

# Coyote Meets Trainers

*Coyote is a curious little creature and is fond of wandering around Europe to meet trainers in the field. Are you interested in getting a picture on how your colleagues in the field of training think and feel? Then this is your section.*

Simona Molari lives in Torino, Italy and Coyote was happy with that. Torino is a lot like Simona: it has a thousand expressive faces. It has a very clear and beautiful architectural history. It is surprisingly multicultural in a refreshing way. And it is funny, because it has the largest public square with no monuments in Europe.

Simona is funny because she is a clown. She is also a trainer for the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg and a lot of other international training organisations. She studied theatre education, did camerawork and has international experiences for example in the Danish Defence Construction Department in Copenhagen. She is currently working on the street as a clown and finishing her studies in Architecture. After that she wants to go to either Moscow or to Cuba to finalise her clown-studies.

## Interview

**Coyote:** You took part as a trainer in a course called "Constructive problem solution and conflict treatment in multicultural situations" organised by Inter'Act in Bonn. What was the training about and what was your role in it?

**Simona:** The main aim was to train participants in problem-solving systems. Of course during the training, we didn't solve any problem really but we tried out different new approaches to problematic situations, inventing and implying the use of 'other points of view', which in my opinion is fundamental in problem-solving. If you focus only on one problematic case or on your own view, your perception of that case, then your problem will never be solved. The team and other participants tried to see the case in a positive way and tried to give solutions. You could listen and see the 'problem' from another, no 356 different point of views.

We used experiential learning methods and problem-solving simulation games like the spider web, the kind of games where the group has to solve together what a single person is not able to solve by him/herself.

I ran a workshop on creative and physical methods to use in training which are liberating people's fantasy, their power of invention and practical creativity using group dynamics.

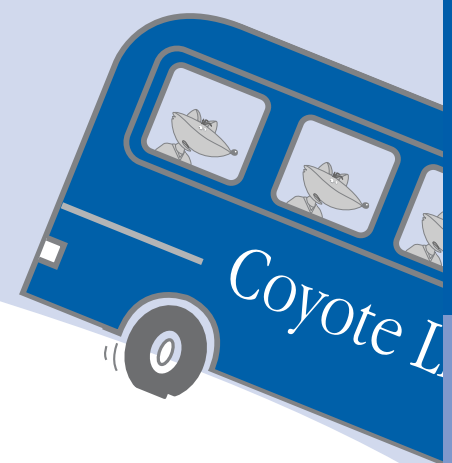
Participants had to take an object and think about all the different possible uses. A ball can be an object to play with but it can also be the world. I asked them to create an imaginative fantastic world in which the object played a central role. I invited them constantly to force their mind to step out of existing thinking structures and to try out new ones. After that I asked them to invent their own games and try to reach what they were looking for in training or in an exchange.... Try to catch the central point with their heart, with a fantasy, with a flexible language...

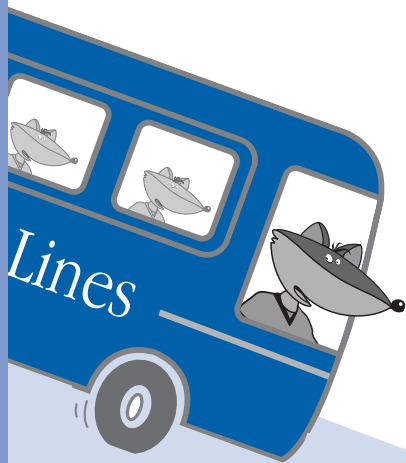
**Coyote:** You are one of the very few people I know who says she is trying to be a clown. Do you see yourself as a clown in a training situation as well or do you change 'hats'?

**Simona:** People get scared when you invite them to a clown workshop. Maybe they believe they all will end up with a red nose. The answer of course is that I as a trainer am not a clown at that very moment and I don't want to train participants to become clowns. I use methods and techniques from my clown background: theatre, movement, mime, pantomime or even just my face. My aim is not to amuse participants but to help them to reach for their own fantastic language. I want to help them to discover that it is relaxing to be open. Humour is another



Simona Molari





language, one that is direct because it is clear and spontaneous. It goes directly to your heart. It is simple and it is free. Inventing that language is discovering yourself.

Instead of fighting shortcomings you have to recognise and accept them. From the viewpoint of a clown, you also laugh with them and you are alright laughing with them. You win in doing so because you can live better with yourself. If you are able to laugh with yourself, then you will laugh with others but in a correct way. For me this is really the philosophy of the clown. So you see I am and I am not a clown in training.

**Coyote:** And do you train your audience when you perform as a clown?

**Simona:** It is therapy to laugh. A very famous example everybody knows is Doctor Patch Adams. He is a clown in a hospital for children. They have cancer and he is trying to make them laugh even in a place where you have nothing to laugh about. It is a universal law that you feel better, liberated if you laugh.

It is obvious that I do not want to give a solution wrapped in a box of jokes for people to open and to solve their problems. I want to show them a mode of intelligence which is a bit more humorous than reality but not in an indicative way. It is sure however that there are limitations. Humour is not a method. It is a way. It can not resolve problems. It is merely a different approach to a problem.

It is not laughing with everything without taking care, reducing the problem. By laughing with it you do not really make it smaller. But you offer an intelligent way to analyse the problem with irony and humour. The message can never be: Don't care about it. The message is: Analyse it and see the human and thus funny part of it. Just think about Charlie Chaplin when he made 'The Great Dictator', that was even made in the same period as Hitler lived.

I want to create that moment when your tummy surprises you. ... It is when laughter bubbles up and you say: '(h) aha! She is right. It is true.' You can see the whole thing and at the same time you laugh. You have to be very subtle to be a clown like that.

If you compare it with the training methods... they are always the same. They have the same aims, they are supposed to have certain types of outcomes. They are structured. Humour is not a method because you do it spontaneously. You do not give the key to the solution. It is impossible to make a scheme for humour.

**Coyote:** There might be similar aspects in the way

you as a clown deal with an audience and the way in which a trainer deals with the participants?

**Simona:** I play a lot with people in the sense that I deal with them in the street making a performance. I prefer the direct approach with people as a public. The street is a credo for me. Everything is possible and you can expect anybody; maybe only during one minute but it is possible. Also people that can't pay for a ticket to the theatre can see you. Everybody is on the same level, participating in the same event. In a theatre they have to come in to see you, but then they already have an idea that theatre exists. On the street, if they don't like you, they can go. They can decide to give you a 10 minutes opportunity and they can decide to stay longer. You are so close to the people, you can touch them. After the performance they come and talk to you, question you, invite you and that is incredible. That is the power of the street. It is energy. It is also scary because, imagine, you go in the middle of the street and you say to yourself "Here I will give a performance". You are even the one that has to stop the people to make them see you.

It is a bit the same in training. You look at the people in the eyes; they are on the same level. You can feel their reaction.

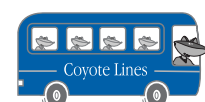
Both in the street as in a training I have to deal with you even if I shocked you. This is a risk. You have to feel the group, how they are, if they want to follow you or maybe they are scared. In a performance, one can choose. But me personally, I feel that I lose if you go. I like to analyse and to feel the public, which is more or less the same dynamic as in training. Playing in the street, I see how people are dressed, how they move, how they walk, if they have children, if they are alone or with somebody: there are a thousand little signs around the eyes alone. You have to look and react and that is hard WORK, work WITH people.

**Coyote:** Do clowns have anything to do with culture and cultural differences?

**Simona:** Humour is culture; it has different religious and political backgrounds in different countries. Monty Python and its black humour is not so recognised here because for Italians it is too much orientated to religion.

Europeans know that a red nose refers to a clown and not only a cold or having had too much wine the night before. But in Africa it has no meaning.

Not everybody laughs with the same thing. Failures are a good example - I want to drink but I am not able to find my mouth. For us failures make us laugh but this might be different in Japan.



In Sicily, colleagues of mine did a show about William Tell. One is told to put the apple on her head, but she eats a piece and then hides the rest of the apple. William then asks the children in the audience: "Where is the apple?" Usually all the children scream: "It is there, she is eating it, she is hiding the apple". In Sicily: silence! They did not want to say because you never know who is in front of you.

There is always a line you shouldn't cross. Maybe you are not aware of it in your own culture. Somebody from outside has to come in and tell you a joke that shocks you and then you know.

But there is also something universal in humour. My friend lived in Belgium for a while and there she found out that the Belgians tell the same jokes about the Italians as the Italians tell about the carabinieri, the Italian police.

It is not the single act that makes people laugh. It is when you are on the same level as they are and people see you and recognise that. In that case you can communicate directly with them and they feel that and it makes the people participate and laugh. But of course you have to be good. It is not easy to make people laugh. It is easier to make them cry.

In Italy we have Dario Fo. He re-invented a non-language called Grammelot which came from the Commedia dell' Arte. He tells stories without saying anything but you understand perfectly. He uses an invented language. He is speaking but there are no words as we know them, just sounds and intonations. And everybody can understand it. What is the key? I think it is the simplicity of seeing the world, the curiosity and the ability to discover: that might be the universal thing that makes everybody laugh.

**Coyote:** Suppose I would ask you to create a clown performance on the topic Training, to be used in a seminar for European trainers. What would you do?

**Simona:** I would create a pantomime and would try to describe the typical situation from the participants' point of view and comment on a certain type of trainer or a certain learning style. I would like to represent what is going on from the participants' point of view. But it would be my main aim to humanise the trainer, to show that he worries, he is doubting, he tries and fails. It might be funny to represent what is going on before in their heads and hearts. Or I might comment on the fact that a lot of training courses repeat themselves: there are always the same getting to know you games, evaluation methods, ... Another thing is the language problem. My mother tongue is not English. So I always have to think about the other language. But when I do that in an intense situation like a training, something happens to me. I have no

more the clear 'sequenza di pensieri'. I don't know how it is possible but I even forget the 'things' in Italian, my mother tongue. Then I say to myself: "Stop thinking in another language and come back to Italian." But nothing comes. Why? If you think about the language you lose the point you want to make. That would be a nice subject for a clown's performance don't you believe? I even could use Fo's Grammelot.

**Coyote:** Is there any humour in architecture? No, seriously, looking at your educational background, I was wondering about the relation between architecture and your intercultural experiences. Is there any comparison possible, any place the two can meet?

**Simona:** If you build a house, you have to think about different things: in what kind of situation do we build it? What are the possibilities? The shortcomings? What does it mean in this culture, this climate? What do people consider to be a 'home'? Does it have a lot of windows? Is it open or closed? Does it have a lot of green around it or not? A house in Finland is not the same as a house in Spain. So to be a good architect you have to be able to communicate with people and to be sensitive to cultural backgrounds, because you represent somebody else. You have to take care of the culture and the country.

**Coyote:** What is your star sign and does it fit to you as a trainer?

**Simona:** I am Aquarius and have as an ascendant Aquarius; I am practical on the clouds. It is true that I am a dreamer with a lot of fantasy. But at the same time I keep my feet on the ground. That is why I contradict myself a lot. . . I am chaotic. As a trainer in a group I am very much in the group and this can be dangerous, because if you are too involved you can not be a good trainer. I don't know if this is Aquarius but it is I.

**Coyote:** BASTA COSI. Grazie Mille, Simona.

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This interview was conducted by Leen Laconte.

