learning and innate talent: the challenge and the need to achieve a sense of "timing," or the right balance between mockery and insult, which often occurs through improvisation on the stage.

The embarrassment transmitted by the audience, in combination with the architectural design of the stage, reference the power device developed by Foucault (1977, 1979). Regarding

the effects of power, similar to that found in prisons, the stage induces a form of internal control over artists' performance, which takes place during the interaction and in each moment of their relationships. During the artists' performances, the audience hinders their freedom by embarrassing them, such that the artists are constantly interacting and overexposed. Therefore, the stage and the audience create a device through which a game is played; a clown mocks members of the audience to attract their gaze and smiles in return. Nonetheless, this is also the context in which behavioral elements are introduced. Therefore, the reciprocal relationship of giving and receiving defines the possibility for artists to emerge from the game victorious or defeated. Meanwhile, artists are also embarrassed when they "tease" members of the audience.

Whether they are a ringmaster or a clown, a hole or empty space in the show allows the artists to create and rearrange the show into a different one. This process constitutes a metamorphosis that may not affect the audience but is (re)cognized by those working in the circus, who must also be prepared for anything. This metamorphosis produces improvisations that can be repeated and learned from other experiences and shows, but which nevertheless hold the potential to create a different show.

In order to contribute to the literature, we have confirmed the exhaustion of the existing management models based on Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari. However, the failure of those models may simply serve as a condition for the emergence of new possibilities and other management modalities. Failure and exhaustion reveal a demand for the invention or creation of something new. By framing improvisation in this way, one can devise resistance strategies from that which has been instituted, that is, the hard line. In this regard, improvisation constitutes a line and an act of flight from that which is established, existing standards, and norms, and seeks to elude convention or do things differently. In drawing from the works of these authors, one can contemplate the ethics of improvisation. That is, one can reflect on what it means to begin with the notion of continuous improvisation on a daily basis, in which subjects constantly experience creative acts throughout their everyday lives, work, and survival.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

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