

*EL ARTE DEL CIRCO EN AMÉRICA DEL SUR:
TRAYECTORIAS, TRADICIONES E INNOVACIONES
EN LA ARENA CONTEMPORÁNEA, LA PLATA:
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INFANTINO*

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THIS book was first published in Portuguese during the Festival Internacional Sesc de Circo organized by the Social Service of Commerce in São Paulo, Brazil, in 2023. It was published by Ediciones Sesc as a performing arts collection with work by authors from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and France. In 2024, a Spanish translation of the collection was launched at the Circus and its Others IV Conference held in Bogotá, Colombia. The book is divided into four thematic sections as well as a final section focused on experiences and reflections. In total, it contains twenty-two chapters written by twenty-three authors.

This collection is an important contribution due to the remarkable plurality of learning processes and approaches to circus embodied by its authors. Readers are going to find different points of view on the same subject. The distinction between traditional, new and contemporary circus will be of particular interest. Due to the large quantity of research in this volume, each article adds new perspectives and points of view. Some challenge traditional definitions and propose innovative angles with evidence-based arguments. Therefore, it is my belief that the book is aiming to express in a practical and concrete way the polyphony that is the circus scene nowadays. It offers differing thoughts so that readers can think for themselves to reach their own conclusions.

The way that Julieta Infantino has organized the book should be highlighted. The book does a remarkable job of engaging in dialogue with diverse people

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Figure. 1. Book covers: Portuguese (2023) and Spanish (2024) editions.

whose lives are dedicated to circus work. *El arte del circo en América del Sur* has been released in both analogue and digital formats, which guarantees greater global access to its information that sometimes only circulates in the places where these reflections are produced. The book reaches out to both academics and to people who develop their circus knowledge in other study environments.

Before examining each part of the book and its inherent plurality of writings, it is worth mentioning that there are basic needs that people who live in South America have in common and that circus must address those issues. In neighboring countries where people's essential needs are not guaranteed by the state, food insecurity and national currencies that are constantly devalued in relation to the economy of so-called developed countries are still major issues. These South American nations are also still suffering from the aftermath of terrible periods of military dictatorship. In these countries, therefore, we find examples of circus arts that strongly resonate and interact with one another.

In the first part of the book, "Localised histories: thinking from the South," chapters critically discuss the history of Latin American circus and how it is reflected in the current development of its artistic language. Special attention is

given to some common episodes in the recent history of the countries, notably the dictatorships. The opening two texts are about Brazil, presenting dialogues with places that influenced a Brazilian circus language with different focuses: the first on history and the second on gender. They debate the simplistic ideas that the past is something stagnant, obsolete and that everything that is done today is, in itself, avant-garde. This section of the book also includes two other texts, one about the Argentine circus, providing an overview of the “new circus” and its connection to changes in circus training; and another text on circus in Chile, about the Chilean political moment in the 1990s and how it gave rise to an art that dialogued politically and aesthetically with that special historical moment.

The second part, “Contemporaneities: the circus between ‘the new’ and ‘the old’”, discuss the notion of circus, starting from a broad view, to see what the boundaries are between the circus, theatre and other stage languages. It features some concepts which, in addition to being temporal, are, according to the authors, also aesthetic: *traditional circus*, *new circus* and *contemporary circus*. These are circus arts categories that are under construction, both in terms of their narrative and the artistic presentations that contemplate these concepts. This section also includes a chapter on “*social circus*,” which is something that changes the course of circus language in South America, that provides an exciting overview of some works by new collectives.

The third part, “Between technique, aesthetics and poetics,” discusses the limits between creativity and technique. It analyses ways in which circus technique is rethought as a result of a search for new aesthetic possibilities and creative approaches, thus exploring the issue of circus skills and training. With this elaboration, questions arise about the narrative possibilities and the importance given to prowess and risk as well as technique and creativity. Any technique obviously brings possibilities that would not be achieved without them; however, according to the chapters in this part, these techniques can simultaneously generate standardization that does not allow creativity to be unleashed as expected. These dialogues also offer important current reflections on the circus arts: Isn’t a circus technique, placed on stage or in front of an audience in any type of venue, already artistic in itself? What are the limits, where technique and poetics can overlap and intertwine?

In the fourth part, “New cultural spaces for the circus,” the authors present new circus experiences from different countries in the south of the continent. In addition to the diversification of performance venues, they demonstrate the importance of circus language having its space expanded in places that generate knowledge, such as universities. They discuss how important it is for the circus community to build public policies to create better working conditions and artistic development for the entire creative process.

The fifth and final part, “Situated experiences and reflections,” invites readers to reflect on circus through the voices of professional artists, teachers and producers who dialogue with one another about the themes that have been developed throughout the book. In this way, the polyphony that was already present gains even more voices, possibilities for reflection and different points of view.

The importance of this book for circus in this region is already evident when considering its release at one of the main circus festivals in the world: the Festival Internacional Sesc de Circo in São Paulo, Brazil. It unifies reflections that are relevant to the circus arts in South America, especially in order to further develop this research and to continue producing compelling practical and theoretical work.

Its relevance was reinforced when the Spanish version was presented less than one year later in Bogotá at another important international conference. The book helps to unify certain reflections. This is important because South American thinking is of immense relevance to the study and development of circus arts.

I believe that the power of recognizing our continent’s own circus language confirms that we do not need to prioritize other countries when making our choices, nor do we need to copy foreign models. South America is a global creative powerhouse and the circus that is springing up in its streets, public squares, circuses, theaters, halls and even universities needs to be looked after by us, the professionals of this ancient art, so that it can flourish in the way it deserves.

May this book continue its journey, like circus art itself, reaching people who want to experience an encounter and who want to become empowered to build their own paths.

Author Biography

Rafael de Barros is a PhD student in performing arts at the Universidade de São Paulo (USP). He is the author of the book *Palhaço de Rua: A Experiência de um Latino-Americano - Um Estado de Risco* (*Street Clown: The experience of a Latin American artist — a state of risk*). He holds a master’s degree in performing arts from USP where he developed research on the Latin American street clown. In 2011, he founded the circus group Ejército Contra Nada.