Ephemera
Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes Cênicas
Instituto de Filosofia, Artes e Cultura
Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto
ISSN: 2596-0229

TOWARDS A PEDAGOGY OF EXPRESSIVE FORMS:
a conversation on the 40th anniversary of the XPTO theater group

POR UMA PEDAGOGIA DAS FORMAS EXPRESSIVAS:
uma conversa sobre os 40 anos do Grupo XPTO de teatro

Flávio Américo Tonnetti
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9279-1852

doi.org/10.70446/ephemera.v8i14.7936

Towards a pedagogy of expressive forms:
a conversation on the 40th anniversary of the XPTO theater group

Abstract: The text is an interview with Osvaldo Gabrieli and Beto Firmino, founders of the Grupo XPTO theater group, conducted by Flávio Tonnetti. Throughout the interview, they discuss the socio-historical context of the group's formation, their fields of activity, and their artistic language, as well as the group's relationship with the audience and critics. They also talk about their interactions with curators and other artists in both national and international contexts, offering a rich overview from the 1980s to the 2000s. Additionally, they address the power of animation theater as a language and group theater as a political form, bringing forth contemporary themes of theatrical interest and the strategies adopted to engage audiences.
Keywords: Grupo XPTO; group theater; animation theater

Por uma pedagogia das formas expressivas:
uma conversa sobre os 40 anos do Grupo XPTO de teatro

Resumo: O texto é uma entrevista com Osvaldo Gabrieli e Beto Firmino, fundadores do Grupo XPTO de teatro, concedida à Flávio Tonnetti. Ao longo da entrevista, abordam-se aspectos sócio-históricos do contexto de formação do grupo, seus campos de atuação e sua linguagem artística, bem como a relação do grupo com o público e com a crítica. Também falam da relação com curadores e outros artistas do contexto nacional e internacional, oferecendo um panorama bastante rico das décadas de 1980 aos anos 2000. Tratam, ainda, da potência do teatro de animação como linguagem e do teatro de grupo como forma política, trazendo, ao longo da conversa, a emergência de temas contemporâneos de interesse teatral e as estratégias adotadas para a sensibilização do público.
Palavras-chave: Grupo XPTO; teatro de grupo; teatro de animação.

1 About Grupo XPTO

Founded in 1984, Grupo XPTO has become one of Brazil's most important and innovative theater groups. As it celebrates four decades of artistic endeavor, its trajectory is distinguished by a singular aesthetic that merges puppet theater, musical composition, and visual arts, revolutionizing the Brazilian stage and profoundly influencing successive generations of artists. Grounded in an experimental ethos, XPTO has earned acclaim for its original creations, which are characterized by a distinctive dramaturgical voice. Through its integrated approach to artistic and musical direction, the group has captivated audiences across age groups while also engaging the critical and scholarly interest of both national and international observers.

Over the years, Grupo XPTO has developed an extensive repertoire of productions and received numerous accolades, cementing its reputation as a cornerstone of the performing arts. By presenting its work in diverse contexts, the group has played a pivotal role in democratizing theater and cultivating new audiences, with a particular emphasis on children and young people. Its work embodies a pedagogical approach through expressive forms, addressing pressing contemporary issues—such as environmental degradation and planetary destruction—with both playfulness and sensitivity. Aesthetics and politics converge in this pursuit of a language that articulates the challenges of the present through the pathways of sensibility.

In this interview with two of its founders, Osvaldo Gabrieli and Beto Firmino, the artistic and discursive potential of animation theater as a medium is explored, alongside the contextual dimensions of collective theater as a political form and the emergence of contemporary themes in theatrical practice. The conversation also delves into the strategies employed by the group to ensure its sustainability and deepen audience engagement. Additionally, the interviewees offer valuable insights into the evolution of the Brazilian cultural landscape and the São Paulo theater scene since the 1980s, as reflected in their extensive collaborations and interactions with artists, critics, and curators over the decades.

2 Interview

Flavio Tonnetti: Whenever we meet, we talk about a certain shift in the character and mode of operation of the group, noting the transition from more collective and grandiose productions to smaller performances in recent years, even solo acts. In your case, the return to smaller formats seems to reconnect with the group's original formation. Could you outline this trajectory, starting from the emergence of XPTO?

Osvaldo Gabrieli: Well… Actually, the group was born quite casually. I was preparing for an exhibition *Café Piu-Piu*[1], a well-known bar in the city of São Paulo. And I invited Natália Barros and Beto Firmino—we were dating at the time—to do a small performance at the opening of the exhibition, on a little stage they had at the bar. We created a short story, about 20 minutes long. Then a friend of ours, André Gordon, who was a singer and played a bit of piano, approached us: "Wow, what you're doing is really cool, I'm super interested in collaborating on something." And that's how it started, very spontaneously.

Beto Firmino: But soon, things started to take a direction. In the beginning, we rarely performed in theaters and mostly worked in nightclubs or alternative venues. At the time, there was *Madame Satã*[2], where we performed a few times. Later, we began to realize that we needed the structure of a theater—not as something that would confine us, but as a tool that could help us in terms of sound, lighting, and other resources. Thus, we ended up adapting our small performances into more structured works suitable for theaters.

Flavio Tonnetti: At the time, did you see yourselves as a theater group or more as a performance group? What were these performances like?

Beto Firmino: Honestly, there was no intention to do something "theatrical" or "as theater". It was a gathering of friends sharing a common cultural universe and wanted to create something to insert themselves into the universe we frequented—nightclubs, music shows, and so on. What we had in mind was indeed something performative, but without thinking of it as theater or as a "theater show." In fact, in the beginning, the first awards we received were in "special categories." They could not place us in traditional categories like direction, playwriting, or acting—as they didn't see us as a theater group. So, they awarded us special categories because theater was still present, even if it wasn't exactly what people expected from a theater piece.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: That said, my background is in theater. I came from a theater tradition and worked extensively in Argentina. I graduated in Fine Arts, but I practically entered the theater world at 16. I worked in the puppeteer ensemble at the *Teatro San Martin*[3] in Buenos Aires. Then I came to Brazil because I had met a Brazilian company, *Vento Forte*[4], at a festival, and I fell in love

1 **Café Piu-Piu [Piu-Piu Cafe]** is a musical venue located in the bohemian area between the neighborhoods of Bexiga and Bela Vista, in the city of São Paulo, known for its live music shows and for its association with the alternative cultural scene; still active with an intense schedule of shows.

2 **Madame Satã Club [Madam Satan Club]**, an iconic meeting point in the alternative and LGBTQIA+ scene in São Paulo, is located in the Bela Vista neighborhood. This place was crucial for the underground theater and culture in São Paulo, promoting meetings and cultural events in the 1980s and 1990s. The name of the place is a homage to the famous character **Madame Satã** [a Brazilian drag queen who represented the night life in Rio de Janeiro at the beginning of the 20th century], a symbol of the bohemia of Rio de Janeiro and emblem of resistance and sexual diversity in Brazilian culture.

3 In the **Teatro General San Martín**, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the puppeteer cast integrated the cultural venue known for its puppet theater productions, which received international recognition for its quality and innovation in performing arts.

4 The experimental theater group **Grupo Vento Forte** was founded by Ilo Krugli and Pedro Domingues and operated as a travelling theater in the 1970s, until it settled in São Paulo in the 1980s. Focused on puppetry and educational

with their work to the point of coming here and deciding to stay. I worked with Vento Forte for four years, performing in two plays with an absurd accent—much stronger than the one I have now. And that's how we, the XPTO group, met. It was also where I met Beto. It was a time of trying to do different things. Beto, Natália, and André initially had nothing to do with theater. None of them. Natália worked with poetry, composing music and singing. André and Beto were always musicians. I was the only one with a more theatrical background, specifically in puppetry and animation.

Beto Firmino: I would like to add that much of our artistic connection stemmed from performances Osvaldo did with a puppet named Plauta. It was a deeply personal puppet, almost an alter ego—and a rather cheeky one, I might add. This was not a puppet for formal productions but for more intimate performances. I remember being profoundly moved and captivated the first time I saw him perform with it. There was an incredible power in that interaction, something that had a truly mesmerizing effect on me. I believe part of our bond also comes from the enchantment Osvaldo created through his performances with Plauta, in a distinctly theatrical, puppeteer-actor manner. XPTO's relationship with theater began there—not out of bureaucratic or institutional ambition, but as an organic engagement with theater as a language.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: It was a time just after the dictatorship, when theater in Brazil was highly fragmented. There were those historical figures I heard about, like Zé Celso, who for me was like a mirage—I only met him many years later. Many other figures I didn't even know—especially since I wasn't Brazilian. In that climate of disarray, there was a lot of political theater, with a somewhat pamphleteering approach, even in how they addressed the audience—a kind of theater that I found totally uninteresting because it lacked any artistic language. While I believe in incorporating ideology, it must always emerge through expressive language—that is fundamental. But that wasn't happening. It was theater devoid of poetry. However, Vento Forte was different because it was theater full of poetry, primarily aimed at children. What fascinated me was that it had dance, body movement, beautiful and sensual people—something I started finding very interesting in Brazil. Somehow, when XPTO was born, we wanted to break away from that formal aspect of theater. Even today, when I go to the theater—and this bothers me a lot—I still see rigid formats, even in the way actors speak, with an atmosphere that smells of something old. I think of the theater we do as a unity, as if it were the work of a single artist, like someone painting a canvas. Because theater brings together many people in different roles—actors, directors, producers—there are times when this combination fails to cohere, resulting in Frankenstein's monsters. This happens less often now, it's true, as São Paulo has a strong tradition of group theater, but we still encounter productions in which the costumes have no connection to the set, which in turn has no relation to the direction. Each element is developed in isolation, and the pieces fail to converse with one another. We thought of XPTO's theatrical practice as something integrated, in which here music, as a pulse, had the same importance as acting, and so did the imagery and physical performance.

theater experiences, the group is known for its contribution to Brazilian and Latin American theater, forming and giving rise to several other groups.

Everything was very carefully studied. The shows did not emerge from a preconceived script but from something created during rehearsals, starting, for example, from a costume—as was the case with *Coquetel Clown* in 1987, which was inspired by seeing a visual arts exhibition by a collective of friends. I was so moved by that exhibition that I immediately designed a costume, and from the costume, the show was born. Others emerged from music. In other words, there were many starting points. Something quite uncommon in theater.

Beto Firmino: Still on the genesis of the group, it is important to remember the universe Osvaldo is talking about. On one hand, there was this poetic aspect—seen in Vento Forte, closely tied to animation theater, puppetry, dance, and live music. On the other hand, Natália, André, and I were connected to pop music, especially Brazilian rock from the 1980s, which was linked to post-punk culture, which later became new wave. It was from this place that the need arose to bring that poetic verve into a more urban universe. And I had an issue with Vento Forte. I had taken some classes in a course Osvaldo was teaching there when we first met. And it bothered me—with my post-punk spirit, even annoying, exaggerated, and mistaken at times—that Vento Forte had this very earthy, grass-under-your-feet vibe, while outside, the city was on fire, full of concrete, with all its metropolitan conflicts. Then, there was an event I always like to mention when talking about XPTO because, to me it is a very important element of its genesis: the episode of the shipwrecked payphone. In that course, Osvaldo proposed a scene exercise in which we were all covered by a fabric, like a fishing net at the bottom of the sea. Each of us had to perform a scene under it and then explain what it was. One was a starfish, another a little fish, and so on. Then I started making a non-stop noise – *beep, beep, beep*. When they asked me to explain, I said I was playing a shipwrecked payphone. That object created a huge disruption in the class. It threw everything off, a foreign body in that enchanted underwater universe. Later, in XPTO's first show, *Infecção Sentimental Contra-ataca* (Sentimental Infection Strikes Back) in 1984, the payphone character appeared. This episode illustrates a bit of that marriage, of a poetics coming from something earthier, confronting a more urban universe. At the time, the big impact of XPTO was that it was an animation theater with a language rooted in the city and urban life.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: And this was present in all the members as an initial motivation.

Beto Firmino: We lived in the basements of the city. Our universe was *Madame Satã,* it was *Cais*[5], it was the entire underground scene of São Paulo. Truly underground! At *Madame Satã*, the shows happened downstairs, in a basement. *Cais* was also a basement, tucked away in *Praça Roosevelt.* We lived in the basements of the city and were the urban rats. But what I find relevant is that all of this intersected with this poetic sensibility, which was already very strong in Osvaldo's work, both in Vento Forte and in his own formation as a visual artist, puppeteer, and playwright. We were a bunch of kids who were, yes, basement rats of São Paulo, but who found an outlet for that universe to flourish with poetry…

5 Located in São Paulo, as Madame Satã and Café Piu-Piu, **Cais** was a meeting point for artists and musicians that contributed to the cultural effervescence of this period with their alternative audience.

Flávio Tonnetti: Interesting, because *Infecção Sentimental* (Sentimental Infection) is from 1984, with you all at the peak of a new counterculture in the context of democratic opening.

Beto Firmino: And in a context already following the 1970s counterculture that challenged the establishment. By the late 1970s, that scene had become exhausting—no one could stand the sight of long-haired, bearded guys in tire sandals anymore. It had been entirely co-opted by the status quo, drained of its original force. Then punk emerged as a direct challenge to that hippie counterculture. But punk, by its very nature, eventually burned itself out. In its wake came new wave, which engaged more with irony—navigating the machine from within the machine. All of this converged with the poetics that Osvaldo was bringing into the work..

Osvaldo Gabrieli: There were two particularly significant events. In 1985, there was a puppetry festival in Curitiba, and I had just come from another festival in Maranhão, where the discussions felt almost prehistoric. They were still debating whether something qualified as a puppet or whether certain forms fit into established categories—questions that had long been outdated. I told the group, Either they'll love our show for taking a completely different direction, or we'll be torn apart. And that's exactly what happened. The dominant aesthetic was rooted in the *bumba-meu-boi* tradition, always tied to very traditional Brazilian themes. Then suddenly, we arrived with something entirely urban—garbage bags, puppets made of twisted pipes—elements that completely broke with that prevailing logic. In many ways, it marked a turning point. But at that festival—because they always brought an international attraction—there was a group from Ljubljana, Slovenia, which at the time was still part of Yugoslavia. And they were enchanted by our work and invited us to a festival happening there in 1986. Perfect. And we were freaking out at the possibility of going abroad already in the group's second year. Then, by chance, we presented a scene right after that festival at *Madame Satã*, on a day when Sérgio Mamberti, Cláudio Mamberti, and Mario Prata were there. And the three of them were like, "Ah, how wonderful," and "this and that." You know these figures, so you can imagine what came next, right? And Mário said, "Look, I just got an invitation to choose three Brazilian works to go to the Montevideo Festival. And I was fascinated by your work, let's take it to Montevideo." And we were like… holy shit… we didn't know how much of that was Mário's usual nonsense—we got to know Mário later—and we thought, which one of us is Mário interested in, because we were all young, so we thought it was just flirting for future encounters. But it happened! And we went to Uruguay in 1986. And there it was also a scandal, because at that time people thought theater was something only done by actors over 40. How could a group of twenty-somethings perform? I was the oldest, at 25, Natália was around 19 or 20.

Beto Firmino: And that was a cultural contingency tied to the politics of the time, with the repression of the dictatorship in Uruguay. There had been an exodus of an entire generation. There were not even young artists because anyone young had gone into exile.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: And there was the association of critics, who were all dinosaurs, and they hated us. But there were some people with a sharper eye, and in the two or three times we

performed, there was a lot of empathy with the young audience. We were even invited by the Brazilian embassy to do an extra performance at the Alliance Française theatre, thanks to the impact caused by a show that completely broke out of that traditional box. Quickly, through word of mouth, many young people showed up and packed the house.

Beto Firmino: The young people there mobilized themselves.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: People the same age as the actors. That is the craziest part. And we felt a huge resistance from some middle-aged people. Then came the reviews, some terrible, from people with no openness to that kind of theater.

Flávio Tonnetti: Did you keep those reviews?

Osvaldo Gabrieli: We have some things. But not much from Uruguay. Because what happened a lot were radio programs, with interviews that lasted two hours, drinking *chimarrão*. And we were used to the Brazilian rhythm, in which 15 minutes was already a lot. Nowadays, five minutes is an event. There is no more space for that. No one talks about theater anymore. All of this suddenly placed us in an international space. And then we went to Yugoslavia to perform just a few months after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. It was an absolutely urban show, representing the reality of São Paulo, visualized under the *Minhocão* overpass, with a bunch of garbage bags and people eating from them, all within a stylized language. But there, in Yugoslavia, it was interpreted differently. The next day, a newspaper article came out with the headline "Ecological Metaphor," something that also came up in conversations with the local press. And, of course, there were people there who hated the work. One critic sent a note saying, "You are too young to do these things, you need to start by reading the classics." That kind of talk. But there was one critic who left the show in tears, very moved, saying it was impressive how we had captured what happened in Chernobyl, that the monstrous beings we created had to do with the nuclear catastrophe. And it had nothing to do with Chernobyl. The thing is, the show did not have a single word. Throughout XPTO's trajectory, we spent 12 years on stage without saying a single word. It was just music, body, movement, and images.

Flávio Tonnetti: And when did words come in?

Beto Firmino: It was at SESI[6], in 1996, in the show *Pequeno Mago* (Little Magician). But words only entered in one of the dramatic layers; in the others, there was no text. Only the adult characters spoke. In the magical world of the children, there was no text.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: Those were very intense early years. Soon after, we went to Spain, because in Montevideo there was a theater director who invited us to the Cadiz Ibero-American

6 **SESI** – Social Service of Industry–is an institution that has a history of supporting Brazilian theater and culture, financing educational activities, theater performances and artistic events as a part of its mission of democratization of culture with its several venues scattered across Brazil. At Avenida Paulista, postcard of the city of São Paulo, where its headquarters are located, SESI has its most important theater, where renowned artists and groups from the Brazilian artistic scene perform, almost always with the theater at maximum capacity, providing the public with free access to the event.

Theatre Festival. We were very well-received, and one festival led to another, which led to another… Suddenly, we had a huge international career. But we didn't have the perspective of time, or what the future would bring. We thought this was the most natural thing in the world, but as we got older, we realized it wasn't natural or normal at all, that life was really tough. I feel like we did not take full advantage of the opportunities.

Flávio Tonnetti: But what does that mean? What could you have done that you did not do?

Osvaldo Gabrieli: Take more advantage of those international opportunities. Today, we move through the internet, but back then, it was not like that. You could do something amazing in Brazil, and no one in Europe would ever hear about it. But we had two fairy godmothers when we went to the Canela Festival, a very traditional puppet theater festival in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, very much within that conventional framework—in wchich we saw nine out of ten 10 similar shows in terms of language and performance styles. When we performed there, a Romanian woman and an Englishwoman were in the audience: Margareta Niculescu[7] and Penny Francis[8]. Margareta was one of those hugely important figures, the director of the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts de la *Marionnette* in Charleville-Mézières, France. And Penny Francis wrote an article about us in England for a magazine called Animations[9]. Margareta stayed in touch with us, at a time when there was no email or anything. Communication was very difficult, through letters, but we kept in touch. Then there was a workshop on theater direction, offered by Margareta and other directors of animation theater. I went to Spain to do that workshop with a scholarship. Other things started falling into place, and we ended up in the program of a festival in Charleville-Mézières. And look at this woman's insight: bringing a bumba-meu-boi (a traditional Brazilian folk performance) with elderly performers from Maranhão, the most authentic, folkloric thing possible. Bringing a *mamulengo* group (traditional Brazilian giant puppet theater) from the state of Pernambuco, but with people connected, to university training, i.e., a more "chic" *mamulengo*, with a whole theoretical foundation behind it; and bringing us, from XPTO, representing the modernity of that moment, coming from São Paulo. Everything all together: our show would end, and the sound of the drums from the next show would already start. The French went crazy because it was wild to see a super contemporary language and then suddenly drop into an extremely traditional, deeply rooted one. That festival led us to another one in a small town called Haubourdin, near Lille. When the festival ended, we were called aside: "There are some people over there who want to talk to you." We went with the translator: "We want to buy a show from you for September," while another person said, "I want one for

7 Theater director and puppet specialist, **Margareta Niculesco** was a key figure in the development of contemporaneous puppet theater. Her efforts were essential in the revitalization of puppet theater in Europe, with internationally recognized works.

8 British specialist in puppet theater. Author and professor, **Penny Francis** has influenced generations of puppeteers and is known for her theoretical contribution to the study of puppets and puppet theater.

9 Animations magazine, edited and published from 1976 to 2000, is still available in a digital version as Animations Online, which can be accessed via the website of the Puppet Centre (www.puppetcentre.org.uk).

November," another for March, and another for July. We were terrified because we could not sell March and July, with such far-apart dates. Logistically, it was unfeasible. So, how could we take advantage of this? In that sense, I think we missed many opportunities as we ended up not accepting any of those invitations.

Beto Firmino: Later, we did end up doing a tour through France and Spain in the following years, but not because of those work proposals.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: Margareta organized the tour in France, which is why she was our fairy godmother. She even invited us to write.

Flávio Tonnetti: So, in some way, you managed to take advantage of that social capital.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: Partially. For example, we had a contact in Spain, but that person's interest was to bring a Brazilian group to perform in random places. We never had the chance to perform in Paris or other major French cities, or to perform in a good venue in Madrid—there, we only performed in a peripheral space, in a union hall for the elderly, with an audience of old folks who probably looked at it and thought, "What the fuck is this?" And we were aware of these mismatches.

Beto Firmino: At the same time, in Barcelona, we performed at a theater school, and it was amazing, the complete opposite, with a fully engaged and participatory audience. At the end of the show, they climbed on stage and celebrated wildly with us. What we lacked was a producer who could organize all these opportunities into a tour without gaps, connecting one venue to another, who could play a more active role in harnessing the potential that was clearly there, given their interest. But we let it drift and didn't manage to take full advantage of that moment.

Flávio Tonnetti: Ideally, every theater group would have a person or department to handle the commercial side, scheduling, logistics, and contracts. What we see are groups, even the big ones, with the creators themselves handling negotiations. Don't you think this also has to do with the precariousness of Brazilian theater?

Osvaldo Gabrieli: Of course, it's very difficult. We have worked with a handful of producers, but it never really worked out. There was even an issue of ego—some did not grasp that it's not just about selling a show, for instance. You have to understand what the group is about because we are not selling bananas and apples—we are presenting work built on a thought process, a creative construction. Without that understanding, it was very difficult. At the same time, since the group was already well-known, a producer could easily arrange meetings, mistakenly believing their efforts were highly effective. In reality, it was the group's reputation that opened doors. The producer simply benefited from that recognition.

Flávio Tonnetti: There was a lack of someone who could engage with production more organically, someone who could truly think alongside the group.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: Exactly. In that sense, *Grupo Sobrevento* is impressive, with its two directors—Sandra and Luiz André[10]—working like ants and doing it very well, winning several grants. They also have a member who, besides being an actor, is a great producer, with that dual skill. A guy who understands the language and the proposal and, at the same time, knows how to sell and promote the plays and the group.

Flávio Tonnetti: You can count on one hand the people who have such profile.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: Also because actors don't like doing production. They do it because they are broke. An artist who is a producer is usually broke. So, we ended up doing it ourselves, which takes up a huge amount of time.

Flávio Tonnetti: And it diverts us from our original function.

Beto Firmino: Besides, we do not have the right tools to do this production work. It's a hell of a job, and the results aren't great because we're not from that field.

Flávio Tonnetti: You bring up this relational, interpersonal dimension a lot. I would like to understand better this erotic-affective dimension that mobilizes the formation of the group and its continuity. I would like to know how long the four of you worked alone and when, how, and for what purpose the others joined.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: There were four of us in total. Three of us lived together in the same house, which had a basement—this basement became the birthplace of our group. The fourth member, André, lived in the annex. He was dating Fernando, who eventually took on the role of sound technician. Another housemate, Helinho, handled the lighting and, since he was a photographer, also produced the images for the shows.

Beto Firmino: And Helinho was having an affair with Natália… there was a network of erotic exchanges… very noticeable… The scheme was very familiar.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: Time passed, and the thing grew. Natália and André left because they were part of Luni,[11] which had a song featured in a soap opera, which led to about 200 performances across Brazil. So, they couldn't reconcile XPTO's schedule with Luni's. When they left, I gave a workshop, and from that, Vanderlei Piras and Anie Welter joined. Sidney Caria had already joined earlier when we needed a utility actor. And this lineup of five people lasted 14 years. That is how the second formation of XPTO was born. Always for very long periods.

Flávio Tonnetti: At that point, were you still rehearsing in the basement of the house?

Beto Firmino: We had already moved. At that specific time, we lived in a building where the entire cast lived in three different apartments, after everyone had already met. There was

10 Reference to Sandra Vargas and Luiz André Cherubini of the Grupo Sobrevento animation theater group, active since 1987.

11 In addition to Natália Barros and André Gordon, the musical group Luni was made up of Marisa Orth, Théo Wernek, Fernando Figueiredo, Kuki Stolarky, Lelena Anhaia and the Frenchmen Gilles Eduar and Lloyd Bonnemaison. They were performative and irreverent, moving between rock and jazz, achieving relative success in the 1980s

a time when we would have a meeting and everyone would take the elevator up to a room on the roof of one of the apartments. It was a combination of a party room and a janitor's house that had been renovated and which we used as a rehearsal room. We moved from the basement of a house to the roof of an old building. A very special neoclassical building in the Bela Vista neighborhood.

Flávio Tonnetti: And how did you coexist? If the coexistence brought creative possibilities, it must have also brought conflicts. How did you manage this artistic life that was also a personal life?

Osvaldo Gabrieli: Since it was not a commune, and everyone lived in their own apartment—me with Beto, Anie with Sidney, and Wanderley with his wife—I would say there were not many big arguments. In the initial formation, the group did not have a director; it was more like a collective practice. After Natália and André's departure, I ended up taking on the artistic direction, and Beto took on the musical direction.

Flávio Tonnetti: When did this change happen, and with which show?

Beto Firmino: In 1988, with Coquetel Clown. One remarkable thing is that this cast was very happy, which is why this formation lasted 14 years. They were very talented people with a very stimulating work dynamic.

Flávio Tonnetti: And how did you survive?

Beto Firmino: Within these dynamics of survival and continuity, there were these performances we did in the underground scene at Praça Roosevelt, wordless sketches that later gave rise to *Coquetel Clown.* We sold the idea to the *Cais* nightclub to do a 15-minute performance on the dance floor at 2 a.m. As we went in, people were dancing. We had to go all in! Imagine the person on the dance floor, high, and a group comes in to do a theater scene. What a challenge not to have tomatoes thrown at you! And it was a real close call. They would call us for a performance, say, tomorrow night or next week, and the day before or the week before, we would come up with an idea and start rehearsing the scene.

Flávio Tonnetti: And how did the performances go? Did people make space on the dance floor?

Beto Firmino: No, there was a small stage. We would start mixing the club's sound with ours, and everything would blend. We would do our thing, and then the sound would go back to the DJ, no break.

Flávio Tonnetti: Was there continuity between the club's sound and the performance's sound?

Beto Firmino: In terms of language, yes. We would record it, and they would pass it to the DJ. We imagined a vibe that fit the dance floor, so there would not be a disconnection.

Flávio Tonnetti: So, people stopped to watch but kept swaying?

Beto Firmino: Yeah, they would stop to watch in that dance floor spirit because the club kept going. It was not like *Cais* lit up and everything changed. No. Everything stayed the same, the dance floor with the same lights, and us on stage doing our thing.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: And it was all very unusual. Super big, colorful things. Absurd!

Beto Firmino: There was a scene simulating a video game, in which characters were the pieces of it, and the music was all based on a series of looping noises. Musical elements came in with a lot of movement, pulse, and dynamics. It was a challenge we had to take on: making an insertion on a dance floor!

Osvaldo Gabrieli: Let's say life was much simpler. It was a different Brazil.

Beto Firmino: And it was also much cheaper to live in São Paulo. You could sort out your finances with much less. There were not all these expenses like internet, cell phones, etc. You paid much cheaper water, electricity, and rent bills.

Flávio Tonnetti: As a long-lived group, do you feel that the financial challenge increased over the decades? Is that something that made it harder for a group to continue?

Beto Firmino: Especially in terms of focusing on the work, because as people need more money, they have to spread themselves across different fronts to make ends meet. As they are working on multiple things, their dedication to something specific, like a group, gets shorter. There was no choice, you have to divide your time and manage it. Back then, it was much easier to dedicate yourself exclusively to one project because you could stay in one job and surviving from it.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: I feel like we were very lucky in some ways. For example, the director of a company, Hoechst, invited us for a job. They had an event called the Hoechst Olympics, a huge integration activity they did for their 15,000 employees, renting out and closing Sesc Interlagos, with big opening and closing events. We went to talk to them, a bit suspicious, as it was a big chemical company and all. But when we got there, we had a great conversation with the guy in charge of the event, a smart, cultured, really nice guy. We started talking, he was enchanted, and said, "Present a project." And we were starting a new project, *Babel Bum*. But we didn't have a cent to make it. We just had the desire. I have learned that in life, when you hit rock bottom, a little rope comes and pulls you up just enough to breathe, and then you go back down. When the Hoechst person showed up, he asked how much it would cost, and we explained how it would be and how much it would cost. He said, "Tomorrow I'll give you this much." And he asked, "But can I pay you 20 thousand at a time?" And we said, "Sure." It was a leap of faith. And this was at the beginning of XPTO, when we were in our early 20s. Now, we are over 60, and XPTO is 40 years old. You see? Now we have to make piles of justifications and present a series of documents for something that will be a theatrical creation, to try and, if we are lucky, get funding that will be insufficient. Visual artists, if they are lucky, become famous painters and do not need this anymore.

Us, in theater, no. We will spend our whole lives living off the state's crumbs. Today, to put on a show, we have to spend a lot of time making lists of things to convince the evaluators of the grants, always in a square, boring way that fits the bureaucracy. We spend hours and hours justifying the unjustifiable. Sometimes, I just want to express myself, I just want to create. The artist who paints or the dancer who dances does not know what they are going to do before they start working with their body, so any justification is just lip service. If you have 40 years of history and propose something like that, they say, "Osvaldo, just apply, try." However, like XPTO, there are 400 groups in São Paulo. If someone said, "Here's 100 thousand, do whatever you want," we would do it, even if that amount is peanuts for making theater. But that's never going to happen because the funding managers are bureaucrats. The thing is: this unbureaucratic reality already happened for us. And it was incredible because, during the Hoechst Olympics, we put on a show that was grand. There was no Rouanet Law[12], no grants, none of that. And people in the theater world would ask, "Is XPTO rich? Is someone in XPTO rich?" Because *Babel Bum* was a very expensive show. Today, it would be a million-dollar production, something like that. We teamed up with another group, Pia Fraus, which at the time had Domingos Montagner, who did aerial acrobatics, and we went wild! We made a show that toured the world. We did two Olympics for Hoechst, they was fantastic. But it was a different Brazil. To give you an idea, imagine this: we were a group of 12 people going to France with 800 kilos of material, and we would show up on the day of the flight at the Varig counter, almost crying: "We're a theater group, we don't have money," and Varig would let us check in 600 kilos for free. And the other 200 kilos, we'd split among the 12 of us and board. All of this at check-in! It is not as we went beforehand to negotiate. Try doing that today with an airline. That happened in another Brazil and time, the conductor Jamil Maluf came to us—we did not even know him at the time—and said, "Do you want to do a project with the Experimental Repertoire Orchestra?" Sure! "Well Orloff wants to donate 80 thousand Brazilian reais to make a crazy show, it has to be really crazy because the project is called 'Orloff Spirit.' It's about the vodka they're launching. So, it has to be trippy, trippy, crazy!" I wrote the script, presented it, they agreed. We did two shows at the Municipal Theater of São Paulo and two at Paço das Artes in the city of Belo Horizonte. The whole orchestra on a chartered flight to do a show with the São Paulo choir singing while 100 people ran after giant chickens that stormed the stage. We did something so absurdly big that it did not fit on the Municipal Theater's stage. You know, when I look back at things like that, I wonder: how did we manage to do it? We did not have a cent, we were all poor, we were all very basic in how we lived and survived.

Flávio Tonnetti: And how did you actually do it? How did you build those sets, those costumes?

Osvaldo Gabrieli: We had a big workshop in the Mooca neighborhood in São Paulo, in the middle of an industrial area. In the middle of this cluster of factories, we had a huge, wonderful

12 Federal Culture Incentive law No. 8.313, from December 23, 1991, which regulates the financial support to cultural projects via tax incentives.

workshop, alongside the Acrobático Fratelli group. We rehearsed and built things there. This was in 1990, before we joined SESI.

Flávio Tonnetti: And how did the entry into SESI/FIESP happen?

Osvaldo Gabrieli *Aquelarre* had been seen by SESI producer Maria Lúcia Pereira, who also saw Babel Bum. She knew the group's work very well and asked us: "Look, I've seen your work, and I've realized that you're ready to create a piece to come to SESI". This was in 1996. And that's how *O Pequeno Mago* (*The Little Wizard*) came to be, which was a milestone. A production prepared over almost six months before its premiere, with plenty of time to think and create. A show with 23 actors and a small orchestra of six musicians playing live. We won fourteen awards with it, making it the most awarded children's show in SESI's history.

Flávio Tonnetti: A children's show that is not just for children, right? It is for adults too. Like all those you create.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: I don't think much in terms of children or adults. You know how *Coquetel Clown* became a children's show? We performed it in theaters at midnight, and some parents brought their kids. There were moments when three kids laughed in the middle of the show, all by themselves, at unexpected times. That laughter would affect the rest of the audience. So we thought, "Let's do a children's session!" And that's how it became a children's show! Of course, we adapted some things because the language was a bit spicy… not too spicy, but there were some cheeky jokes that did not work for kids, though adults found them hilarious. They were silly things that had an effect on adults. All of this without words.

Beto Firmino: When we do children's theater, I think, deep down, the kids we are aiming for are ourselves. We are doing it for the child within us. I have a thing for children's theater; I enjoy it. My inner child enjoys it. I think that is why it's also for adults: it's for the children who live inside adults.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: With SESI, the production became something wild. Maria Lúcia Pereira was the one who hired us. She had a deep understanding of what was happening in São Paulo's theater scene. She was a critic who knew everything that was going on. She had been following XPTO since our early works. But she was fired from SESI—and sometime later, she passed away. When she left, someone administrative took over, someone who was not from the arts, hired to manage SESI's entire cultural complex. XPTO had been contracted for six months, and the play was a hit. The new person came in and said, "Would you like to stay for another six months?" "Of course, please." Imagine that. I was already on alert, thinking there would be trouble. I prepared a project based on Buster Keaton, *O Enigma do Minotauro* (*The Minotaur's Enigma*), and submitted it. She was fascinated. "If it is not broke, don't fix it," as they say. We ended up doing *Buster* for 8-9 months. Then, by the 2000s, we left SESI and faced the harsh reality, realizing that life was not like SESI. We went from 500 people in the audience to 80, with a show called *Além do Abismo* (*Beyond the Abyss*), which featured Grace Gianoukas

and a bunch of amazing people, but it was a "very twisted" show. Soon after, theater funding began.

Flávio Tonnetti: In what sense was *Além do Abismo* twisted?

Osvaldo Gabrieli: In terms of its dramaturgy. It was a commission by someone who was not Brazilian and lived in Spain, and it came with something a bit heavy that didn't go down well.

Beto Firmino: Some people said it was not even theater. But it ended up winning awards for best costume and best music. It was a well-executed show, but it was very strange, to the point in which people said it was not theater. Because, really, it was very odd from a dramaturgical perspective.

Flávio Tonnetti: What was the language like, Beto?

Beto Firmino: First, it took place in an inflatable tent. Coca-Cola had a geodesic dome at the São Paulo Cultural Center that stayed there for years, like a round arena with terrible acoustics, which forced us to do a lot of sound work. The audience sat around the central arena where everything happened, with people coming in and out. The dramaturgy itself was very fragmented; the show was truly crazy. We were not aiming for clarity, in terms of weaving a story or leading to any kind of organicity.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: There was no story. It was the idea of "the mouth of time." There was a Spanish inquisitor, a reference to Torquemada, with three crazy subjects. People who had died—and did not know they were dead—would arrive. An empress from a country, then a cow that spoke English, and then a guy who dominated the cow. The cow was an actor two meters tall, and the guy who dominated it was 1.60 meters. The performances were very absurd…

Beto Firmino: And the dramaturgy had these long soliloquies that didn't connect to anything before or after. It was really challenging.

Flávio Tonnetti: But was it close to what we now consider post-dramatic theater?

Osvaldo Gabrieli: Honestly, I only learned what post-dramatic theater was much later. We had been doing post-dramatic theater since the beginning. Because we were never Aristotelian in our dramaturgy, and most of our works did not revolve around resolving a central issue. Noting like that. They were scenes… because I did not believe in structures. Nowadays, I believe in them more—I'm older now.

Beto Firmino: Even in your writing, it feels like you're painting with words, loose, without worrying about structuring sentences. That shows up in the dramaturgy or post-dramaturgy of our shows.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: It has to do with what I said earlier about being a visual artist—I studied visual arts—you are not looking for coherence. I always think of Pina Bausch, who said,

"I hate giving interviews because I don't know how to talk about the show." The show is the show! Everything I want to say is in the show; I don't want to explain it because I can't.

Flávio Tonnetti: But even if you didn't know or didn't want to explain, audiences and critics received this show and gave you feedback. In the transition from the 1990s to the 2000s, how were you received? Because there was a sociopolitical shift and the context was not the same as when the group started.

Beto Firmino: One of the challenges XPTO took on was that despite not having a narrative-driven dramaturgy, achieving organicity in what was presented on stage. I think it is a musical thought process, in which you have an internal organicity that does not rely on a rationally structured dramaturgy. It is more about the organicity between the elements involved in the scene.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: But there are themes. We always talk about power. In *Babel Bum*, it was there the whole time. There were characters who received boxes of fallen angels. When they opened the boxes, each one revealed something. Two, who were migrants, were fascinated. The three sisters, who hated each other, opened theirs and saw nothing. The queen saw power. Each character saw what was inside them. I think this way of conveying a message is much more interesting, especially since I was a militant in Argentina and developed an allergy to overt militancy. You can be a militant in many ways in life. I think things that lend themselves to a single reading are always mistaken. Things should have multiple interpretations. I believe in the Gestalt approach, in which you see one thing, but someone else sees another. In a way, the work is built alongside the audience. I'm very bothered by dated shows, except when they have a more universal reading. Zé Celso had that knack; in the seven years I worked with him, I saw him incorporate everything. He could take the drama of an actress's marriage to a musician and connect it to history and what was happening in Brazil and the world. I don't have that ability… that intelligence to tie stories together. My path was different.

Beto Firmino: At the same time, in a scene from *O Pequeno Mago*, we had the luxury of setting the Queen's Castle on fire. A castle crumbling into ruins. Not being pamphleteering has that meaning. Dealing with power involves rationality but also sensitivity, emotion. Instead of approaching content with a spreadsheet, you express it from all angles. What we decide to do in the world is much more mediated by emotions than by reason.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: In 2000 there was a scene Beto created in the second version of *Infecção Sentimental*, which we did also at SESI/FIESP. Three figures covered in gas balloons interacted with three others covered in spikes and knives. At one point, only two men remained—one with pink balloons and the other with knives—while the others had been hurt and fled the scene because, inevitably, one would hurt the other, and the balloons would pop. The two who remained showed great interest in each other… and started dancing! When school groups with teenagers were in the audience, there was a lot of screaming, because it was two men—of course, it was a different time; today, maybe that wouldn't happen. But it was impressive how that scene provoked reactions. There was a very clear message.

Beto Firmino: That might be one reading. But there's a more philosophical one—which is what led me to create that scene—about human relationships. When the balloons entered, the music was super lively, bouncy, but when the knives appear, the music was dry, harsh. The two who remain, even if the balloons popped and they got hurt, came together and hold each other. And at that moment, the most romantic music I've ever composed in my life played. And in that dance, every now and then, a balloon popped—it's inevitable, because they were balloons and knives. In other words, when there are two, things would pop. Someone will be the knife, and someone will be the balloon. That is the most essential reading there. Even if the balloons popped, you had to find each other, you have to dance, and the balloons would keep popping.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: And nothing could be further from today's polarized tensions.

Flávio Tonnetti: You should stage that scene again!

Osvaldo Gabrieli: But I don't even know if I believe in that scene anymore! I feel there are some things that don't make sense anymore. Nowadays, I'm much more concerned with ecological issues, such as destruction of the oceans, animal life, and the planet as a whole. We are at a point in which young people cannot even connect with this bipolar world full of empty antagonisms. Maybe I'll find more space to create work in which I can talk to a child about something happening in the ocean that they might not know about, like in the show *Mar, Maru, Maré e a Ilha Que Não É* (*Sea, Maru, Tide, and the Island That Isn't*). I think it is more meaningful to talk about floating plastic islands in the middle of the ocean, the size of the state of Minas Gerais. To tell them that animals die from eating plastic waste, which is also in our blood, in the air, and in our food.

Flávio Tonnetti: I want to share with you, since you also scuba dive, a real image I would love to see explored on stage. I have dived several times under a layer of trash. And one of the things I loved doing most as a professional diver was picking up trash in the ocean.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: We have all the equipment here; we only stopped because of the pandemic. We dove for many years, and there was always that thing of being in a paradise-like place and finding a Coca-Cola can at the bottom, trash that would stay there for who knows how many years.

Beto Firmino: A shipwrecked payphone!

Flávio Tonnetti: Back to the shipwrecked payphone!

Osvaldo Gabrieli: People see the ocean from above. When you go below, you see it is much worse than you imagine. You see the corals dying. With uncontrolled fishing, there are almost no giant tuna left. It is terrifying. And what will these new generations inherit?

Flávio Tonnetti: In that sense, thinking of a theater of sensibilities and sensations, one that speaks to these new generations, is much more effective than making a pamphleteering speech. I remember when I was writing *Hamlet Cancelado*, it was a political moment in which I wanted to write something more direct and explicit, but Vinicius Piedade, my co-author, would not let me.

He said it would date the work in a bad way. He said, "Remember, we're adapting Shakespeare, an author who was criticizing England but through an allegory set in Denmark!"

Beto Firmino: And it still makes sense today!

Flávio Tonnetti: And it remains powerful, like in your play, which was interpreted as a critique of Chernobyl. The audience needs that interpretive margin so the work can spark a transformative power within each person, both internally and externally.

Beto Firmino: I was reading an article on affective neuroscience, which establishes parameters for emotions common to mammals. When you access one of these fundamental emotions, you are accessing the same set of emotions that cavemen accessed. That electrical discharge is exactly the same. It is about accessing that essence.

Flávio Tonnetti: Thinking about the group's ethos versus the atomization of the individual, do you consider group theater a powerful tool for this?

Osvaldo Gabrieli: We just finished a run of dozens of performances, many for schools. Historically, we have always done very spaced-out performances. But this time, we did up to eight shows in each city, and we got a real sense of what was happening with the audience. And it was clear that the kids were really engaged with the story. We told a story that was all about death. It started with people from a distant village finding a dead marine animal every day. There were fish, a turtle, a whale—which appeared full of plastic inside. And the animals were buried! No one knew what was happening. It was one of those shows in which the parents turned pale, not knowing how to explain it to their kids later. And I was fascinated by how the kids stayed silent—because school performances are usually chaotic. It was impressive how engaged the kids were. Even to the point of playing a word game we proposed at the end, in which the actors suggested versions of what happened during the play. Because many animals appeared that were not really animals, and at the end, a mermaid appeared, but there was no food or water left. To me, seeing the mermaid, the character was delirious. And one character says, "It wasn't a mermaid!" But when another insists it was, the kids joined in and defended that it was, in fact, a mermaid. The kids took sides on something that was initially denied—because an actress mocked a character, a puppet, the central character who defends the mermaid, which is supposedly imaginary. And the kids embraced that idea. When he goes to the city and says he comes from a village where he found animals that weren't animals and a plastic island with a mermaid, he becomes a pariah. But the kids defend him; they speak up, even without us provoking them. Shouting things like, "He's telling the truth!" or "It's true, I saw it!" You see? Taking the side of a character who might be telling a tall tale but believes what he saw.

Beto Firmino: I think the kids engage because there is play, there is organicity in what is proposed to them as a story, as a universe of thought. And that happens largely because it's a group production, because it's a group working together, with a cohesive language. And that results in something that sustains itself. The kids get involved to the extent that this organicity is

realized, with each element working in harmony—through acting, music, and dramaturgy that come together in a certain way. And that touches on the issue of group work. Because it is not music made separately for a play, you know? It was made with the play, and the play was made with the music. There is a density that emerges from that. There is a power. I'm talking about the music, but we could think about other elements too, like the set, the costumes, and so on. Group work allows for greater integration between the elements that can be articulated. The group creates favorable conditions for that to happen. And that results in potency.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: Potency with all the fights and arguments that come with it.

Beto Firmino: But those fights are a fundamental part of the process. They are the dynamo that makes things move forward. From that interaction, which can be conflictive, and from the clash of ideas, comes refinement. That is why it becomes organic, because there is room for the clash of perspectives.

Flávio Tonnetti: But don't you think the imaginary around groups has changed?

Beto Firmino: The idea of groups has a mythology that comes from the 1970s, reinforcing a sense of community, of everyone living together, playing soccer together, and so on. That very *Novos Baianos* vibe. Where you belonged deeply to it. Nowadays, people have a much more pragmatic relationship with group projects. In our case, that gave us, more recently, the luxury of doing a monologue.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: Today, even in XPTO, I see difficulty in engagement: "Oh, I can't rehearse because of this or that." And so we ended up doing the play *As Pedras de Javier* (*Javier's Stones*) with just one actor, Tay Lopez, in a monologue. But it didn't have to be a monologue. It's very rich to work with people who are engaged, who are in it. We're facing a serious problem: when there's money, it unites people. But it unites them to do work, because the struggle for survival prevents the formation of groups. I've been watching plays by groups that no longer have anyone from the original lineup; they've kept the name, but not even the director is the same. I can't see myself leaving XPTO. It's like creating a WhatsApp group and leaving! Or passing it on to someone else. Zé died, but *Oficina* continues. Maybe it'll be a different *Oficina*, but the people in it have a very clear sense of what the group is, they're very sure of what they want. I think that's great, but it's also sad. I think it's important for things to renew themselves. Even if, at this moment, the possibility is to work with just one actor.

Beto Firmino: And that doesn't bother the people who currently make up XPTO. At another time, that might have been a problem, because people would want to participate in some way. But today, since people are doing so many other things—if there's no work in XPTO, they're doing this or that elsewhere—there's more freedom. When XPTO started, if you were in a group, that was your workplace. You might do something else on the side, but that was your main thing. I notice that today, the relationship with collective work is different. People don't necessarily depend on it as their main source of income.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: I also think that often, the group can be a prison. I started at 26; now I'm 66. What I wanted before different from what I want now. Today, it is very annoying to always be thinking about the collective. But if we don't think about the collective, nothing happens. It's a lot of people with their hands out, asking to do something. If we don't do the Herculean work of creating projects, applying for PROAC[13] grants, structuring work, and thinking about the future, things don't move. Because even though Beto and I are retired, we still need to work. But of course, there are times when we say, "Screw it." Right now, I think of the group in terms of open relationships, like how people think about marriage. I just did a project with Natália and you were there that day. It was kind of improvised because we had very little time. And finding a common day to get five people together is like finding a diamond. We would meet with the actors in shifts, and by luck, we would all meet for a rehearsal. I'm eager to do other projects not involving everyone. But it's hard because we carry the group's name.

Beto Firmino: At the same time, I found it liberating that it can happen in a light way. We did this performance with Natália, which did not involve members who are in other plays. And they came to watch the performance, genuinely interested. It is not something that challenges or upsets them, as they are not in that project. It is a possibility. At the same time, we are thinking on new projects with them. Because we feel the language is the bond. In the play we did, on this longer tour with more people in the group, you can feel the play growing. It is delightful. I felt very connected to them on stage. Not in the institutional sense of a group, but in the sense of being united in art and language

Osvaldo Gabrieli: To me it is quite different. Especially because, when I'm on stage nowadays, I feel uncomfortable. I've done some work as an actor, but I keep thinking like a director—worrying about whether the other actor entered at the right moment, whether they did what they were supposed to do, whether they missed the timing and if that will interfere with something else… So, I end up directing instead of acting. And that doesn't work because it drains an absurd amount of energy. What I believe I do best is directing. I've come to understand that about myself. I'm not a great actor. I'm a good puppeteer, but puppetry is now in the past for me because I want to explore other things.

Flávio Tonnetti: And what are you thinking about now?

Osvaldo Gabrieli: In recent years, I have discovered the wonders of object theater, and I'm fascinated by it. Object theater operates on a different reality because objects carry a prior history. If you work with a small box that belonged to your grandmother, then you need to discover its material history. That gives the object a completely different status than something randomly taken off a shelf. The box takes on a theatrical status. And I'm captivated by working with raw materials—sand, logs, stones, water, things like that. If I could, I would dedicate myself entirely to this. But the

13 The Cultural Action Program (PROAC) is a public policy created by the São Paulo state government to fund cultural activities using public notices to select projects for direct incentive.

challenge is selling this kind of proposal. When a PROAC grant application comes up, and you say you are going to create a performance with logs and pieces of trees, without knowing exactly what will come of it, it becomes very unlikely that you will get funding.

Flávio Tonnetti: Indeed, this seems to be the greatest challenge we face: to find ways to persist in artistic creation as a way of life. I want to sincerely thank you for this conversation. It was wonderful.

Beto Firmino: We are the ones who should be thanking you for the opportunity to share these stories.

Osvaldo Gabrieli: And may there be many more conversations to come!

3 Collection images

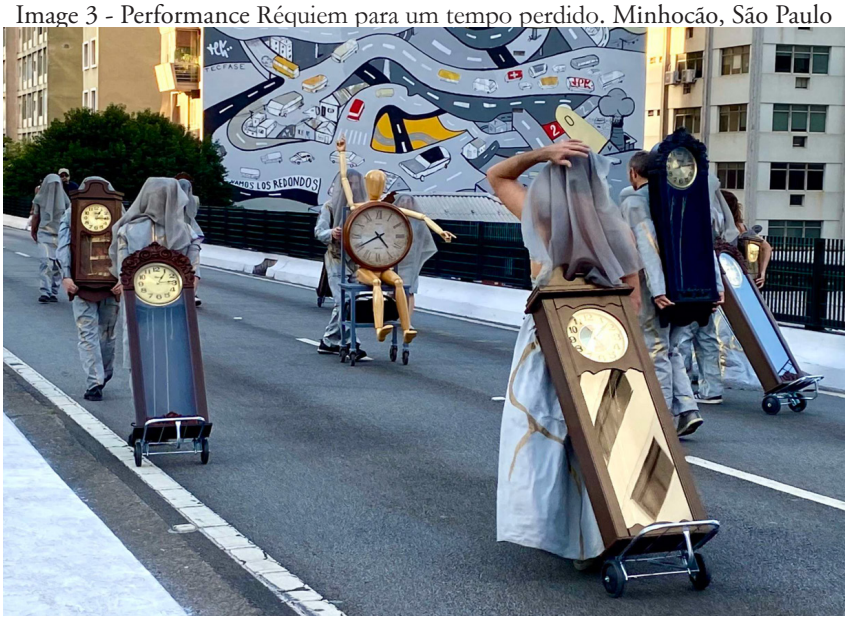
Image 1 - Aquelarre, 2000

Source: Acervo XPTO

Image 2 – Participation in events

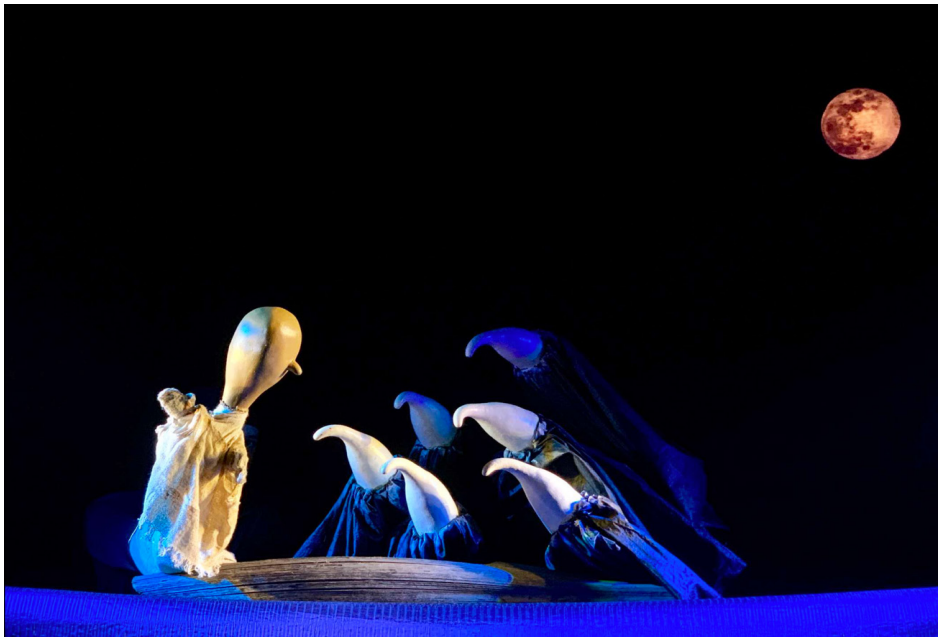
Source: Acervo XPTO

Image 3 - Performance Réquiem para um tempo perdido. Minhocão, São Paulo



Source:Acervo XPTO

Image 4 - Oroboro, 2019

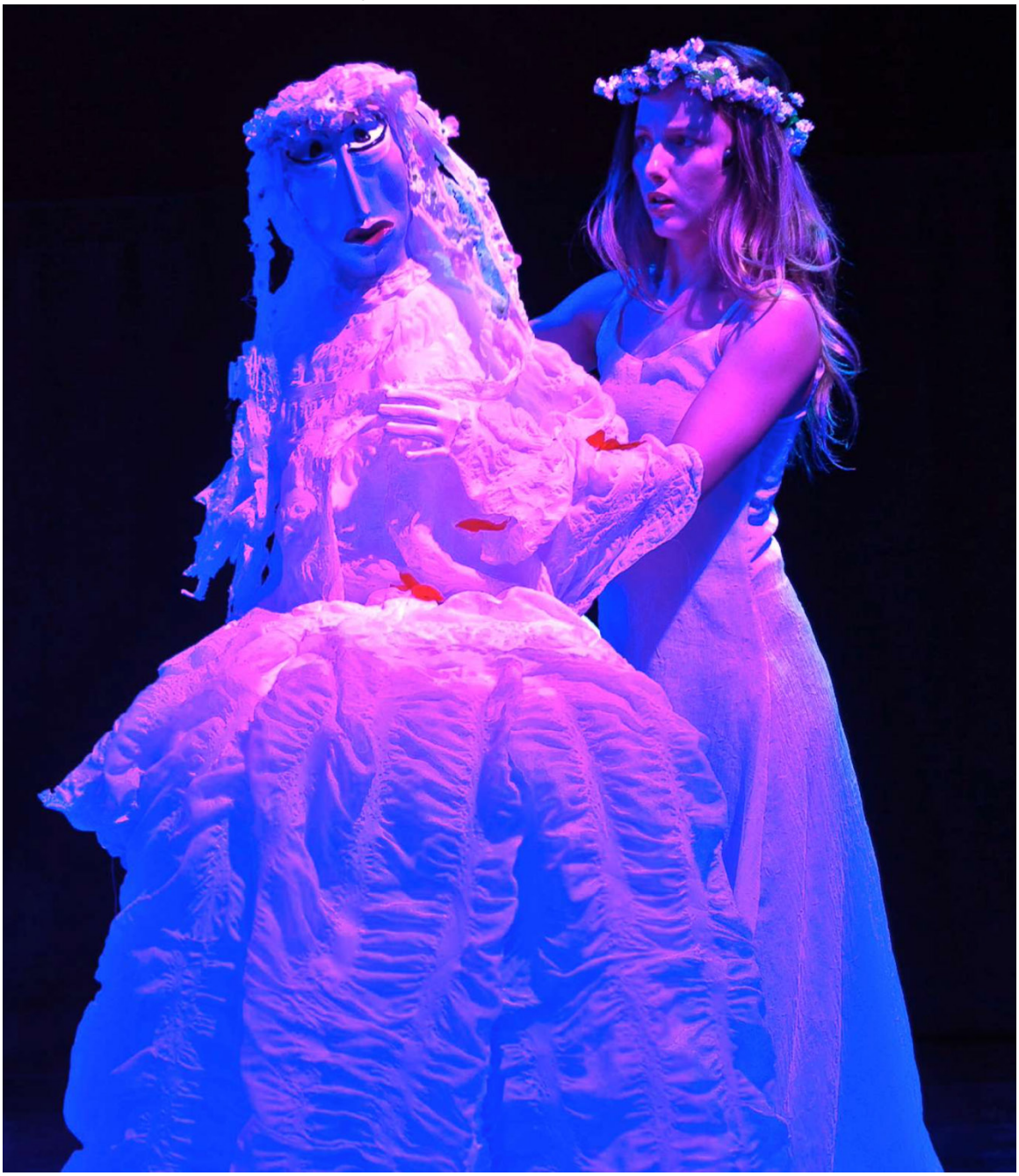


Source: Acervo XPTO

Image 5 - Além do abismo, 1999

Source: Acervo XPTO

Image 6 - Lorca Hallelujah Erotica, 2014



Source: Acervo XPTO

Image 7 - Pulando Muros, 2005

Source: Acervo XPTO

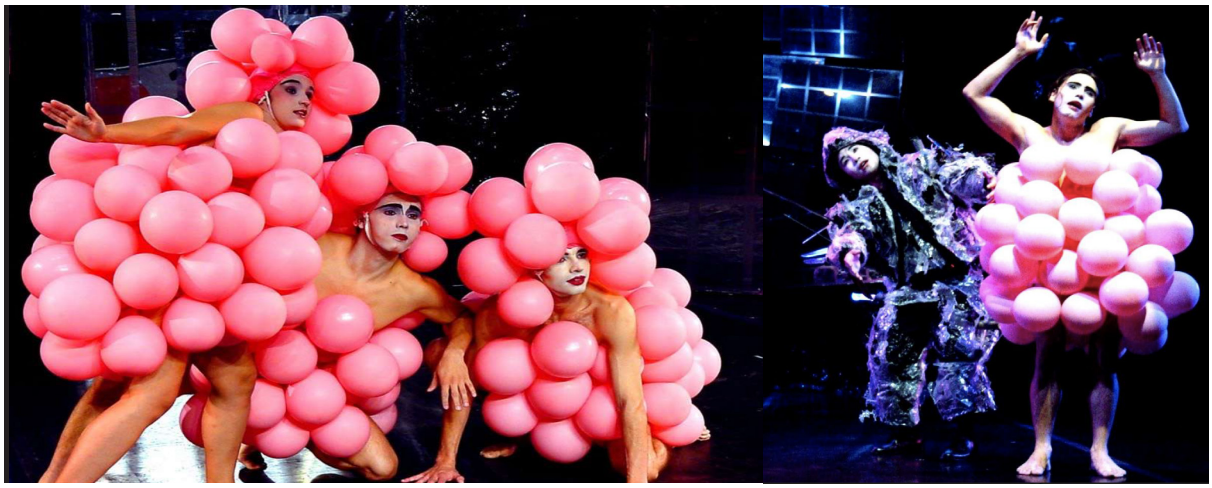
Image 8 – Estação Cubo, 2001

Source: Acervo XPTO

Image 9 - Infecção Sentimental Contra-ataca, 1984-2000 (1)

Source: Acervo XPTO

Image 10 - Infecção Sentimental Contra-ataca, 1984-2000 (2)



Source: Acervo XPTO

Image 11 - Buster – o enigma do Minotauro, 1997 (1)

Source: Acervo XPTO

Image 12 - Buster – o enigma do Minotauro, 1997 (1)

Source: Acervo XPTO

Image 13 - Buster – As pedras de Javier, 2024

Source: Acervo XPTO

4. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Simone Mello, an artist, researcher, friend and host, who put us in contact with the project Porto a Puertos, financed by the art residency program Programa Iberescena 2022/2023, from which we wove a set of conversations which prepared us for the fulfilment of this extensive dialogue and its recording. To her, who for years integrated the cast of Grupo XPTO, we owe this encounter that happened with a friendly tone from the very first moments. We also thank Prof. Thiago Soares Vitor, for his collaboration with the transcription of a final portion of the recording of this interview, as well as a Prof. Kelly Koide whose reading of the originals contributed to a better adaptation of the published text.

Academic Biography
Flávio Américo Tonnetti
Professor at the Universidade Federal de Viçosa (UFV), Departamento de Educação, Viçosa, Minas Gerais, Brazil.
E-mail: flavio.tonnetti@gmail.com

Funding
Not applicable

Ethics Committee Approval
Not applicable

Competing interests
No declared conflict of interest

Research Context
No declared research context

Contribution of authorship (CRediT)
Not applicable

Evaluation Method
Double-Blind Peer Review

Editors
Ricardo Gomes
Priscilla Duarte
Lídia Olinto

Peer Review History
Submission date: 06 September 2024
Approval date: 26 October 2024