Identifying and Exploring Key Principles of the Clown in Theatre – a practice-led approach

by
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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

In this study, an artistic research methodology is employed to identify principles of clowning as they are practiced in contemporary clown training workshops, to then offer applications of these within a South African theatre context. Autoethnographic accounts and fictional narratives offer an exploration of the practice of clowning from a personal perspective in multiple roles as clown performer, student, educator and observer, supplemented by an interpretive analysis of existing literature.

The past decade has seen a significant increase in allusions to the term 'clown theatre' on formal theatre and performance platforms, as well as in critical and practice-based literature. This self-proclaimed category of theatre is yet to be sufficiently theorised and historicised. Both 'clown' and 'theatre' remain persistently contested and evolving practices. In this study, the term 'clown theatre' is employed as a springboard from which to interrogate the complexities of the clown's presence in contemporary theatre, with the aim of generating dialogue and supporting further innovation in practice. Six case studies of contemporary performance identified as or aligned with 'clown theatre' are presented to explore the terminology and practices employed by practitioners.

The study uses participant-observation methods to understand principles of clowning as they are currently grounded in training approaches focused on laughter as a marker of success, indicating audience appreciation. Particular attention is paid to practitioners Jacques Lecoq and Phillipe Gaulier and their lineage of clown teaching as it has emerged in the methods employed by contemporary pedagogues such as Jon Davison and Mick Barnfather. Secondary sources are then used to position these clown principles in relation to the historical presence of clown figures on stage, with an emphasis on Bertolt Brecht's conceptualisation of the clown as protagonist.

By critically addressing the multi-faceted approaches to engendering laughter within clown training and performance, this practice-led study uncovers the benefits and challenges that lie in translating clowning into contemporary theatre practice.

Keywords: Clowning, Theatre, Laughter, Failure, Clown-theatre

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OPSOMMING

In hierdie ondersoek word ’n artistieke navorsingsmetodologie gebruik om die beginsels van narrery te identifiseer en moontlike toepassings hiervan in ‘n Suid-Afrikaanse konteks aan te toon. ’n Selfrefleksiewe ontginning van narpraktyk vanuit my perspektief en spesifieke rolle as narkunstenaar, student en waarnemer word aangevul deur ’n interpretatiewe analise van bestaande literatuur.

Oor die afgelope dekade was daar ’n beduidende toename in sinspelings op die term ‘narteater’ in formele teater en optredeplatforms soos kunstefeeste, maar ook in kritiese en praktykgebaseerde literatuur (Peacock 2009; Danzig 2007; Polunin 2015). Daar moet nog na behore oor dié selfverklaarde teaterkategorie geteoretiseer word en dit moet ook nog histories geposisioneer word. Beide ‘nar’ en ‘teater’ bly omstrede en ontwikkelende praktyke. Die term ‘narteater’ word as vertrekpunt geneem vanwaar die kompleksiteit van die nar se teenwoordigheid in kontemporêre teater ondersoek word met die uiteindelik doel om gesprek te inisieer en verdere vernuwing in die praktyk te ondersteun.

Kontemporêre narbeginsels word bestudeer as synde geanker te wees in opleidingsbenaderings wat fokus op lag as merker van sukses aangesien dit die gehoor se waardering aandui. Spesifieke aandag word geplaas op die herkoms van naronderrig soos beïnvloed deur die paraktisyns Jacques Lecoq en Phillipe Gaulier en in verband gebring met die analise van metodes wat deur hedendaagse pedagoë soos Jon Davison and Mick Barnfather gebruik word. Sekondêre bronne word ondersoek ten einde die narbeginsels aan te stip in hulle verhouding met historiese narfigure wat op die verhoog teenwoordig is. Bertolt Brecht se konseptualisering van die nar as protagonis word ook verken.

Deur krities na die veelkantige benaderings tot die bewerkstelling van lag binne naropleiding en -optrede te kyk, lê hierdie verhandeling die uitdagings bloot wat gevind word in die omskakeling van hedendaagse narrery na teaterpraktyk.

Sleutelwoorde: Narrery, Teater, Lag, Mislukking, Nar-Teater

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Dedicated to Pattie, my dearest grandfather Sam Tolmay.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"Laughter is the shortest distance between two people." – Victor Borge

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The Backdrop

In 2012 I was asked to collaborate on the creation of a theatre show, *The Epicene Butcher and Other Stories for Consenting Adults (The Epicene Butcher)*. The show was conceptualised, and intended to be performed, by a South African theatre-maker, artist and performer, who had then recently returned from spending five years in Japan learning the art of *Kamishibai* under the guidance of a local veteran performer, Rokuda Genji. *Kamishibai,* meaning paper-play, is an ancient form of popular Japanese storytelling usually performed by a single narrator with the aid of a small wooden frame or box that allows the performer to manually operate panels of cardboard drawings.

The art form became repopularised in the post-war period in Toyoko, Japan in the 1930s, but the exact origins of Kamishibai, dating back to the 12th Century in Buddhist temples as part of the etoki form (pictorial storytelling), are unknown. Kamishibai, as it was repopularised in the 1930s, was typically performed on street corners or at festivals, as a mobile popular performance, the narrator travelling between venues on a bicycle that carried the box of story panels (Nash, 2009). Jemma Kahn[1] adapted the form to be presented in POP Art, a small urban theatre space in Johannesburg typically hosting young independent theatre-makers, with the guidance of an established theatre and film director, John Trengrove. The show debuted in June 2012 and presented its final performance in 2019.

During the last weeks of rehearsals, it became evident to the director and performer that moving the story panels from the wooden frame to a shelf where they were being stored, as well as continuously replacing them throughout the show, was a laborious mechanical task that disrupted their sense of flow and coherence in the performance. As a solution to 'masking' this process, the director suggested that they employ someone to distract the audience as well as facilitate other logistical tasks on stage (these included switching on small lamps, initially operating a sound system and moving a chalkboard in front of the story box to introduce the stories and disguise the switching of panels).

I was approached for the role of this sidekick and what I understood at the time to be a type of 'stage manager' who would be present on stage. I recall the performer saying, in an informal discussion prior to rehearsals, that the role envisioned was similar to that of the Bunraku puppeteers, who are present on stage but whose visibility are diminished with black clothing and an attitude aimed towards creating an 'invisible presence' and drawing as little attention to themselves as possible.

[1] Jemma Kahn is a South African theatre practitioner and winner of the Standard Bank Young Artist Award, who is well known for her series of Kamishibai productions, *The Epicene Butcher and Other Stories for Consenting Adults, We didn't come to Hell for the Croissants* and *The Borrow Pit.*

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After a few rehearsals, however, the director encouraged me to 'explore' a persona rather than attempting to remain unseen. With his assistance, a persona emerged that provided a contrastive force to the actress's lively, open, intellectual and often enthusiastic storyteller persona. Chalk Girl, as the persona was later called, became an increasingly sloppy, bored and resistant embodiment of a Japanese teenager, who had no interest in doing her job properly. Starting out as a game, my persona resisted all instructions; lazily chewing gum, rolling her eyes and keeping herself occupied on her cell phone during the storytelling; it soon became clear that the relationship between the storyteller and her bored assistant was starting to incite laughter - made apparent when the show was rehearsed a few times before a small invited audience. Chalk Girl was completely silent during the performance, communicating with the audience by writing on a blackboard in between stories and otherwise sitting on a crate, beside the audience, watching the stories from their perspective.

One evening, during the run of the show at the *Alexander Bar and Theatre* in Cape Town, the Front of House Manager (who usually provided clearance for technicians and collected tickets from audience members at the door), was unable to be present at the performance. I was requested to stand in for her and take over as ticket collector in full costume as my performance persona – moody, chewing gum and looking bored.

Chalk Girl enjoyed playing games of control with audience members. She indicated where they had to form a straight line before entering the theatre. She returned their tickets when they handed them to her. She stared at those couples holding hands, with a look suggesting that they were being inappropriate.

The audience generally responded to these antics with laughter and mostly played along.

She waited for the last few audience members to arrive and take their seats. She observed two middle-aged men walking towards the theatre, deeply involved in an animated conversation. They were taking their time – one of them with a glass of wine in hand. She stared at them impatiently. One of the men, a red-bearded gentleman, looked her up and down dismissively as he walked past her. His friend on the side furthest away was completely absorbed in the conversation, paying little attention to her and walked into the theatre without handing in his ticket. Chalk Girl could see that he had it in his hand but tapped the bearded man on his shoulder and with a bossy gesture insisted that his friend hand over his ticket.

At first, he looked shocked. Then agitated. He replied with something along the lines of: 'It's in his hand. Are you blind or what? Is it really necessary to make a scene?' And then: 'Maybe

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you should consider spitting out that gum – we're in a goddamn theatre!' He grabbed the ticket from his friend, who was already ahead of him, and in the act of passing it over to Chalk Girl he accidentally dropped it to the floor.

I leaned down to pick it up, suddenly overcome by embarrassment. My thoughts were overwhelming. Could he not see that I was playing a role?

In that moment, I felt ripped from the mischievous, confident antics of my teenage persona – and from any potential playful engagement that could have unfolded. The gap between performer and persona felt almost unbridgeable. I recall having to make a conscious effort to shift my behaviour and adjust my posture to continue with the performance. I slowed down my steps and shifted my hip to one side, deliberately playing the role of the Chalk Girl entering the stage arrogantly, loudly chewing gum and throwing dismissive looks to anyone whose eye she caught.

The narrator of Kamishibai, as it was repopularised in the 1930s, was typically a candy vendor who would catch the attention of potential customers with the performance of a story that usually formed part of a series, so that customers would return to hear the next episode (Nash, 2009). This tradition was adapted into a game for The Epicene Butcher: Chalk Girl would pass each spectator in the front row, judging whether they deserved a sweet or not, playing games such as snatching it when they were about to put it in their mouths or encouraging them to choose in which hand the sweet had been hidden. Each of the one hundred and thirty-five shows in which I performed started off with this audience-interactive, laughter-provoking game. On that evening, as soon as I heard the first roars of laughter, I was able to relax and be present in the performance, putting the awkward interaction out of my mind, focusing on the exchange with receptive audience members.

Chalk Girl fetched the blackboard from the wings and wrote:

Once upon a time

Before Manga

Before Hentai

There was…

Kamishibai

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Chalk Girl looked around, clocking[2] *the audience, and suddenly found herself looking straight at the red-bearded man. But now she felt secure, empowered in the space where laughter was received. She continued to stare at the man, then added a smirk. She noticed his discomfort and how he leaned over to whisper something to his friend and returned her attention to the blackboard. Turning around a second time to confront the audience, Chalk Girl watched the red-bearded man getting up from his seat. He was making his way to the exit past an entire row of seated audience members. He made no further eye-contact - and walked out of the theatre.*

Was it my fault?

As a young clown-performer and theatre-maker, my experience in this production, (where I silently observed and interacted with audiences over the course of over a hundred and fifty performances), raised many unanswered questions and concerns which would become the foundation of my ongoing practice leading to the research for this dissertation. These concerns included the audience-performer dynamics implicit in the type of theatrical engagement and the impact thereof on both player and spectator with specific regard to: the proximity of player, stage and audience member; whether the rules of engagement were understood by all involved; the control of the audience's gaze; and the player's ability to respond to unforeseen incidents.

A further key issue was that my role as clown in this performance was born from a functional need to distract the audience between significant scenes and carry out other practical tasks that were considered secondary to the main narrative. Paradoxically, then, my presence was meant to *distract* the audience from potential disruptions caused by logistical tasks, simultaneously becoming a *source of distraction*. Understanding the pragmatic mechanisms of this dual role of masking and exposing has become key to my ongoing research.

[2] John Wright refers to clocking as "little looks of communication to an audience" or "turning to face the audience." He explains that the word derives from Cockney slang, as the word "face' [is] reminiscent of a clock face" (Wright, 2007:77).

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Rationale

In the past decade, there has been a significant increase in allusions to the term 'clown theatre' on formal theatre and performance platforms, including arts festivals, as well as in critical and practice-based literature (Peacock 2009; Danzig 2007; Polunin in LeBank & Bridel 2015). This self-proclaimed category of theatre has yet to be sufficiently theorised and historicised. Despite the apparent seamless integration suggested by the term 'clown theatre', both 'clown' and 'theatre' point to complex and context-specific phenomena. A thorough enquiry demands an engagement through the optics each provides, rather than as an already accepted and integrated concept.

Dr Jon Davison, an eminent clown performer, teacher and co-founder of the school *Escola de Clown de Barcelona* in Spain, states the curious fact that although it is not difficult to find "summarised histories of clowning", there exist very "few decent books about clowning" (2013:18). He observes that the abundance of superficial summaries seems to "indicate an anxiety in the clown world", demonstrating that either "there isn't enough historical information around", or that "we are misinformed", or that "no-one is doing new research on that history or attempting to update it" (2013:18).

In the opening chapter of *Clowns: In Conversations with Modern Masters* (2015), LeBank and Bridel concur with Davison's assessment by stating that "clowning is minimally represented in critical literature and, as an art form, has almost no academic foundation" (2015:viii). They offer a possible reason for this lack of methodical, systematic enquiry: "Clowns locate traditions of their craft that exist exclusively in custom and practice, and then adapt those traditions according to their own impulses" (2015:viii).

Issues regarding the validity of systematic enquiry into clowning have arisen persistently. As Murray explains, clown practitioners, such as Phillipe Gaulier, Monika Pagneux and Jacques Lecoq, "would strenuously deny that their teaching practice represents a 'method. '[...] Here one might also note a shared scepticism about the ability of academic writing to capture and communicate any lived sense of their pedagogy: its aims, strategies, inflections and underlying dynamics" (2010:215). Phillipe Gaulier, a renowned clown pedagogue, has developed a hermetic philosophy on clowning with a unique master–apprentice teaching style, intentionally resisting academic engagement.

LeBank and Bridel (2015) pose valuable questions about whether the prevailing tendencies towards inconsistently recording and sharing knowledge about clowning, and the "preponderance of master–apprentice learning models," is having an impact on the potential evolution of the practice itself:

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> Does the absence of academic or text-based models offer license and freedom to its practitioners in their continued pursuit of the art? Or, alternatively, is clowning shackled by modes of thought and behavior that are more restricted than other artistic disciplines, owing to a lack of critical examination? (LeBank & Bridel, 2015:ix).

There is therefore value in considering to what extent, and by what means, the embodied intuitive practice of clowning may be critically explored in a contemporary theatre and performance context.

An extension of this enquiry is the use and development of laughter-inciting principles in clown pedagogy and performance which are embedded in master–apprentice style pedagogies that remain inaccessible to most performers and practitioners. Jacques Lecoq, founder of *École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques,* wrote a short but influential chapter on clowns in *The Moving Body* (1997) in which he asks the question: "the clown makes us laugh, but how?" (1997:143). He offers an answer by means of describing an experience shared by himself and some students in class where he asked them to stand in a circle and one at a time, enter the 'ring' in attempt to make each other laugh. He tells of how the results of their attempts at being funny were 'catastrophic', and it was only when they became aware of their failure, "that everyone burst out laughing"; Lecoq ends the story with the statement - "We had the solution" (1997:143). This story, amongst others – such as the many versions of the birth of the *Auguste* clown told by Phillipe Gaulier – emphasise the idea of the *accidental success* of the clown, born from failure[3] (2012:263-265).

The vocabulary associated with failure – referred to as the 'flop' or 'being in the shit' by Gaulier – has become commonplace within contemporary clown practice (Gaulier, 2012). Less commonplace, however, are critical discussions on how this failure works, and which principles can be identified to enable the transfer of successful clowning from the workshop and training environment (as a performative space with its own code of conduct) to the performance principles associated with theatre.

My own experience of participating in clowning workshops (Gaulier, 2014; Seidestein, 2015; Barnfather, 2017; Davison, 2017) has evidenced the notion of laughter as an inevitable, continuous and usually frustrating reality, often provoking some of the following (or related) questions: 'Does the clown *always* have to be funny to be defined as a clown?' or 'What about the tragic clown?' or 'Will something that is funny in one moment necessarily be funny in another context or space?' and 'Can the laughter-inciting incident be repeated? or 'Why was that funny?' These questions, and the manner in which I have observed facilitators and teachers either skirt around or dismiss them, have led me to consider the challenges of sharing how laughter works as a teaching tool, and how it may serve performance outside of the workshop environment. I propose that laughter-eliciting methods as they

[3] When I attended Gaulier's workshop in 2014 he told a slightly different version of the 'birth of the clown'.

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have been experienced through my engagement with three pedagogues, will illuminate current complexities surrounding the practice and deepen understanding of how these methods may be applied to theatre-making processes and performance by providing a taxonomy of principles employed in laughter-centric training to produce clowning.

Research Questions

1. What principles embedded in a laughter-centric lineage of clown pedagogy and performance may be identified, documented and made accessible?
2. What roles do laughter and failure play in the practice of clowning?
3. What are the means whereby clown principles may be put into practise for the preparation and performance of contemporary theatre?
4. What writing and documentation research methods allow the embodied practice of clowning to be studied as a lived experience?
5. What are some of the challenges of creating and performing laughter-centric clowning in the theatre in South Africa today?

Aims

This study uses the term 'clown theatre' as a springboard from which to identify the principles underlying the clown's presence in contemporary theatre, with the aim of generating multidisciplinary dialogue and supporting further innovation in practice. The study explores the embodied practice of clowning and the 'lived sense' of clowning pedagogy and performance in relation to theatre by:

a. reflecting on my experience as clown-student performer in the workshop setting of three pedagogues – Gaulier, Barnfather and Davison – and documenting the key principles as put forward by them in practice;
b. offering six case studies of contemporary performances described under the umbrella term 'clown-theatre', using performance analysis as well as discussion of the interviews, reviews and academic texts associated with them;
c. forging connections between disparate examples of the clown performer's historical presence on stage through a review of available literature and documentation, with an emphasis on the Vidusaka, the Mountebank and Zany, and the English Elizabethan clown;
d. critically reflecting on the role that laughter plays in clown pedagogy and performance;

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e. highlighting complexities and challenges that arise when translating laughter-centric training approaches from the workshop/studio environment to certain contexts within contemporary theatre.

Methodology and Methods

The need for integrated approaches towards critically understanding the practice of clowning are highlighted by LeBank and Bridel (2015). My own battle to generate effective streams in which to locate my experiences for closer inspection points to similar inquiries and observations by practitioner-researchers addressing methods of sharing embodied and lived experiences. During my first two years of research for this study, I attended several symposia on artistic research and practice-led methodologies initiated by Dr Samantha Prigge-Pienaar hosted by Stellenbosch University Drama Department. The supplementary reading material and discussions with other researchers and practitioners foregrounded an increasing global urgency to procure more applicable systems and methods of generating and transferring knowledge within art-based practice. They contributed to my understanding of artistic research as a methodology inclusive of multiple strands of practised-based and practice-led methods which aim to “advance knowledge about practice, or to advance knowledge within practice” (Candy, 2006:3).

While practice-based methods have provided alternative methods for mapping and disseminating new knowledge in the arts, they are not free of their own challenges. Professor Mark Fleishman, a South African researcher and practitioner based at the University of Cape Town, highlights an observed tendency amongst research-practitioners to ‘champion’ Practice as Research in the hopes that it may emancipate them from the various “strictures of academia and its regimes of performance management” especially those that involve the “commodification of research outputs and processes” (2015:10). He proposes, paradoxically, that the problem lies with the practitioner’s inclination to express the *equality* of their work in relation to other works that are “fundamentally textual and supposedly stable and thus transferable and reproducible” (2015:10). Fleishman further observes that this tendency is proliferated by our fear of the “disappearing artwork” which remains elusive unless directly experienced; the performing arts practitioner strives to find ways of “grabbing hold of, stabilizing and then fixing” the practices they are attempting to set ‘free’, leading to their inevitable entrapment (2015:4).

Fleishman cites Bannerman (2006) in proposing a solution by refraining from the employment of “forms of documentation and writing that trap the work like a pinned butterfly” (2015:11). He urges

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practitioners "to argue persistently for an acknowledgement of different ways of knowing and different modes of knowledge transfer and sharing" (2015:11–12).

In practice-based research, the practice is commonly perceived as occurring and finding resolution *prior* to the writing of the dissertation, in a defined or scheduled project or experiment. But the practice of identifying and exploring the principles of clowning in this study has also extended into the period of writing up the dissertation. The practice of *writing about* clowning from the *perspective of a practising* clown – using literary, poetic and performative methods that demonstrate the 'lived sense' of the clown – has been integral to the research. Artistic research is the methodology that has allowed the complexities of this embodied and emergent practice – the teaching, observation, reflection, theorisation, conceptualisation, creation and performance – to generate new knowledge in this study.

Complementary to an interpretive analysis of existing literature and other secondary sources, is the use of reflective and empirical methods that: i) ground broadly applicable theory and philosophy in what is a deeply personal and contextual practice; ii) identify a vocabulary and body of principles considered applicable for South African practitioners. In particular, the study identifies strategies that are employed in the performance of the contemporary clown within theatre which may be process- and event-oriented. For this purpose, some conclusions are drawn from participation-observation in selected performance events in which the direct phenomena between facilitator and clown, or clown and audience member, are foregrounded and understood from the clown practitioner's perspective.

As Hannula points out, one of the central potentialities of artistic research is to bring "different ways of producing knowledge into a fruitful clash and collision, analysing what happens to them, and what, in the end, can be achieved in and through this interaction" (2009:1). I draw on my experiences and role as both spectator and practitioner of clowning/theatre to interrogate the language that practitioners employ to describe their practice, revealing how certain processes and intricacies related to making and viewing clown performances in theatre have become mystified and misinterpreted.

Many of the practice-led reflections and events in this dissertation deal with personal feelings and actions, the actions and choices of other people, and heightened conditions, which have made them challenging to write about. My chosen methodology has, in these moments, become a vital research tool to bridge these polarities of knowing. Klein observes that there are those that require artistic knowledge "be verbalized and [...] comparable to declarative knowledge'" while others argue that the knowledge "is embodied in the products of art" (2010:6). He is very clear, however, that regardless of the output or end-point at which the knowledge is received by others, the discovery and processing of new knowledge:

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> [...] has to be acquired through sensory and emotional perception, precisely through artistic experience, from which it cannot be separated. Whether silent or verbal, declarative or procedural, implicit or explicit – in any case, artistic knowledge is sensual and physical, 'embodied knowledge'. The knowledge that artistic research strives for, is a felt knowledge (Klein, 2010:6).

In keeping with an artistic research methodology, this study self-consciously attempts to refrain from 'shackling' the practice of clowning, or the performative works referred to in this dissertation, by proposing the practice of writing about clowning as an "engaged practice [...] able to apply its own internal logic to deciding between what makes sense and what is invalid." (Hannula, 2009:1). In my aim to explore and document the felt knowledge of clowning, I position this practice as "particular, content-driven, self-critical, self-reflective and contextualised" (Hannula, 2009:1).

In writing about research in the arts, Fleishman offers an image, borrowed from Tim Ingold, suggesting that practitioners need to follow the materials they are working with in the same way a "carpenter follows the grain of the wood" (Ingold in Fleishman, 2015:15). Following the *grain of the practice* requires staying attuned to how knowledge may surface whilst the practitioner is engaged in the practice of writing, a process requiring awareness of emerging paradoxes, uncertainties and failures as notions implicit to the practice itself. The ongoing process of selecting, formulating, formatting and disseminating material in the production of the dissertation, engages a diversity of artistic, performative and expressive practises as a valued means of reflection through which to witness ideas in motion.

> *While I am writing, I am listening to my ten-year-old cousin Isabella and her friend Laura lying on the carpet and comparing their new classmates in their respective grade four classes. Naturally, in lieu of the competitive spirit of a ten-year-old, it has become a competition – a grand show-off of their imitation skills to bring to life the strangest amongst their respective classmates. Now it's David with the reddest hair and so many freckles you can hardly see his eyes, trumped by Alyssa who only gets boiled eggs for lunch (and "they smell too, shame"), or Chiara who supposedly boasts a collection of over three thousand stickers, so many that she has run out of space to keep them and has had to cover the entire outside of their house in them. A pause. My cousin interrupts and clears her throat in preparation for a final round, introducing... Jacob, a boy, freakishly tall and "Ridiculously Smart" – so smart that he finishes his long division a week in advance and spends math periods shaping paper around his pencils to create intricate paper planes that can fly perfectly shaped holes into the ceiling whenever Mr Taylor turns his back to write on the board. "The trick is, you see Laura," (to friend), "its not just something anyone can do since your timing needs to be genius and also your aim. Until yesterday when … the pencil-plane got stuck and..." She starts to laugh, "Mr Taylor…",*

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> *she bends her body forward, hunching her back, stroking an imaginary beard, "…he turned around and he…" Her laughter is out of control now. Laura and I watch as she collapses, holding her stomach… between gasps for air she manages, "he said..." More laughter. "Mr Taylor went like" … "What's with this…" She tries to repeat the word three times, but we can't make out what she is saying, until she manages to say… "What is with this HULLABALOO?" he said, and then the plane fell down, right next to him … and … and …" She lies on the floor, red in the face. Laura tries to provoke her with "AND??? and then? What happened? What did Mr Taylor do?" But my cousin cannot move from the floor, defeated by her own laughter. Laura gives up and turns to me with a look to indicate that she is about to say something very clever, then with a shrug she gets up, "Well, I guess we just HAD TO BE THERE."*

How does one share a moment, an experience or practice so dependent on a context, on a unique configuration of circumstances – a 'there where one had to be'? Bratton explains the function of the anecdote as follows:

> The anecdote is not the same as a story because it claims to be true, about real people; it occupies the same functional space as fiction, in that it is intended to entertain, but its instructive dimension is more overt. It purports to reveal the truths of the society, but not necessarily directly: *its inner truth,* its truth to some ineffable 'essence', rather than to proven facts, is what matters most – hence its mythmaking dimension (Bratton in Amsden, 2011:19).

Most explorations and writings on the experience and consequences of laughter in clown practice share an anecdotal or fictional quality. This foregrounds the challenges around methodology as well as the attempts to textualise or offer critical analysis of a form that has, through the centuries, continuously resisted being limited by text and academic analysis. In acknowledgement of these challenges and strategies, this study remains grounded within methods of writing that foreground and demonstrate this deeply embodied practice.

In his paper, *Doing Ethnography, Being an Ethnographer: The Autoethnographic Research Process and I (2010),* Mitra motivates his use of certain writing approaches when dealing with practice:

> Methodologically speaking, there are several ways to refer to this – performative writing, interpretive ethnography, writing culture, reflexive co-performance – though the intention is similar: re-centring incoherence and fragmentation to foster questioning among readers and encourage further dialogue drawing on one's personal experiences and outlooks (Mitra, 2010:3–4).

His proposition, that "the juxtaposition of academic form [...] with free-style introspection is not meant to be a seamless smooth transition but, rather, a JARring JOlt (DISjuncture!)" is applicable to this study (Mitra, 2010:3–4). Artistic research methods have been used to offer opportunities for myself, in the role of practitioner, as well as my imagined readers, to foster curiosity for emerging tensions, and

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appreciation for the in-between spaces of doing and knowing. Fleishman offers this reminder about the value of theatre and the value of research in theatre:

> There is a world of difference between the world as it is and the world as it might be; between a mimetic approach that reflects/reveals/confirms the world and an approach that engages in a process of poiesis to make new versions of the world (Fleishman, 2017:2).

My guiding motivation in choosing a methodology for this study has been to ensure that the essential nature of the clown, as creative and embodied agent, is given the opportunity to shine his torch on the forgotten trapdoor that may well be revealed as a useful new entryway. A secondary motivation for choosing this methodology is that it offers the potential for the creation of new texts and literary artefacts on the practice of clowning, and contributes towards the scarcity of available literature as identified by Davison and LeBank and Bridel, which has also reflected in the relatively shorter reference section in this study.

David Carlyon's enriching book, *The Education of A Circus Clown (2016)*, is written in anecdotal form and weaves together multiple facets of his personal and professional experiences of clown training and performing as suggested by the subtitle 'Mentors, Audiences, Mistakes'. Similarly, I aim to use anecdotes as living texts or provocations that may offer sensate understanding and insight into the context of learning through performance both on stage and in the workshop environment that may be useful as resources for clown practitioners who may not necessarily have access to direct training and/or literary sources. Towards this purpose, the anecdotes have been differentiated by font type and style, as have other 'texts within texts' throughout the dissertation that signal a shift in tone and perspective on the subject under discussion.

Scope

My first public clowning experience took place outside Wits University in the busy, urban streets of Braamfontein as part of an undergraduate exam in June 2013, concluding a six-week course with clown and performance lecturer Gerard Bester. We walked out of the campus grounds into the streets as a group of about thirty students, in costume, to perform an assessment. Our task was to find a space and context in which to demonstrate to an audience, which included examiners, fellow performers and passers-by, the clown principles we had learnt during the term. It was left up to each individual student to discover and sustain, through impulse and spontaneous play, a laughter provoking engagement with the audience, self-selecting the conditions under which his/her clown would appear, working on principles such as paradox, failure, estrangement, status and laughter.

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Figure 1: Klara van Wyk, third year clown performer, stumbles over the danger tape indicating a worker excavating (2013).

The duration of each performance, the number of audience members who gathered to watch, and their proximity in relation to each performer-student, varied significantly from one performance to the next. One student performed on a bridge distanced from the audience; another performed inside a hair salon with the audience observing through the window; and another performed across the street from the audience, with passing cars constantly interrupting the view.

The environment and context became an ever-changing backdrop and participant in the action. Spectators, often unwittingly, found themselves in the middle or background of a clown performance and became integral to the performance – sometimes adding to and at other times detracting from the performance.

Figure 2: A third-year clown performer in a nun's costume trying to 'help' a passer-by with his recycling trolley (2013).

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The surroundings remained in close and constant dialogue with each choice the performer made and altered the significance and impact of the performance for the audience in ways impossible for the performer to perceive.

> All moments of decision are contextually embedded and all art works are moments of decision. There is no way to lift an artwork out of the social context in which it exists, any more than it is possible to lift an individual out of his/her social context. Which is not to say that an artwork need necessarily reflect that context (Fleishman, 2017:2).

As a clown practitioner, I perceive my current location in South Africa as the place from which I create, imagine and perform to specific audiences in particular types of spaces – comparable to the way in which the streets of Braamfontein shaped each student-performance on that day. My research focuses on clowning as a practice inherited in large part from pedagogies developed and transmitted in Eurocentric contexts through international training. There are instances of South African practitioners who have significantly contributed to the practice of clowning in South Africa. Most of them are Lecoq-trained, including Jennie Rezneck, Mark Fleishman and Sylvaine Strike. Others include Andrew Buckland, Gerard Bester, Shaka Septembir, Jenine Collicot, Roberto Pombo and James Cairns. While I acknowledge their contributions, the scope of this study is my direct experience as a young emerging practitioner of laughter-centric clown training and performance within the past five years. In other words, since this study is practice-led, I will only focus on work that I have witnessed in South Africa and Internationally (as an active audience member) or participated in (as a performer) within the past five years.

Even though I was privileged to attend courses and workshops by Ira Seidenstein, Jon Davison, Mick Barnfather and Phillipe Gaulier, my practical application of these teachings remains deeply embedded in a South African context, informed by my own experience. Although I draw from, and am interested in, learning further from practitioners such as Ira Seidenstein (whose work I examined in my Masters thesis) and others such as Giovanni Fuscetti, and Richard Pochinko (whose philosophies and practices are currently taught by Sue Morrison), this particular study places emphasis on clown teachers whose training centralises laughter. Laughter and failure are the most common threads that connect the diverse practical trainings I have received; and are also, as I will argue, critical factors to consider in the challenge of transferring clown practice to the theatre.

Fleishman in a paper delivered at the *Afrovibes Festival (2017)* in Amsterdam, draws from a statement made by J.M Coetzee in *White-writing* (1988) to identify himself as "no longer European, not yet African" (2017:1). Fleishman observes the strange "in-between-space" experienced by South Africans "who live and work in Africa and were born in Africa of parents born in Africa" but are "not yet African" (Coetzee 1988, cited in Fleishman, 2017:1). Penny Youngleson, a South African theatre-maker and

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academic, writes that “in an age of intentioned political and historical tolerance it seems almost inconsiderate to claim certain categories” (2009:12).

I have similarly felt reluctant to ground myself within certain categories, as it feels reductive within a contemporary context in which identity is experienced as unstable and ever-changing. On the other hand, in a dissertation that draws so heavily on notions of appearance and ideas of the ‘personal’ or ‘inner’ selves as a locus from and through which I practice, it seems irresponsible to resist making apparent some aspects of my identity. I am a young researcher, a White South African from an Afrikaans family born in 1991, two and a half years before the dawn of democracy. My early years were shaped within Afrikaans traditions. At age thirteen I attended an Anglophile co-ed private school after which I enrolled at Wits University for my undergraduate studies, where I trained as an actor and was first introduced to clown training within the sphere of a theatre and performance course. I elected to pursue a Master’s degree in Theatre-making at the University of Cape Town followed by a PhD at Stellenbosch University Drama Department, and I have, through my studies, experienced vast cultural and ideological differences within the three Universities I attended.

As a young South African clown practitioner, I have experienced the challenges brought about by the interplay of socio-cultural dynamics, as well as the criteria most often foregrounded within a changing model of contemporary theatre production.

Further Reading Guidelines

There is something grammatically dubious and inconsistent about the way in which the performer as clown is spoken about: sometimes as ‘the clown’, a combined subject/object (in other words, the performative frame collapses and the clown is named as if a singular persona); sometimes as ‘Clown’ (denoting an objective representation or archetype, a persona that is timeless and contextless); and at other times as a gendered subject, located within the personal. For this reason, I have engaged critically and intentionally with the language used to refer to the clown. In Chapter Four, for example, with reference to the clown performer’s historical presence on stage, I use the masculine ‘he’ to recognise and represent the limited presence and acknowledgement of female clown performers in history. For the remainder of the study however, the clown performers are referred to as dual-gendered ‘s/he’, acknowledging the changes in perception of clowns within contemporary contexts.

Throughout this dissertation, I have made use of photographic images as additional research tools for documentation and evaluation. Photographs of myself and other clowns in performance have been sporadically inserted to offer a glimpse of the fleeting performance event under discussion. I imagine them as accompaniments to the memory and residual fragments of performance and practice, rather

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than as 'evidence'; to borrow Fleishman's interpretation of photographs as: "a kind of parallel text which is both more material than the word text but also more opaque and illusive" (2012:55).

Outline

Chapter One introduces the rationale, research questions, aims and scope for this study, and discusses in detail the research methods and methodology employed.

Chapter Two investigates principles of clowning as they have been witnessed from my participation in workshops with Phillipe Gaulier, Jon Davison and Mick Barnfather. The chapter foregrounds the significance of laughter in relation to play. I consider how these pedagogues establish the laughter-producing engagement in the teaching environment by blurring the boundaries between actuality and pretence, and foregrounding teaching mechanisms that rely on 'danger', 'confusion', 'vulnerability', 'control' and the 'personal clown'. The workshop-as-place serves as a frame for a performance environment that produces, as well as teaches, clowning, and therefore provides the foundation for discussing the principles and challenges of clowning principles as they are applied in other contexts.

Chapter Three offers three statements made by Jacques Lecoq as a framework in which to examine the clown performer's place in contemporary theatre with an emphasis on: i) laughter and its associations with spontaneity and innerness, ii) the way that theatre spaces define and manage the operations therein, iii) the clown performer's agency and ideas around meaningfulness and meaning-making in theatre. Six case studies of contemporary performances and practitioners, mostly identified and described as 'clown theatre' – namely, *Tweespalt* (2017), *La Chair de Ma Chair* (2018), *Babbelagtig* (2018), *Hilda and the Spectrum* (2017), *Slava's Snowshow* (2016) and the company, *500 Clowns* – are offered to reveal inconsistencies in terminology and practice. Further, these examples highlight complexities that arise when transferring the principles prevalent in clown training contexts to contemporary interpretations of theatre.

Chapter Four turns to literary examples of the clown's historical presence in theatre with a focus on: the Vidusaka in Sanskrit Theatre, the Zany to the Mountebank in the Italian Middle Ages, as well as three Elizabethan clown performers. Although these accounts are far from exhaustive, they offer an opportunity to identify and reflect on recurring principles from within a post-Lecoqian perspective of laughter and audience engagement. This chapter illuminates connections between the clown performer and the audience, as well as the clown performer's relationship with the other performers on stage, the texts/scripts and the spatial configurations that play a role in outlining or demarcating the clown's theatrical engagement.

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Chapter Five unpacks Lecoq's idea of the *acteur-auteur* in relation to the clown performer by investigating how clown principles can be deliberately applied in performative contexts that rely on written text and direction. Specific focus is placed on Bertolt Brecht's use of clown principles in his conception of Galy Gay in *Mann ist Mann* (1931); secondary sources are employed to augment this enquiry.

Chapter Six offers an analysis from a participant-observer perspective of a one-person theatre production, *You Suck and Other Inescapable Truths*, in which principles inherited from the lineage of clown training were employed. The production was presented to audiences throughout South Africa in a diversity of theatre venues and contexts. This chapter aims to critically engage with the challenges highlighted in previous chapters of translating clowning principles from the workshop environment to that of preparing and staging a full-length theatre production, paying close attention to the notion of failure as a constructive device.

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CHAPTER TWO: CLOWN TRAINING

"The master presupposes that what the student learns is precisely what he teaches him. This is the master's notion of transmission: There is something on one side, in one mind or one body—a knowledge, a capacity, an energy—that must be transferred to the other side, into the other's mind or body. The presupposition is that the process of learning is not merely the effect of its cause—teaching—but the very transmission of the cause: What the student learns is the knowledge of the master." - Jacques Rancière

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I ordered a copy of Philippe Gaulier's book The Tormentor *(2012) months before the summer clown course at Ecole Phillipe Gaulier, and covered it with plastic. I took time to make sure that all the bubbles were rubbed out of the plastic covering, and that my name and the date were written neatly with a black fineliner on the inside of the cover, along with the address of the school. I also bought a notebook that I covered with pictures of clowns - clowns in Renaissance paintings, circus clowns, Pierrots and clowns with red noses.*

I arrived in Paris two days before the two-week course started and woke up early on the first day to have more than enough time to be fully prepared. I wore a black T-shirt that had Le Dance & La Música printed onto it. I thought it was appropriate for the first day of clown school in France. On the first morning on the day of the workshop, I arrived at the station and looked at the screens above my head for the name I had written down in my book: ***ETAMPES*** *was there in big bold letters (in case I forgot).*

It was my first time in Paris and on this Monday morning, the station seemed especially chaotic. I felt disoriented and completely alone. But I assured myself that I was OK – I was early, I knew where I was going, and I was wearing the right T-shirt.

I heard announcements being made over the speakers in French but failed to decode them.

*Eventually, I approached a woman at the help desk and with an unaccustomed tongue, I mumbled a self-conscious 'bonjour' and then continued in a strange staccato-wishing-it-was-French: 'Excuse me, how do I get here? To ETAMPES.' She stared at me but said nothing. I tried again, this time slower, '****ET-AM-PES****', pointing to the circled area on my map.*

She replied with a sniggering laugh and a glance at her tall red-faced, gum-chewing colleague. She repeated my slow (and obviously incorrect) pronunciation of ETAMPES, followed by an aggressive correction: 'EtaMP, not EtampES' and continued with an impatient explanation: 'no' 'today' 'metro strike' 'only one every three hours to Etampés – you missed'.

'What? Are you sure…?' No answer. 'Okay, Okay, never mind. Please tell me where I can find a taxi, I am late for clown class…Uhm…you know like…school? Important school with clowns. Ok? yes, never mind.'

She turned to her gum-chewing friend and had what felt to me like an unnecessarily long conversation…with a lot of laughter while pointing straight at me. It seemed they were assessing my abilities as a clown (something they seemed to think was very funny) but they

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may well have started a conversation on what they preferred for breakfast or the increased price in eggs at the Carrefour for all I knew.

I cleared my throat, panicked and frustrated: 'Sorry, excuse me, yes apologies, I'm sorry for the interruption, really, sorry. Okay thanks, yes, so do you know…uhm…can you tell, please, WHERE I CAN FIND A TAXI for me...uhm, I mean Madame please, Bonjour, I mean...thank you, Merci??? Taxi. Thanks. Thank you. Ok.' They both turned and stared at me.

'Oiu. UGhhh…Taxi...Oiu…' She gestured to show that the taxi would be VERY expensive and explained that I should take the bus, but that it would take over three hours to get to ***EtamMP*** *since the bus ...JUST LEFT a minute ago.*

'You mean I just missed it? Like now? but why did you not...? Ok never mind, merci'. I took my map from the desk.

The bus arrived an hour later…meaning I would be very late and would have three hours to imagine how to apologise to Gaulier. How much English does he understand? What would I have missed?

When I arrived, I ran down the path to his studio using my (by then crumpled and fading) map to find the way. I rushed into the small building I had stared at so often on the homepage of the website – and followed the sound of singing that I could hear from the room upstairs. I ran up and slowly opened the door trying not to disrupt whatever important clown things the students were up to. Fifty students turned to me. I walked apologetically to the back of the class trying not to make eye contact and joined one of the four groups, standing right at the back.

Gaulier wasn't leading the class – another teacher was, which had me questioning if I was in the right place. I opened my bag to get out my map and check again…it seemed rightI joined a group that§ had just started singing a freedom song in isiZulu that I remember from my childhood. I couldn't believe my luck! I knew this one! What were the chances? When the next verse came, I belted out: 'Iparadise, ikhaya labafile' joining in from the back of the group. But seemed to be the only one in the group singing…

Everyone turned to me. A moment of silence.

Then laughter erupted like a tide, it washed over the class. It was not my group's turn to sing… all the groups had been divided into parts and were by now competent at falling in at specific

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moments. I blushed and felt myself turning hot and red, feeling embarrassed and foolish. It was the end of the session; I was still clutching my backpack and map.

Everyone left for lunch and I followed a group of students to a Chinese café, they all seemed relaxed, at home, making jokes and singing the turn of the final song. I learnt at lunch that many of the students were at the end of Gaulier's year-long course and that for some of them this was their last month.

We returned to the classroom for the session with Gaulier.

Gaulier walked in and sat down with a tambourine, peering over his glasses, with no introduction except for 'Have I said Good Afternoon?' Everyone laughed. He started with a children's game. Gaulier's only explanation: 'Samuel Says – We know Samuel says, yes? Good. If I say "Samuel says" you do what I say, if not, you DO NOTHING'.

'I do know the game,' I thought. 'It's simple. But how does it relate to clowning?' I ran a bunch of previously learnt clown instructions through my mind in preparation. 'Be stupid. Don't think too much. Do nothing.'

Gaulier bangs his drum and starts a list of commands:

'Samuel says sing OPERA, Samuel says run, Samuel says jump' interspersed with 'sit down' 'laugh', 'don't laugh', 'Samuel says speak Italian'.

Everyone frantically running, jumping, screaming, speaking Italian, bumping into one another, screaming louder, tripping, laughing. Until…

BANG.

Gaulier stops the game with a loud angry: 'Boh, STOP'. Followed by: 'Put up your hands up if you made a mistake.' I look around for any clue of what he meant. Should I put up my hand? I did make a mistake, what will happen?

I don't put up my hand. Another student, Sarah, put hers up and announces that she made three mistakes. Everyone laughs, with a familiar 'Of-course-Sarah-did-here-we-go-again' laugh.

Gaulier, however, does not laugh, or smile, or change his expression in any way, but simply glares at Sarah over his glasses. He takes his time to reply:

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'Very bad student Sarah, very bad'. He shakes his head.

Suddenly the room is silent, and everyone stares at Gaulier in anticipation. He is in no rush.

'Horrible student, Sarah. Absolutely awful'.

Long pause.

A few students laugh.

Gaulier: 'Sar-AHHHHHHHHH' (He says her name but ends it with the baaaaah of a sheep.)

Laughter. Gaulier repeats it.

'Sar – aaaah' (baahing of a sheep.)

Much laughter.

Gaulier picks up a small children's keyboard from the floor.

He says: 'Sar' – and then presses a button that plays a sheep's 'baaaah' and continues…

'You know what to do, Saraaaaaaah?'

A lot of laughter.

Sarah tries to hide her smile. Scrunching her eyes into a look to show she's peeved.

Then she replies, like a cheeky child, rambling down the instructions: 'I need to ask for three kisses from my friends. If they say 'yes', I am lucky, and must thank them that I am spared; if not, we will see, maybe it will be "very bad"'. She puts on a French accent seemingly quoting the instructions as previously given by Gaulier.

Gaulier bangs: 'Not bad!' And taps a rolled newspaper on his chair for effect. 'Not bad'.

Sarah gives a shiver.

We laugh. Sarah shivers again, and everyone laughs again. Gaulier bangs: 'Samuel says: Stop Shivering!'

Sarah jolts, but when Gaulier looks away, she adds an extra shiver for everyone's amusement. We laugh again. Gaulier notices the shivering and lifts the newspaper. Sarah stops abruptly

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and gives an apologetic look. Sarah looks around the classroom to find her first potential saviour. She looks at Ruth and pleads: 'Ruth, can I kiss you?' Ruth seems proud to be chosen. 'Yes, you may', and Sarah gives Ruth a kiss. Sarah glances at Gaulier to log her first point.

She continues to scan the room for potential and spots James: 'James, can I get a kiss?'

James turns to his friend Michael for apparent affirmation and then shrugs 'Ok, fine'. Sarah kisses James.

Sarah gives a confident smirk, clocking Gaulier. The stakes are high. Amanda steps forward and offers a kiss. Sarah considers it and then asks: 'Amanda, can I get a kiss'. But Amanda is silent, changing her expression suddenly after looking at Gaulier and then erupting with an exaggerated: 'NO, not at all, never in a thousand years'.

Sarah gasps – she does not get her three kisses and slowly turns to Gaulier defeated.

He waits for the laughter, drum rolls and cheering to die down from the rest of the students who form a cheering crowd. He takes his time to slowly get up from his chair with his rolled newspaper, tapping it three times on the edge of the chair. One student starts chanting and dancing in a circle around Sarah and the others follow the proposal.

Gaulier calls 'Saraaaaaaaah', sounding the keyboard and repeating it three times. She walks towards his chair protesting and begging for mercy all the way. Gaulier bends Sarah forward into a neck lock and begins the torture sequence starting with a ruffling of hair – "Shampooing" – proceeding with three hits to the back of her neck with his rolled newspaper – "Guillotine" – and then administers the pinching of skin on her back – "Acupuncture" – finishing up with the most brutal torture resulting in Sarah's fingers being bent backward to administrate "Chinese finger lengthening". With each torturous punishment her face cringes into a dramatic exhibition of excruciating pain. There is roaring laughter and noise each time she gets hit.

When it ends, Sarah takes a bow, clearly proud of her performance and moving back to her place on the floor, she continues shooting angry glances at Gaulier.

I think to myself, 'Sarah is a good clown'.

When the laughter dies down, Gaulier bangs his drum and shouts: 'Samuel SAYS RUN'. The crowd disperses, running around the room at full pace. Gaulier calls for mistakes again and I

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take a chance and stick up my hand. This time, however, Gaulier does not ask me how many mistakes I made, but rather: 'Where are you from?'

Startled, I answer: 'South Africa'.

Gaulier stares silently and everyone laughs in anticipation.

'Ohhhhh, South Africa.' He lifts his keyboard and makes the sound of a lion roaring then an elephant's trumpet. Gaulier glances at the other students, they laugh. He repeats… 'Hmmm…South Africa'.

I feel a tingling of opportunity for play, for fun, for chaos – but keep quiet, not knowing how to respond. Gaulier waits for my reply, but I do not have one, he answers:

'Boh, there are no clowns in South Africa. London, maybe yes, clowns in London, France yes, clowns in France, America, mmm yes … maybe … South Africa? No, no clowns in Africa, only giraffe.'

Silence.

Did I miss my turn?

Figure 3: "Learning is hard, or else it wouldn't be that" (Bailes, 2011:109).

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Phillipe Gaulier: *Monsieur 'Flop'*

Phillipe Gaulier is arguably the most famous and most often cited clown pedagogue after Jacques Lecoq. He has been formally recognised within universities and clowning schools and is reputed for his training of highly successful clown practitioners, actors and comics such as Sacha Baron Cohen and Helena Bonham Carter. Gaulier is primarily known for his hermetic clown philosophy and unique teaching style developed over the last forty years. His methods having deeply infiltrated and extensively contributed to contemporary theatre training and practice, most noticeably through his philosophy of theatre that prioritises and centralises play *as* performance.

Gaulier's book *The Tormentor* (2012) is a collection of anecdotes, exercises and witticisms on the range of subjects taught including Melodrama, Shakespeare, *Bouffon*, Neutral Mask and *Le Jeu* (the basic principles of play) as well as clown. The written style and tone of his book echoes his performative public persona. Although Gaulier strongly resists engaging in critical literature himself, there has been a recent surge of academic texts analysing his teaching methods and approach to clown training, including texts by theorists such as Danzig 2007; Kendrick 2010; Amsden 2011/15 and Purcell-Gates 2011. For this reason, this section will provide only a brief introduction to some of the key principles experienced and observed through my clown training experience as a student-performer and observer in Gaulier's workshops. It is my view that by identifying some of the core principles and reflecting on how they were experienced, this chapter will provide a steady foundation on which a shared taxonomy may be created as a means of a) furthering an understanding of implicit tensions and assumptions underlying contemporary clowning practice and b) creating a platform from which to explore how these principles may be utilised in performance outside of the workshop environment.

Lynne Kendrick's[4] study is a particularly detailed and compelling analysis of how the ludic functions in Gaulier's teaching methods. The first half of her dissertation provides a rigorous theoretical framework drawing on the work of theorists Huizinga, Caillois and Goffman. In the second half of her dissertation, Kendrick applies the theoretical framework towards an analysis of the methods of Gaulier, Jon Davison and John Wright as clown practitioner-educators, who have inherited and further developed Lecoq's practices.

Kendrick explains that up until recently, play-based practices had been "promulgated by those artists for whom play is a specialist form of training or theatre practice" closely associated and generally limited to theatre-sports (Keith Johnstone), devising strategies as a way to construct theatre,

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specifically how games may offer a platform from which to explore social relations between players (Joan Littlewood and Clive Baker), or an alternative generative method of various experimental companies (Forced Entertainment) (Kendrick, 2011:112). Kendrick draws attention to the way in which Gaulier's influence has been in accordance with a shift in contemporary performance practice, where play not only becomes useful as "precursors to performance" or a way of learning *about* performance, but a technology that may assist in "construct(ing) performance" itself (Kendrick, 2011:137). The prioritisation of the game and Gaulier's disinterest in authenticity or truth – "The truth kills the joy of imagining" (Gaulier, 2012:190) – has been a philosophy that other clown and theatre practitioners such as Dario Fo and David Mamet have advanced. Fo has stated that "in theatre – only the false is authentically real" (Fo, 1991: 178).

Laughter is a constant presence in any discussion on the clown performer's practice and function. As an audible, mostly spontaneous response, laughter has been valued for its ability to introduce a clear, feedback loop between performer and spectator. Paul Bouissac, a semiotician and pioneer in circus and clown studies, offers the metaphor that laughter is the "lifeline of professional clowning" (2015:201). According to laughter-centric clown teachings, laughter is perceived as providing a measure of assessment as to whether performances are 'successful clowning' or not. Gaulier writes that the clown is "born in laughter, lives near laughter and dies beside laughter" (2012:277). John Wright asserts that he "prefer(s) to talk about laughter rather than comedy" since "laughter is less conceptual and more specific" (2007:5).

> You do something in a certain way and either we all laugh or we don't, as the case might be. It is a simple contract and is non-negotiable. We know exactly where we stand with laughter. Laughter has universal coinage. Through laughter, we establish a reciprocal relationship with the audience[…] (Wright, 2007:5).

Despite the common emphasis on laughter's simplicity as an audible and direct physiological expression, the reasons why humans laugh are manifold, perplexing theorists across various disciplines including anthropology, linguistics and performance studies. Paul Bouissac's *The Semiotics of Clowns and Clowning* (2015) offers insight into numerous studies and theories that explore the causes of the exclusively human response – from pioneering studies by psychologists such as Sigmund Freud and Henri Bergson's essays, to more recent investigations such as *The Evolution and Function of Laughter and Humor: A Synthetic Approach* (2005) by Gervais and Wilson. These studies, Bouissac argues, remain inconclusive and contribute little towards an understanding of why humans might laugh at clown performances specifically or why this laughter may lead to feelings of joy and connectedness in some instances and isolation and humiliation in others. He issues a warning against the common assumption that we understand laughter simply because of our intimate experience thereof (Bouissac, 2015:201).

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To try and make sense of the phenomenon, Bouissac, Baudelaire and Wright – all writing from vastly different perspectives – allude to religious views, anecdotes and highly visceral imagery to explore the relationship between laughter and its links to failure and humiliation as well as the associations with holiness, hope and ritualistic bonds that laughter may procure. Both Bouissac and Baudelaire refer to Christian theology and interrogate laughter as a primordial human reaction.

Baudelaire's essay is shaped around the statement: "*the wise man never laughs but he trembles*" arguing that it was possibly stated by the, "pitiless Christian psychologist, Bordalou" (1956:111). 'Haunted' by the thought, he reflects upon the wise being, the man who carries the spirit of the Lord who would not succumb to the mirth of laughter (1956:112). Bouissac similarly, observes that in "traditional Christian cultures, laughter, whether pathological or associated with humor, was attributed to the influence of the devil […]" and that generally laughter is linked to some form of transgression (2015:206). Bouissac includes a contrasting story, by Lee Siegel, derived from the *Kathasaritsagara*[5] of a royal couple walking through a forest when an "all-powerful sacred demon" demands that their young boy is sacrificed (Siegel, in Bouissac, 2015:170). When the boy is delivered to the demon and the King draws his sword, the boy smiles and bursts into laughter, causing such surprise that the company are left to bow "reverentially to the boy, with their hands joined to express their awe and devotion to the divine child" (Bouissac, 2015:170). These rich and highly symbolic tales illuminate a discrepancy between laughter and its associations with wonder and unification, and laughter that indicates transgression and belongs to a dangerous, material world. In yet another tale, laughter appears as the bridge between these experiences.

Why is that so Funny? (Wright, 2007), begins with a Japanese legend, first recorded in an ancient text *The Kojiki,* also known as *The Record of Ancient Matters,* dating back to 712 AD in Japan. The story tells the tale of a young sun goddess, who, after a feud with her brother, descends into the depths of a cave to sulk, causing the world to fall into darkness. The goddess "performs" her frustration by constructing a stage out of a small bathtub and throws a tantrum, stamping her feet. A crowd of gods gather at the mouth of the cave to try and convince her to come back to restore the world to light, but become engrossed in her performance of frustration on the bathtub-stage and "she laughs, and they laugh, and they all want more" (2007:4). Encouraged by their laughter, her performance escalates, leading her to strip herself of her kimono and rip off her nipples, blood gushing – and still the gods roar with laughter. Eventually the laughter outside causes the young goddess to fear her exclusion from the merriment which lures her out of the cave and into the world she re-illuminates (2007:4).

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[5] A renowned 11th century collection of Indian legends, myths and fairytales.

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These narratives centralise laughter and depict themes of death, violence and transgression – interwoven with notions of lightness and pleasure. They also correlate with Baudelaire's idea that since laughter is "essentially human, it is also essentially contradictory" (1956:117). Bouissac examines Henri Bergson's three essays on laughter that seek to discover the "meaning of the comic" (2015:203), and finding it difficult to imagine laughter as a response to a "perception of absurd acts," he interprets comedy as representing humanity on stage and argues that laughter lies in its social function, and "intimidates transgressors through humiliating them" (2015:203). He further offers an interpretation of Bergson's hypothesis and writes that "an explanation of laughter must be found in its social gesture*,* an aggressive way of controlling asocial deviance that could jeopardize the harmony of civilized life" (2015:203).

Gaulier's clown training methods, prioritise laughter as a teaching tool that reflects and brings about an experience of both connection and pleasure as well as humiliation and danger as encapsulated by the themes in the stories above. A discussion focusing on Gaulier's methods in relation to clowning necessitates an acknowledgement of his methods as deeply rooted in play. For Gaulier, "play is as vital a function as breathing or laughter" (2012:187) and theatre "*e*quals the pleasure of a game plus a play" (2012:187).

The complex notion of *pleasure* arises persistently in Gaulier's writing and in-class teachings. Although the term pleasure and related terms such as 'fun' or 'enjoyment' are often used interchangeably, they do not only denote an emotion or feeling but encompass the students' *approach* towards the game. Gaulier insists that pleasure is non-negotiable, a prerequisite that points to a performer's commitment and willingness to become fully immersed in play: "When I talk about the game, I am talking about the immense desire for life, the same desire which makes us breathe" (2012:187).

Richard Schechner[6] asserts that play "creates *its own* (permeable) boundaries and realms: multiple realities that are slippery, porous and full of creative lying and deceit" (1993:26–27). Schechner further clarifies an understanding of play by emphasising the necessary danger involved:

> [T]he perils of playing are often masked or disguised by saying that playing is "fun", "voluntary", "a leisure activity", or – ephemeral – when in fact the fun in playing, when there is fun, is playing with fire, going in over one's head, inverting accepted procedures and hierarchies, that play is performative, involving players, directors, spectators and commentators in a quadrilogical exchange (Schechner, 1993:27).

The issue of danger in clown-play is significant, since it calls for reflection on the type of risk that might be involved and how it may differ from that which threatens a rugby-player, an aerialist, a player in a

[6] Professor Emeritus at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, Richard Schechner's cross-cultural research has contributed extensively to contemporary performance theory.

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game of snakes and ladders or the Shakespearean actor playing Julius Caesar. The experience shared in the above anecdote of my first day at Gaulier provides examples of certain invitations of what *felt* to me like dangerous play or 'playing with fire' as a result of the inversion of accepted procedures and hierarchies.

Schechner argues that the willingness to start playing necessitates a feeling of security (1993:26). One might argue that the feelings of safety, in clown training, are enforced by the shared understanding of the play as 'just a game'. There is also an acknowledgement that the play begins and ends within the confines of a specific place, consciously set up and arranged towards specified ends (to teach clown principles), and that the participation in each game and the workshop itself remains voluntary. The workshops are process-led rather than outcome-based and there are few, if any, obvious, tangible consequences if a student is not successful in the games proposed.

By embodying a role as provocateur[7] or gamemaster, Gaulier arranges and directs the engagement with students to offer continuous uninterrupted experiences of play that predominantly involve laughing at or being laughed at – experiences that inspire feelings of joy and connectedness, as well as feelings of fear and humiliation. According to Gaulier, however, feelings are inconsequential: "The Game allows things which are unbelievable and marvellous, not feelings. Enjoy pretending to feel, without feeling" (2012:190). Whether it is necessary for the performer to pay attention to their feelings in clowning, and whether the clown performer's possible awareness of feelings may contribute to, or detract from, the performance is a contentious issue that this study does not seek to interrogate or resolve. The study attempts, rather, to acknowledge the issue as a point of dispute in contemporary clown training; one that has infiltrated literature surrounding clown performance and that has the potential to hinder and effect an understanding of the clown performer's transition from workshop to theatre or workshop to rehearsal. The issue has arisen, I propose, from the heightened emotional experience that is often endured by performer and audience alike in training contexts and has subsequently become associated with how clowning *should* feel to be understood and classified as clowning.

Lucy Amsden, a clown practitioner and teaching fellow at Birmingham University, explains that each time a student begins an exercise in Gaulier's workshop they have to risk "being personally insulted, making emotional risk integral to the training" (2011:40). In addition, Amsden references the observation by clown practitioner Leslie Danzig, that at the workshops/schools of both Gaulier and

[7] An agent provocateur in the 'real world' may incite someone to aggressive or rebellious or hurtful behaviour – lacking the frame offered by performance. The use of the word in a performance context is already a double-play of sorts, since a clown rebels against the narrative, but always within the parameters of a 'staged' reality.

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Lecoq, "the bathrooms are often full of distraught students pulling out their hair, trying to get a handle on how clowning works" (Danzig in Amsden, 2011:40).

Gaulier embodies the role of provocateur through the presentation of a witty, brutal and authoritative persona that can, and often has been, likened to the role of the Whiteface clown in the circus. In my Master's thesis, I argued for a re-acknowledgement of the inter-dependence of the Auguste/Whiteface relationship, proposing that contemporary clown discourse has – to its own disadvantage – become predominantly focused on the Auguste clown, as well as what the figure represents, namely spontaneity, chaos, misbehaviour and disruption. I proposed that a reconsideration of the Whiteface role would enable contemporary practitioners to become more aware of what the Auguste clown *may need* to be successful in his role of disruption and failure, since the Whiteface often serves as a frame or an authoritative structure against which the Auguste's disruption becomes apparent.

This has also been in line with the view of clown historian John Towsen, who recognises Antonet (1872–1935) as perhaps the "last 'authoritarian' clown" (1976:226), underlining how the Whiteface clown has become undervalued. He writes that:

> Despite the abuse he sometimes heaped on his partners, it was Antonet who was most responsible for improving the status of the auguste. In his attempt to give an impression of dignity and restraint, he avoided all excess, depending far less on slaps and falls than had Footit. Instead, Antonet was a superb straight man who could bring out the most in his partner and help build the plot to his highest potential of hilarity. In the process, more and more of the comic effects seemed to be attributable to the auguste. It was hardly a coincidence that three of Antonet's partners – Little Walter, Grock, and Beby – were considered to be among the greatest augustes ever (Towsen, 1976:226).

My aim with this brief historical diversion, is to serve a reminder of the Auguste clown's dependence on structure and authority, a principle which I argue contemporary clown teachers like Gaulier construct for the clown performer in training, by immersing themselves in the structure of the game. Although a student-clown may remain aware of the performativity of Gaulier's persona as 'The Tormentor', Gaulier never compromises or contradicts this role: it is sustained throughout his interactions, even outside of the workshop environment and in his public exchanges (his book, website and documented interviews). For this reason, it is difficult to imagine any persona other than the one Gaulier projects; it is also almost impossible to differentiate between when Gaulier is playing and when he is being serious, and students are thereby encouraged to treat any interaction with him as a game.

Gaulier's role-play and interaction allows him to retain an intimidating high-status persona and students, in response to his directives, appear ridiculous, perpetually confused, embarrassed and one-step behind. These states are sustained in the training environment through deliberate strategies

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employed by Gaulier such as: avoiding formal introductions, refusing to separate advanced from less experienced students, and limiting the details in the instructions for exercises.

In the early stage of workshops, exercises are mostly derivatives of popular children's games – such as *Samuel Says*, *Grandmother's Footsteps* or *Musical Chairs* – games that present students with a clear framework of rules and objectives. As the workshop progresses, games and interactions are less structured and focus on simple provocations offered by Gaulier and the performer is simply provided with instructions or a question that may lead to free improvisation and exchange. Often the simple, competitive children's game provides a useful frame to introduce and invite students to play roles by setting up hierarchical relationships between players. The starting point or initial rules or framework provided by the children's games often evolves into a different game altogether, in which the initial aims are discarded.

In the example of *Samuel Says*, discussed in the anecdote, Gaulier's provocation 'who made a mistake?' led to Sarah's risky decision to stick up her hand and identify herself as a player who made mistakes; this positioned Sarah as a primary player to be observed, thereby diverting the action. The rule that requires Sarah to attain three kisses to set her free, foregrounds other players and creates the potential for tension to develop, since the other players may divert the action and determine Sarah's fate. The game further encouraged participants to adopt different roles to play such as the trickster, victim, perpetrator, accomplice or enemy.

Although Sarah, by admitting her mistakes, demonstrated her *failure* in the game, her acknowledgement of these mistakes and her pleasure in that acknowledgement ignited the opportunity for further play and our amusement as spectators, ultimately demonstrating her *success* as clown-player. Nevertheless, although the punishment Sarah received was clearly part of the game and at once childlike and silly, it was simultaneously brutal and intimidating in affect. Kendrick, who discusses Gaulier's torture procedure in the game of *Samuel Says* in her own text, writes that: "it isn't fake, it's real and it hurts," and explains further that these tangible acts of cruelty add "seriousness to the game" and introduce "an element of fear" (2010:155). Kendrick further exemplifies how, even when it "remains unexplained, Gaulier's cruelty is not arbitrary" (2011:80–81).

> His extreme imposition of ludus[8] is an intrinsic, pedagogical act. This not only demands immersion in the proceeds of the game, but also abandons the player in its midst as they are beset with a baffling alternating array of playful and cruel rules that produce unwittingly personal and often revelatory responses. This intensified ludus is designed for the player to attain the skills for an

[8] Lynne Kendrick uses the term 'ludic' to refer to all principles of play as "playfulness, play forms, game, gaming, playing, performing, taking action and acting." She also employs the term to denote a "field of play theory and practice" (Kendrick, 2010:11).

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> advanced technique of Gaulier's performer training, it is a structure enforced upon the game that produces the type of play necessary for the clown (Kendrick, 2011:80–81).

The primary aim of the game is to create a necessary relationship between spectators and performers; performers are required to remain constantly and acutely aware of the audience's presence and response, particularly their laughter and silences. Gaulier's provocation is also a strategy for tutoring the student-audience on how to respond to the performances, by serving as an active example of an audience observer with the power to initiate, shift and end the performance. Gaulier's exercise, therefore, inducts both the performers and the audience into behaving in an optimal way for the clown contract to function, in other words, into a specific culture of clowning in which laughter, failure and audience involvement are key. *Complicité,* the term Gaulier employs to refer to the reciprocal relationship amongst players, or between the performer and audience, can be described as "shared understanding", or a "state of creative communication" that is "profound and often unexpressed" (Gaulier, in Kendrick, 2010:138–139).

The experience of failure, specifically when performing an action, gesture or interaction that is *intended* to incite laughter but does not, is referred to by Gaulier as the 'flop'. Kendrick has described the 'flop' as one of the "most difficult aspects of Gaulier's clown training" because of the ever-present "threat of error" as well as the "aspects of the clown persona" it involves (2010:172). Gaulier asserts that the clown's failure to provoke laughter is inevitable, since the clown is always rooted in stupidity; according to Gaulier, this marks the difference between the clown and the comic actor: "One of them provokes laughter when they want and the other when they aren't expecting it" (2007:277). The 'flop' is personified by Gaulier as *Monsieur 'flop',* a 'friend' who may come to the rescue and appear as a friendly invitation to the performer to admit their failure and thereby reinstate an immediate open relationship with the audience by demonstrating their presence in performance. It is when the student-performer does not pay any attention to the 'flop' that Gaulier puts a brutal stop to the performance since, according to Gaulier's teaching, by not including the audience the performer provides no opportunity for *pleasure* or interactive play. This lack of awareness leads to aggressive punishment from Gaulier where he may ignore, physically punish, insult or simply dismiss students.

Gaulier situates audiences to become accomplices in the punishment by asking students what they thought about the performance in the "form of two hyperbolic options – the first a declaration of love and desire, the second a brutal, violent and torturous rejection" (Amsden, 2015:84). 'What do you say, Amy', Gaulier asks a student, 'about her? Do we like her or do her eyes remind you of some goldfish twenty years in a suitcase in Vietnam?' (Gaulier Clown Workshop 2014). Gaulier thereby not only instructs the performers to produce and learn clown principles, but simultaneously encourages a highly

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engaged, opinionated and responsive audience who are tutored to value (and act according to) their own pleasure as spectators.

The game *Samuel Says* provided an example of all the student-players sharing the play space with Gaulier observing and performing the role of an off-stage director of the game. In other games, the space is arranged to create more distinct boundaries between performer and observer through a configuration that emulates a front-end arrangement, resembling the proscenium-arch or thrust stage and auditorium. Amsden describes how Gaulier sits in the middle of the audience, creating an alternative stage that brings "power to the audience, but makes [Gaulier] appear as the head spectator" (Amsden, 2015:86). Gaulier thereby provides a brutal, honest and unmerciful translation of the audience's response and appreciation. Both the performer and audience are invited to engage with each other in a heightened state of presence and awareness, remaining always uncertain of what is going to happen next. Schechner explains that play encourages:

> the discovery of new configurations and twists of ideas and experience, it is the ongoing, underlying process of off/balancing, loosening, bending, twisting, reconfiguring and transforming the permeating, eruptive/disruptive energy and mood below and behind and to the side of focused attention (Schechner, 1993:43).

As a student-performer in Gaulier's workshop, I experienced the heightened emotional state associated with these strategies of "off/balancing", "reconfiguring" and "transforming" dynamics and interactions. The multiple texts that discuss and analyse Gaulier's training methods leave no doubt that these methods incite highly emotive experiences of fear, anxiety, uncertainty and excitement, as well as a deep emotional connection between performer and observer with the intention to lead to pleasure and laughter. Clown practitioners like Danzig emphasises the idea that students *need* to "care about their failure" otherwise "nothing happens":

> There has been no experience that the audience can enter into or grasp. Or if the students suppress their caring, swallow their feeling[s] and act unaffected, then they have lied to the audience, creating a disconnect and a disengagement (Danzig, 2007:82).

In her book *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure (*2011)*,* Sarah Jane Bailes 'recapitulate[s]' Ernst Bloch's theories on hope and possibility in his three-volume text *The Principle of Hope* written between 1938 and 1947. As Bailes affirms, Bloch's theories offer a way in which to way to understand the link between feelings of 'danger' and opportunity for play, between 'possibility' and 'hope'. Possibility, she argues, belongs "to the realm of the anticipatory by definition insofar as it does not designate something concrete or already realized"; it acts, therefore, as a precursor of hope in that "one has to *imagine* something as possible in order for hope to be summoned" (2011:116). Hope, she explains with reference to Bloch, is "partially constituted by the awareness of danger; it is not simply

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the affirmation of confidence. Hope acknowledges instability as its principle underlying condition; it is the 'opposite of security' in Bloch's intellectual framework." (Bailes,2011:125).

In Gaulier's training, as well as in many historical examples of the clown figure, it is the hope and optimism of clowns, their willingness to display their grand ambitions and naivete, despite the inevitable and perpetual failure, that invites our laughter. Gaulier's games often draw on these ambitions by providing the performers with a task or role by which the audience can see the impossibility of normative/expected success. The commitment and enjoyment of the student-performers in displaying their effort, despite the looming failure, brings laughter and emphatic pleasure by inviting us to question: 'How will s/he do it? How will they pull this off?'

Problematic within the practice of clowning is when practitioners equate the overwhelming intensity of the students' feelings and experiences with the perception that clowns *are* "truthful" and "honest". This simplified equation has led to a theoretical and practical tendency to proliferate the idea of a "personal" or "inner clown" that has often become defined and venerated by diametrically opposing inner truthfulness against notions such as "fakeness" and "superficiality". Because these feelings also occur in the *present* relationship between performer and spectator, it has resulted in the unhelpful expectation/misinterpretation that clowning needs to be spontaneous and should not rely on anything that is preconceived. Kendrick observes this contradiction in Gaulier's abundant articulations of the clown's necessity for 'play, idiocy and pleasure':

> Gaulier insists all play must be present – be actually happening – but the clown is also constructed and prepared, for instance players are asked to 'write in their head', what was funny in a game and are encouraged [to] repeat this the next day. The clown persona can be prepared, refined and developed over the years but how the clown relates to, incorporates or emerges from the player's self remains unclear. Thus the most complex ludus Gaulier's player can encounter is the negotiation between the self and its clown (Kendrick, 2010:169).

The preponderance of literature that makes reference to issues of 'self', and what has come to be referred to as the "personal" or "inner clown" and its links to the feelings of the performer as well as their presence and spontaneity, paves that way for an introductory exemplification of the challenges encountered when transferring clown principles from the workshop to the theatre. My experience in the workshops of clown teacher Mick Barnfather provides further insight into the clown teacher's immersion into the game and how his role as provocateur is seminal in producing clowning.

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Mick Barnfather: 'Flop' Corner

Mick Barnfather has worked as a performer, teacher and director for over thirty-five years. He has taught the practices of Lecoq (including Melodrama, Neutral Mask, Buffoon, Improvisation and devising theatre) in a private capacity and at various Universities in the United Kingdom. He has also facilitated workshops at *Ecole Philippe Gaulier* and Gaulier describes him as a "superbly intuitive and inspirational teacher".[9]

I attended a five-day workshop with Mick Barnfather in London in 2017. On one of the last days, he proposed an exercise where he would act as provocateur, looking to cast a 'specialist' for a 'new movie'. Three or four students were asked to line up in the space to conduct a 'specialist task' given by Barnfather.

> *'So, Klara, as always, we are looking for specialists. I heard from a few agents that you are particularly talented in playing the earthworm, that is why you are here today, yes?'*
>
> *I nod (remembering that clowns are optimists with no doubts about their abilities).*
>
> *'Wonderful, would you mind doing a demonstration for us please? When I bang the drum, you will give your showing and when I bang it again you will stop.'*
>
> *Barnfather bangs the drum and I wiggle around for a few seconds doing my best impersonation of an earthworm – the audience, however, do not look impressed (even though I find it funny). Barnfather bangs his drum again indicating that the audience has had enough, and I stop. There is no laughter. He decides to give me another chance and bangs his drum again. I give another attempt at the 'earthworm' (this time wiggling more rigorously) but it's only a few seconds until he bangs his drum to end the performance. I stare out at the audience questioningly, ready for feedback, but there has clearly been no improvement.*
>
> *Barnfather shakes his head: 'There is absolutely nothing good about that earthworm you showed us, nothing at all, you should feel very embarrassed Klara. You will need to go stand in that 'flop' corner and reflect. Please be quiet and move swiftly'.*
>
> *I move (swiftly) to the opposite corner of the stage to 'reflect' and Barnfather continues to task the next students with even more bizarre specialisations – 'the camel's mating call'/'baby rhythms'/'an LG 5th Edition washing machine'. I watch other students succeeding, eliciting*

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[9] 'Mick Barnfather', 2014, online (available at: https://www.mickbarnfather.com/testimonials, accessed 15 May 2019).

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more fun, applause and laughter. Feeling slightly jealous, I do in fact reflect on what I could have done to improve my performance – perhaps if I lay down, or gave my earthworm an unexpected sound (do earthworms even make sounds)? Maybe I could've done something with my nose, like a rabbit, surely that would have got them? I practise a little bit, just in case he asks me again, but my rehearsal is interrupted by a loud bang.

Barnfather stops the current showing by Michael, who is hard at work performing a rather convincing impersonation of an 'eagle feeding his chicks', to address my apparent misbehaviour. (To Michael) 'Sorry Michael, I need to interrupt you, Klara is watching you and I'm afraid she might be stealing your ideas for her next performance'. (To me) 'Klara, please do not look this way whatsoever, in fact, face the wall, thank you very much, Michael, please continue.'

Everyone looks my way and there is a lot of laughter. I recognise the prompt and apologise sincerely.

Barnfather redirects his attention to the next student and instructs Claire to audition for the role of a 'Moroccan camel's mating call'. Ignoring Barnfather's instructions, I turn my head and peek at the performance. Some of the students observe this and laugh. I notice their laughter and lean back slowly to get a better view of the specialisation performances. More laughter erupts from the other students and I realise that my 'peeking game' has gained a new fan club. It becomes clear that the focus of the performance has been redirected – from being on the action (that is, the students enacting their ridiculous 'specialisations') to the simpler game of my peeking and disobeying the teacher's instructions. Barnfather notices, but this time leaves the game to play itself out until the laughter inevitably dies down and there is a new game to be initiated. Barnfather recognises the moment and after exhibiting disapproval at Claire's voicework, sends her to my side of 'flop corner'. I sense her excitement at being allowed to join in the fun and the potential for disruption.

My experience of the workshops with Gaulier and Barnfather has been the precursor for my understanding of the interplay between the clown performer and the context by which they are framed, as controlled and arranged by the teacher-provocateur. Although it *felt* like the students were laughing *at me*, the laughter was mainly provoked and set up by Barnfather's carefully crafted exercises and timed interjections. In some instances, these examples demonstrate the major role that teachers such as Barnfather and Gaulier play in assisting students to clown by initiating and 'directing' the action from their placement within the audience. In this exercise, it is also apparent how Barnfather directs

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the action through his placement of student-performers as 'fixed points' to hold the attention, offering others the opportunity to disrupt the action and in so doing becoming the focal point of the performance. As I observed other groups executing this exercise, it became clear how the student-clown holding the 'structure' played a key role in framing the exercise, even if s/he did not feel like they were being watched or laughed at.

Another exercise proposed by Barnfather that I observed and participated in demonstrated this issue more clearly. Barnfather invited two student-performers into the space and instructed them to do anything to elicit the audience's attention. The student-audience were encouraged to respond by pointing to the performers they enjoyed or found themselves laughing at the most. The student-performers were instructed to recognise the audience reaction and 'respond' to the pointing accordingly by either doing something else (when there is no pointing) or repeating actions that might have previously earned pointing, or, for example, leaving the space as an acknowledgement of failure.

I became increasingly frustrated as I observed the exercise, noticing how student-performers who were not being pointed at by the student-audience would try to 'mask' or 'derail' the performance of their partners who were gaining "points", often causing the audience to stop enjoying the performance altogether. After watching a few students participate, Barnfather interrupted the exercise, not as provocateur but as teacher voicing the same frustration. He explained that when a student-performer is receiving laughter – being pointed at – it is beneficial to the 'performance' as a whole and it is only when there is no pointing that there is 'trouble'. The overall aim of the exercise, then, is for the student-performer to keep the performance 'alive' and interesting by inviting pointing from the audience, even if the pointing is not directed at them individually. Barnfather extends this exercise by heightening the stakes, inviting student-spectators to respond by throwing 'ammunition' or 'missiles' (in the form of a rolled-up pairs of socks) at performers they are not enjoying. This exercise, and how it was interpreted and played by the student-performers I observed, points to a complexity in clown training that has, in my experience, resulted in confusion.

On the one hand, the exercise requires students to listen and take note of when *they personally* incite laughter – and directly respond to the laughter they hear and are 'punished' if they aren't individually inciting laughter (in this case, by having 'ammunition' (rolled socks) thrown at them). On the other hand, student-performers are expected to acknowledge and recognize when the laughter is being generated for the performance in its entirety, or at their fellow performer, and refrain from changing their behaviour since it is part of what creates pleasure.

Since clown training is based on listening and responding to clear and direct cues of laughter, it becomes difficult, (as illustrated in the exercise above), for the student-performer to assess whether

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their individual play is inciting the laughter or whether the laughter is at their dynamic or exchange. For me, these games, although helpful in raising an overall awareness of laughter in performance – a critical aspect of clowning – also seemingly encourages an egotistical competitiveness amongst performers that become uncomfortable to watch.

It also sheds light on what I perceive and later interrogate as one of the main challenges in transferring clowning as taught in the workshop environment, into theatre practices. In the example above, the teacher-provocateur does well to set up an experience of clowning through which the student may learn, with the teacher acting as the frame or structure, based on authority, against which the clown performer fails and appears ridiculous. What is rarely paid attention to in training and preparation for the clown in theatre, however, is how the clown student may learn to produce a similar frame *without the presence of the provocateur*.

It is my view that the principles of the Whiteface clown, representing structure or authority, have recently been undervalued (Van Wyk, 2015:54). Therefore, a major gap in clown training that is predominantly focused on the individual's capacity to create laughter, is the student-clown's inability to recognise and value the importance of their play *in relation* to their co-performers or a context of authority which plays a vital role in contributing to the laughter that is received.

Jon Davison, clown practitioner, theorist and teacher, has offered viable learning solutions for empowering clown students to recognise and understand the importance of this relational frame, or to set up the conditions for failure themselves. The following section will identify and discuss some of these teaching methods.

Jon Davison: Calculated 'Flop'

Jon Davison, a former student of Gaulier, has been teaching and practising clowning for the last thirty years. He has developed his philosophy and method based on a Lecoqian lineage, placing laughter at the center of his training methods. Davison has directed his continuing theoretical and practical research towards illuminating the limitations and dangers of the 'personal clown', providing alternatives to the ways in which clowning has become limited by literature venerating "truthfulness", "spontaneity" and an overemphasis on *feelings* as its primary *modus operandi.*

The question of whether the clown performer needs to be *personally affected* to produce laughter from an audience is central to Davison's practical teaching and Ph.D. titled *The Self-Deconstruction of Clowning* (2017). Davison argues against the common and unexplored view – perpetuated by the way in which language is employed by clown teachers, practitioners and theorists – that provoking laughter

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in an audience needs to be at the expense of something personally felt and revealed by the clown performer. Davison provides a counter-interpretation to some of the assumptions around innerness and the *need f*or students to be emotionally affected raised in the previous section.

My capacity to investigate Davison's approach to laughter training includes being a participant-observer in four workshops that he offered in both South Africa and London over a two-year period, 2017–2018. The participants in each of the workshops varied. In South Africa, the participants were generally performance students from several South African universities, as well as professional performers and non-professionals with an interest in clowning. In workshops, he introduces participants to *the step-laugh* exercise which encapsulates most of his philosophy and approach to clowning, and draws from, as well as challenges, the current discourse on the clown as a means of problematising certain notions of spontaneity and truthfulness.

> *All you are going to do is walk here and stand (Davison demonstrates by walking to the one end of the room in front of the students). If you happen to hear a laugh, you take a step forward (he demonstrates by taking a step forward). Now, if you don't hear a laugh for – let's say – about six seconds you acknowledge the silence by moving a step backward (he takes a step backwards).Your aim, being to get to the other side of the room, using laughter as an indicator of when you should move. The only other instruction is that you need to be looking at us (the spectators) half of the time. There is no rush. We can spend the whole day watching you. So, let me repeat that, you move to the starting point, there's laughter, you move forward, you hear the laughter dying down, you stand still and then if there is no laughter from your friends for about six seconds more or less, you move back. Easy right? I'm not asking you to do anything tricky, I am simply asking you to do three things, listen, walk and stop. Do we think we can do this? Very simple, isn't it? (There is tentative nodding from students).*

On each occasion that I observed Davison explaining this exercise, there was laughter from participants. His tone is nonetheless serious and matter-of-fact; not serious like Gaulier's threatening-to-hit-you-with-a-stick-serious, but rather like explaining-how-to-fix-a-lightbulb serious, or change-a-car-tyre serious. His explanation is practical and simple, without any apparent intention to incite laughter; and yet, every time I have witnessed him present the exercise there *was* laughter.

Davison makes it exceptionally clear, through his engagement with the students and careful explanation of each step, that there is nothing 'dangerous' about the exercise and that there is no pressure to receive laughter. What he requires is easy and there can therefore be no personal failure or unexpected consequences when failing. The students are continuously reminded that their task is logical and uncomplicated, without a hidden agenda or trickery; the success of the exercise relies

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simply on observation and listening. Davison affirms this approach when writing about the exercise: "it does not involve, for example, any effort on the part of the performer to use their imagination or anything which could be difficult for a spectator to perceive" (Davison, 2017:249). Yet, despite this emphasis on the ease and simplicity of the exercise, I have witnessed myself and other participants in a workshop experiencing a heightened emotional reaction at the start of participation in the exercise.

The first time I was a participant in a workshop with Davison, and he asked for a volunteer to do the *step-laugh*, I felt too nervous and waited until last to try the exercise. My own reaction piqued my interest, especially since none of the other exercises presented in the workshop that day caused this particular 'nervousness'. I noticed a similar hesitation from other students before they volunteered; it would usually take a few seconds after the explanation of the exercise, and only with a verbal prompt from Davison – 'Ok, who's ready' – before students would volunteer. This hesitation was not overt, nor did it lead to outright refusal to participate. However, when I had a similar experience the second and third time in other workshops, I started to pay attention. What was it that caused this anxiety and felt different to other exercises? Why did Davison feel the need to go to such lengths to explain its simplicity, its 'safety'? Did he anticipate such trepidation or that, as inexperienced students, we would overthink the parameters of the game?

I compared the experience of the exercise to two previous tasks on the same day that had similar instructions but did not seem to create the same response in myself and, by my observation, the other students in the group. One exercise, for example, requires students to stand in a circle and simply throw the ball to one another, until one notices laughter, which usually occurs when there is a 'failure' or a mistake of some sort, (such as dropping the ball, reaching too far to catch the ball, falling, pulling a face when not catching the ball) and then to simply respond to that laughter. Davison plays many similar exercises with a ball and all of them are uncomplicated. I first hypothesised that a major contributing factor to the experience of the exercise was the way it was spatially arranged. In the ball throwing exercise, the whole group stands in a circle, and there is spatially a narrower separation between the one 'performing' (throwing or receiving the ball) and those witnessing. The circular configuration, which arranged students and performers equally distanced and symmetrical seemed to minimise the 'performance pressure'. In comparison with the *step-laugh* exercise, the 'end-on configuration', as Davison refers to it, appears to single out certain performers as *inside*, being observed and reacted to, and others as *outside*, doing the observing and reacting.

This could not have been the only reason for the apprehension experienced, however, since we had performed an exercise with similar instructions to *the step-laugh* and within the same 'end-on' spatial dynamics which had not elicited the same response. In this particular exercise, a single student is

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required to leave the room, and once outside, the rest of the group decides on a simple task for the student to perform – moving objects a certain way (putting a sheet on a bench, putting on a coat and lying on the ground) or performing any relatively simple sequence of actions. When the student returns, s/he is required to figure out the sequence of actions the group had decided on by paying attention to the student-spectators' reactions and trying different ideas until s/he figures out what was planned by the group and there is often laughter following the student's confusion and failure to figure out what is required[10]. In this exercise, the student is therefore also alone on stage in the same spatial configuration as *the step-laugh*, and similarly expected to watch the audience and respond to their feedback through action; and yet, from my observations of multiple students performing this exercise, it seemed to create far less 'performance anxiety' than *the step-laugh* excercise.

What was it about *the step-laugh* that set up a dynamic between audience and spectator making it feel as if the stakes were higher, leading to increased anticipation on the part of the students and high engagement for the audience? A possible deduction is that students may have misinterpreted the game, feeling a pressure to *achieve laughter*; in other words that the simple act of stepping backwards in itself might elicit a feeling of humiliation, and the students did not want to admit failure under these conditions since it would *be experienced as* deeply personal and exposing. The "discovering game" mentioned earlier requires clown-performers to identify a sequence of actions in which laughter is not centralised. As indicated in the discussion on laughter in Chapter Two, laughter is most often understood to be elusive – with the practicalities of where laughter emanates from, and why we laugh, being perceived as extremely difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint. This might explain why a game that places an emphasis directly on *producing or eliciting laughter*, may be experienced as highly threatening as opposed to the less intimidating task of figuring out where to move objects.

If this deduction holds true, then *the step-laugh* exercise draws on the clown-performer's personal fear of failure, despite Davison's claims. I question, then, whether it is beneficial to define such a training exercise as 'simply mechanical', and that it is simply by the clown-performer's ability to listen and acknowledge the audience, that laughter will be elicited. Is there something else at play that may help further elucidate an understanding of how the clown performer elicits laughter in the workshop environment?

In the second half of his dissertation, Davison employs *the step-laugh* exercise as a research device to: 1) explore how an exercise such as the step-laugh exercise can be transferred from the workshop

[10] I have also played this game with various other teachers and sometimes it requires the spectators to clap to indicate that the student is getting nearer to the expected action.

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environment to a performance contest, and 2) to demonstrate his hypothesis "that the discourse of the personal or inner clown misrepresents the functioning of clowning produced by the 'flop'" (Davison, 2017:296). His findings offer an understanding of some key principles of clown theatre which I will serve as a foundation from which to build the next chapter.

Theorising the Step Laugh

To test his hypothesis of the insignificance of the 'personal clown', Davison sets up a demonstration where he assembles an audience under the impression that he will provide a lecture-demonstration of how he teaches clowning, particularly utilising the step-laugh. He explains to the audience that the students involved in the exercise will be represented by inanimate objects (a pot plant, a pair of shoes and a chair), demonstrating that since these objects have no 'inner selves', there is no 'personality' or 'innerness' required from them to make an audience laugh. Davison's logic is that if laughter were to arise in the demonstration, it would be elicited by acknowledging and responding to the mechanics of the step-laugh, and not by the personality or innerness of the performers themselves.

At the outset, Davison pretends to only embody the roles of instructor, mover of objects and on-stage, spectator of the object performers – at the same time the audience are assured that they are simply spectators observing the *demonstration* of Davison's method on clown teaching and that they are not expected to participate (laugh or contribute) in any way (2017:260).

Not surprisingly, however, soon after Davison introduces his 'student participants' (the objects) and starts the 'exercise', there is laughter from the spectators. It is at this point that the event transforms; the spectator-presenter contract shifts from being a demonstration, where the audience are not required to participate, to a clown performance, wherein the audience plays an active role. Davison, at this point, becomes a clown performer, reacting to his audience (albeit by manipulating the objects). This begs the question, what produces the laughter?

The spectators were initially assured that their 'involvement' or contributions were not expected or necessary for the research to take place; they were, however, as Davison acknowledges 'tricked' into providing the spontaneous response of laughter. It is the audience feedback, both through their laughter and their questions and contributions at the end, that plays the largest determining role in the research enquiry from which Davison draws his conclusions. One of the spectators observes: "I think it was terribly clever and beautifully done, but I think you're a liar, we were participants in your workshop" (2017:287). Thereafter, a possible threat to Davison's hypothesis emerges. The following similar question was raised by different spectators in different demonstrations: "But aren't we are

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laughing at you? You are substituting yourself for the chair. What you are doing is actually clowning" (2017:284).

Davison acknowledges that this statement, raised by many, could have posed a serious "blow to [his] argument" (2017:285). However, he observes that it also has the possibility of strengthening his hypothesis by exposing the 'assumption' that laughter belongs to the "individual, an agent, a clown, a person, at 'whom' we laugh" (2017:285). He argues that it is in this very "assumption of ownership of laughter that we find the problem" (2017:285).

This dialogue between Davison as performer and the spectators provides us with insight into the complexity of laughter, providing a platform from which to question some of the assumed notions regarding the possible 'ownership' thereof. This clarifies the contributions that context and the 'set-up', negotiation and confusion or inversion of roles and conventions, play – without which the clown performer would not be able to function successfully. In conclusion to his dissertation, Davison acknowledges that the dialogue around the 'personal clown' is too deeply entrenched and protected to simply dismiss (2017:300). Yet, his research offers an important contribution to the existing 21st Century clown discourse by widening the field.

In addition, it provides me with an opportunity to highlight the importance of the teacher's role (and what s/he might represent as an authority figure) for the purposes of this study. If what Davison was doing was "actually clowning" in the *setting up, arranging and manipulating of the* exchange to incite laughter, in a similar way to that in which Gaulier and Barnfather organise the workshop environment, then it sheds light on the clown performer's dependence on this frame. Significantly, it points to the potential challenges that may arise when the clown performer is separated from a context designed to induct both performer and audience into a contractual agreement that potentially 'produces' clowning.

The 'Step-Laugh' Extended

In one of the workshops Davison facilitated in South Africa, he used *the step-laugh* exercise as a foundation from which to create a sequence of actions/text that could potentially be used in performance as a framework a performer may adopt to devise performance. Davison used this exercise to help students 'build' an action-script that would offer enough flexibility to include audience responses. In the first extension of the exercise, students are required to choose a sequence of four or five simple actions, for example:

Performer A enters.

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Performer B enters with a chair.

Performers A and B try sitting down on the same chair.

Performers A and B stand up again.

Performer A offers B a seat with a gesture.

B refuses the seat with a gesture and offers it to A.

A and B try sit-down on the same chair together.

The rule then, like *the step-laugh* exercise, is that the performers are only allowed to move to the next action once there is laughter; if there is no laughter, the performers return to the previous action. For example:

*Performer A enters, **there is no laughter**. Performer A leaves**, there is laughter.***

*Performer A enters again, **there is laughter.** Performer B enters, and so on…*

The script develops from the audience pleasure and audible response. Clearly, the sequence can easily become a game of entering and exiting, instead of a game of sitting and standing, depending on audience appreciation.

Davison demonstrated a further development of the exercise that offers the opportunity to include scripted text. In this case, the student replaces the step with a line of text. For example:

Original action-script

Step 1:

Clown A enters: Quotes a line from a Shakespeare play.

Step 2:

Clown B enters: "Agh, not Shakespeare again!"

Step 3:

Both clowns leave.

Step 4:

Clown A enters**:** Sings some opera.

Step 5:

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Clown B enters: "Agh, not opera again!"

Step 6:

Both clowns leave.

Step 7:

Clown A enters: Says nothing. Silence.

Step 8:

Clown B enters: "Argh, not silence!!!"

Step 9:

Both clowns leave.

Action-script with audience laughter

Step 1:

Clown A enters: Quotes a line from Shakespeare, but also accidentally trips over a jacket.

Audience laughs a lot.

Step 2:

Clown B enters: "Not Shakespeare again!"

Audience laughs less.

Clown A goes to trip over the jacket again to incite laughter.

Audience laughs.

Step 3:

Both clowns step back to exit.

Audience doesn't laugh.

Clowns take a step forward.

Audience laughs.

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Clown takes a big step forward, almost standing on top of the audience.

Audience doesn’t laugh.

Clowns look at each other, acknowledge silence and leave the stage to go back to Step 1.

Step 1:

Clown A enters: Repeats the line from Shakespeare.

Audience laughs.

Step 2:

Clown B enters: “Not Shakespeare again!”

Very little laughter.

Clown A shows surprise that there is no laughter, thinks maybe it was the action of tripping over the jacket that caused laughter, and trips over the jacket again.

A lot of laughter.

Step 3:

Clowns move to the exit.

Clown A pretends to trip over jacket on the way out.

Laughter.

Step 4:

Clown A: Sings some opera.

Some laughter.

Step 5:

Clown A: “Not opera!”

The clowns sing opera while tripping over imaginary jackets.

Loud laughter and applause.

The clowns end scene.

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I wrote these action-scripts from rough notes I had taken in my exercise book of what had transpired in one of the exercises I observed. When Clown A trips over the jacket and there is laughter, Clown A chooses, in this example, to make it another step to return to. What elicits laughter the second time is not neccessarily the act of tripping but perhaps: a) that the clown performer recognised and remembered the initial moment that evoked laughter; b) the clown's stupidity to think it would be worth seeing again; and c) the clown tricking the student-audience into feeling important by remembering what the audience had thought was funny before. The *step-laugh* exercise creates a framework for clown performers to 'learn', acknowledge and repeat what the audience wants to see by becoming aware of and sharing their failure. This is in line with Davison's view that clown presence "depends on failure" and that the "failure to convince 'the flop', could thus be viewed as a kind of absence: the absence of success" (2013:207). Davison goes on to deduce that "the clown achieves presence (believability) by admitting his or her absence (failure to convince)" (2013:207). The simpler the script, the easier it is for the clown performers to pay attention to what the audience wants without becoming attached to what is supposed to happen next.

On the last day of the workshop, Davison extended the exercise still further. He proposed that we divide ourselves into groups of four or five and decide on a newspaper article or an event in the news with which the participants in the group were all familiar. The aim of the exercise was to share the article or event with the audience by means of an action script employing the mechanics of *the step-laugh* to move forwards and backwards, prioritising laughter as the device to propel the narrative forward. I was initially sceptical, as I could not imagine using current political and social topics of violence, racism and tragedy as a starting point from which to incite laughter. Moreover, I was unsure how occasions of rape or Xenophobia, for example, could be addressed through clowning, (without feeling that the subject was being made fun of), whilst remaining "stupid" or naive – some of the central characteristics of the clown, as taught by Davison.

As a group we chose to cover the event known as the *Esidimeni scandal*. In 2016, 1700 mentally ill patients were moved from the specialised *Esidimeni-Life* hospitals to unlicensed facilities to cut costs. Over 100 of those patients died from pneumonia, dehydration and diarrhoea, considered the result of serious neglect in facilities that were ill-equipped and hastily repurposed. We workshopped a very simple plot that included a few actions by clown performers 'demonstrating' what happened: a group of mentally ill patients sit on one side of the room; an officer arrives and tricks patients into moving to the other side of the room; when the patients 'arrive' at the side they have been moved to, they play dead.

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We performed the exercise, at times successfully listening to the audience responses, and at other times becoming overly focused on the 'plot' or narrative. I played the role of the officer and at one point I remember trying to 'move' one of the 'patients', a performer who was sitting with her back towards the audience. There was no laughter and instead of responding to the silence, I carried on trying to move her. The atmosphere felt tense without any feedback of laughter to indicate pleasure or *complicité.* It became apparent from discussions with other students after our performance that since they could not see the performer's face and her own "pleasure" signalling that it is a game and that she is only playing the patient, the game immediately felt disturbing and violent, and the performance, at that point, became difficult to watch. Even though we reattempted to invite laughter after it had dissipated, it felt like we had crossed a boundary and the audience no longer gave permission for the playing to continue.

I had similar experiences whilst observing the other groups perform the exercise. It soon became clear that when the performers 'asked for permission' from the audience, by clocking and waiting for laughter to continue or taking a step-back when there was no laughter, the performance and actions, no matter how tragic or horrific in their implication, were entertaining. The topic was explored as a game and the clown performer's play became accepted not as mockery but as innocent exploration – like a child with too little information, who needs to work out the details whilst being completely engaged in the game.

Whenever performers forgot the rule and became too involved in the narrative or plot, the game was lost, and it became unwatchable. It was within the clown performer's capacity to ask the audience: 'Do you like this?', 'Is this ok?', 'May I continue?', 'Is this bad?', 'Am I allowed to play this?' that laughter was evoked, not at the content, but at the clown's engagement with the content, the clown becoming the conduit through which the tragic events are portrayed. The role of the clown performers in this game, therefore, was not to deliver opinions or criticism on the topic, but to remain solely committed to playing the game so that the creation of the narrative would become a collaborative exploration of reality – rather than enforcing a specific, monological viewpoint.

The value of this exercise is that it provided an entryway for clown-performers to work from a preconceived structure and create repeatable material whilst encouraging the clown performer to pay attention and respond spontaneously to audience responses during the performance. Davison explains that "[t]he realisation that the point of the exercise does not depend on whether the material is improvised or scripted is vital" (2013:291). For Davison, this approach:

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> [C]larifies one of the areas of confusion that has arisen from the clown-as-play model. The confusion results from the discovery that the flop cannot be scripted, that the clown's relationship with the audience must be created in the moment [...]. But when we see clearly that it is only the relationship with the audience which must be improvised, then we are freed from the obligation to constantly freely improvise our material (Davison, 2013:291–292).

There is one further aspect of Davison's philosophy and training methods related to failure and structure that is useful for this study in that it offers a productive framework from which to 'read' clown performances. In his practical guide, Davison shares an observation based on his experience of teaching student-clowns:

> [W]hile clown students might do well in the early stages of training, the actual performances they produced at the end were not of similarly high quality. The bias towards believing all clowning is improvisation, play or just being 'free' was having a detrimental effect on clown training, leaving students with almost no resources for generating their own material (Davison, 2015:97).

It is arguably this observation that has led to Davison's ongoing search to find a "more complete clown training" and "to teach clown devising that relies on form and structure" (2013:292).

In his workshops, Davison provides an education in 'wrong-thinking', an idea that has also been referred to as 'clown logic' and which relates to a mindset adopted by a clown performer in which expected or accepted rules or actions are inverted. Although such "wrongness" may be born out of a moment of accident or play, Davison is interested in demonstrating how the clown's approach to their surrounds, their 'wrongness', may be recognised, cognitively understood, applied and repeated by learning to recognise i) what the rules governing the adopted, conventional or normalised behaviour or actions are, in order to ii) practically identify and experiment with how these rules may be broken or inverted through interaction with objects, the environment, other characters/clowns or the performance conventions.

In 'The Encyclopaedia of Wrongness', a chapter in his *Practical Guide to Clown Training* (2015), Davison cites examples of incorrect practices or actions that students or clown practitioners may employ to assist them in identifying and adopting rule-breaking behaviour for surprise and laughter. He identifies "wrongness" in relation to objects, for example, "objects used wrongly", "objects missing", or the wrong object used for a particular purpose. He also points to how the clown's environment or place may expose or render the clown absurd (a clown finding themselves in the wrong place), or the clown's timing (actions happening too late or too early) or the clown's display of emotions, possibly a more subtle inversion of rules. Davison provides examples of a clown's reaction being too large or too small, or a clown simply displaying a 'wrong' or unexpected emotional reaction to a scenario (2015:99–126).

In Davison's workshops, the students are allocated time to practise and discover the inversion of rules. Davison provides the students with a task to explore the many possibilities of wrongness in relation to

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a specific topic (environment, object, emotion) as outlined above. The students then demonstrate their findings. These showings resemble a presentation rather than a performance in that there is no "performance tension" and audience members contribute to the performers' ideas in order to help them discover new ways of using the object "wrongly". For example, a student may explore using a broom incorrectly. The 'correct way' this object should be used is clearly 'to sweep the floor', however there are multiple ways of using it incorrectly by (e.g. sweeping the roof, or using it for the incorrect function by brushing your teeth or sweeping very fast or very slow or the object being in the wrong place, in the bath as an example).

Davison's 'Encyclopaedia of Wrongness' also contributes to a recent interpretation of gags, based as they are on the premise of "wrongness". According to Bouissac, gags "designate small units in a performance from the point of view of both the creator and the audience" (2015:74). He further asserts that it is important to "keep in mind that gags are functional units endowed with some measure of autonomy despite the fact that, in actual performances the sense-making potential of gags is context-dependent" (2015:76). Later in this dissertation, I offer ways to recognise how failure may be structured and analysed, especially in relation to my own performance practice where gags are employed as a mechanism within a narrative context.

From my own experience as a clown student interested in creating theatre from clown principles, I concur with Davison's call to "redress the imbalance that has been created in clown training over the last half-century" (2013:292), and, as I have argued in my Master's thesis, the practice of clowning is dependent on both spontaneity and structure. For this reason, I have experienced the need to combine exercises or methods that support both needs within training. Davison remarks that an 'ambitious project' would entail, combining:

> this encyclopaedic dramaturgy with contemporary Gaulierian clown training. If it is more common nowadays to find clown teaching based on the 'personal clown', and rare to find training focused on the externals of clown, or 'gags', even rarer is a combination of the two. Most acting schools that teach clown either incorporate it into a mixed bag of methods, as we have seen, or place it within a Lecoqian system (Davison, 2013:293).

In Conclusion

By reflecting on my experiences as clown-student performer and observer in the workshop setting, this chapter opened a discussion of contemporary clown training – focusing on laughter-centric training methods and philosophies inherited from the lineage of Jacques Lecoq. The discussion aimed at discovering a shared vocabulary of some of the key principles of clowning (in laughter-based training methods) particularly relating to the interdependency of 'laughter', 'pleasure' and 'failure', with the

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aim of foregrounding some of the underlying tensions around *spontaneity, presence* and *feelings* as they surface in the specifically controlled conditions of the workshop setting in which clowning is taught as well as produced.

The chapter demonstrated how the pedagogue's role in setting up, managing and directing the workshop environment by initiating performer-audience dynamics, often leads to heightened emotions from both the spectators and performers. This makes apparent two different, yet interconnected issues: the first being the teacher's practice as an induction to clowning; and the second, the role of the teacher as an active provocateur. Induction is identified as being present in the practice of all three pedagogues; and Gaulier and Barnfather embody the role of teacher-provocateur, whereas Davison offers simple explanations to induct the viewer and spectator into engagement.

By revealing the importance of the provocateur and facilitator in teaching and producing clowning – particularly Gaulier's active play within the game, Barnfather's awareness of creating structure that invites the clown's disruption, and Davison's practical and theoretical research around the step-laugh and a more structured approach to understanding and practicing failure through "wrongness" – this discussion foregrounds some of the complexities that arise when the clown performer is separated from the workshop environment that creates a self-contained network of principles, rules and configurations around failure and laughter. In the next chapter, my aim is to broaden these practice-led methods of identifying the principles of clowning by shifting focus to several case studies of the clown in contemporary theatre, including the recently popular and self-proclaimed theatre category of 'clown-theatre'.

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CHAPTER THREE: BUT IS IT CLOWN-THEATRE?

"Thank God our art doesn't last. At least we're not adding more junk to the museums. Yesterday's performance is by now a failure. If we accept this, we can always start again from scratch." - Peter Brooke

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This chapter draws on the previous discussion regarding laughter-centric clown training to examine 'clown-theatre' as a recent self-proclaiming theatre category that roughly denotes a performance event usually created by practitioners with contemporary clown training experience and presented within the frame of theatre. In keeping with the practice-led methods of the previous chapter, this analysis is based on findings gleaned from my position as a clown-performer, as well as my participation as an audience member. As identified in Chapter One, this is the position occupied by most contemporary practitioners who do not have direct access to the knowledge embedded in the master-apprentice model of clowning. This is especially true of South African clown-performers who must predominantly rely on secondary sources, limited by geographic and financial factors. As a practicing clown and theatre-maker, my participation as an audience member always involves a degree of critical viewing, comparative reflection and theorising

A selection of performances involving clown-performers and practitioners from a range of geographic and cultural contexts are considered. *Tweespalt* (2017), *La Chair de Ma Chair* (2018) and *Babbelagtig* (2017–2018) were three theatre performances in which I was a participant and took on a dual role of performer and writer/director. I observed *Hilda and the Spectrum* (2017) and *Slava's Snowshow* (2016) as an audience member. The PhD study by Leslie Danzig, director of *500 Clowns*, is used to provide further insight on Clown Theatre, along with secondary sources such as reviews and interviews.

To frame and focus the discussion, three key statements will be employed that derive from Jacques Lecoq's writings on clowning as part of his holistic curriculum for 'creative theatre' practices. Lecoq's ideology has become widespread and, despite the paucity of critical writing on his methods, has exerted an unequivocal influence on clowning as it is practised today. The three statements are extracted from Lecoq's seminal text *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre* (1997) to shed light on the clown's presence in navigating contemporary theatrical events. *The Moving Body* was not only intended for clown educators and practitioners, and thus provides relevant insight to the challenges facing any practitioner intending to create theatre from clown principles.

A concluding section, aimed at interweaving the findings and complexities highlighted by these performances, will address the role of the clown as *acteur-auteur* – a further term coined and applied by Lecoq, which emerges as a significant and contentious approach taken by the clown-practitioners in contemporary theatre contexts.

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1. "Short Numbers"

> I like the students to practice comic cabaret turns, working up short numbers, never longer than ten minutes. Sadly, all the places where young actors might present such work have disappeared and the post-war cabarets of Paris are long since gone. Today young performers are expected to come up straight away with a one-man show lasting an hour, which is far too difficult and ought to be the result of extensive research on shorter forms (Lecoq, 1997:153).

In this statement, Lecoq draws our attention to performance venues as sites that have a direct effect on the type of theatre that can be produced, suggesting that the closing of 'post-war cabarets' and further lack of informal venues created the expectation for young theatre-makers to produce 'full-length' productions. Lecoq identifies a 'preference' for 'short numbers, never longer than ten minutes' which is also implicit to the structure of most traditional clown entrées (Towsen, 1976; Davison, 2013:10).

Tweespalt (2017)

The KKNK is considered one of South Africa's major Afrikaans theatre festivals. In 2016 the organisers presented an opportunity for shorter performance events to be staged in small tents, an initiative referred to as *Uitkampteater* and based on a concept adopted from the Netherlands*,* known as *"Tentjiesteater"*. Hugo Theart, artistic director of the KKNK at the time, in collaboration with The Royal Netherlands Embassy, played a key role in importing the concept. *Uitkampteater* consisted of ten small tents within a demarcated area, wherein short theatre pieces, performance art, experimental performances or clowning skits were invited to perform. The performances were expected to be no longer than 10–15 minutes in duration and performed multiple times a day for a maximum of 25 audience members – who would pay much less for tickets than for the usual theatre and fringe productions. The name *Uitkampteater* literally translates as 'camp-out-theatre' and seemed to provide an ideal integration of the informal and playful nature of carnival, busking and circus, within a formal theatre context. The initiative was intended to be accessible, affordable and flexible, inviting audience participation through transient spatial boundaries.

In 2017, the second year after its inception, I was approached to devise and perform a short 'clown show' for *Uitkampteater*. I collaborated with one other performer to create a ten-minute show titled *Tweespalt* (discord/strife). We spent three weeks devising material around the concept of two sisters hailing from a small town but with ambitious dreams, with reference to Gaulier's notion that "[d]reams of grandeur save the idiot":

> His ambition isn't to play in the street (not a very comfortable place) but at the Paris Opera. There, apparently, dressers, stagehands and lighting operators take care of great performers and only great performers (Gaulier, 2012:279).

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The sisters were to pose as international stars from Russia, arriving at the festival to perform 'high art' (Ballet, Performance Art and Spanish puppetry). The aim was to adapt *entrées* that I had derived from Gaulier and Barnfather's games in which student-performers would be given an impossible task as provocation for failure. We drew on our understanding of the interdependent Whiteface-Auguste dynamic. The Whiteface-clown, 'Marischka', embodied a stereotypical older sister – in control, demanding and pretentious; her utterly ignorant sister 'Miggie', the Auguste-clown, would inevitably fail to complete the simplest tasks demanded by her sister. In this way Marischka played the role of provocateur inside the game, instructing her sister Miggie with a task or 'showing how it is done'; Miggie would inevitably fall short of the demands either because she misunderstood her sister's instructions, or by forgetting an essential prop, or missing a beat in the timing.

Figure 4: Miggie (left) and Marischka (right) performing the 'dying swan' in *Tweespalt* at the KKNK Festival (2017).

We devised and performed the show without the assistance of a director, inviting acquaintances and friends to watch rehearsals, informally testing whether the material received laughter. From these experimental showings, an action-script was generated by using *the step-laugh* exercise, and a structure derived by flowing between *entrées* based on performative impulse and what had received laughter in the showings. The complete performance consisted of three short and simple *entrées* – typical in duration and improvisational play as those which students in the *auto-course*[11] at Gaulier's school would be expected to present.

During the first six presentations on the first day of our run at the KKNK, the performance underwent radical changes. The informal and inexpensive nature of the tented performances proved to offer an

[11] Auto-course is a term originating from Lecoq and still used by Gaulier, in which students are required to work in groups, usually in their spare time, to create and then present a showing to the educator and the rest of the class for feedback.

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ideal vehicle for displaying the ignorance of the clowns and their desire to be perceived as famous stars, since its informality was at odds with our display of self-importance. With the audience in close proximity to the performing space, we were able to clearly observe and interact with their responses of laughter and silences and organically develop the material. New actions and expressions were included and since there was no pressure that dicatated how long we had to play for, (sometimes the show was eight minutes other times closer to fifteen), we had time and multiple opportunities to discover and refine intricate dynamics in our relationship. By the end of the week – and the completion of thirty shows in total – the 'action-script' had fundamentally transformed and settled into what we found was the most laughter provoking, sequence of events while allowing gaps for spontaneous play.

The informal *carnivalesque*-like venue further allowed us to interact with the festival public outside of the tent, and we were encouraged to use the platform to advertise our shows with small skits or 'tasters'. We often wandered around the 'carnival' grounds enacting our performance personas with the aim of both making the audience laugh and advertising the performance. The clown performer's ineptitude and general stupidity in knowing how to behave as a performer became visible both in our inability to act professionally – for example, by walking around in costume, fighting with each other or bragging about our past successes – and the use of short visual or physical gags – Marischka throwing Miggie into a pond, or Miggie carrying the long train of Marischka's dress whilst trying to fan her with a giant fan and carrying all her paraphernalia. These short physical gags worked well to attract onlookers outside of the tent, to advertise the show and provide spectators with an idea of what to expect from the performance. Overall, the experience left us feeling empowered to keep experimenting and learning from our interactions with each other and the audience, and we considered it successful in terms of audience attendance and appreciation (laughter).

On our return from the festival, we became interested in performing the show again, but could not think of a venue that would host a similar, informal engagement. We discussed the possibility of adapting the performance for a full-length show in a theatre, even an experimental theatre, but it became clear that in order to succeed in this pursuit the performance would have to change fundamentally and require more complex characters and a substantial narrative plot. The experience stimulated questions around whether it would be possible to keep the structure of the event to a sequence of short *entrées,* and if so then, how we could the advertising and descriptions to meet the expectations of theatre audiences – issues that this chapter seeks to further unpack and interrogate.

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2. "Something to Say"

> You are good when you find *quelque chose à dire* – You are good when you find something to say. (Lecoq)

This statement by Lecoq is representative of the kind of oral tradition that underpins clown literature. The phrase is not exemplified in Lecoq's texts but has rather been discussed and analysed by his students in secondary sources. Although it often appears in relation to clowning in surrounding texts, it was not necessarily used by Lecoq in the context of clown training exclusively. And there seems little to no discussion offered by Lecoq himself to explain in what context he has identified the need for the student to find the *quelque chose à dire.*

La Chair de Ma Chair (2018)

In 2016, in collaboration with a playwright-director and an actress, I submitted a proposal to devise a show for the Main Programme of *The National Arts Festival* in Makhanda, South Africa's largest Arts festival. We proposed a theatre show that would, as we envisioned it at the time, rely on clown principles and it was advertised as 'Clown Theatre'. The initial proposal required a dense description of what the show would be about, to satisfy the organiser's requirements and secure funding. The selection process was described as follows:

> The Main Programme showcases curated works that have been selected by an Artistic Committee after a lengthy application and consideration period. A parallel process by the Festival's Executive Producer results in the Festival Selection, works that include productions made possible by partners and sponsors as well as a selection of plays or initiatives necessary to complete the program both for artistic as well as strategic reasons.[12]

The process of selection was lengthy, with only between five to ten shows selected for the programme and it took two years before our proposal was approved. By the time we received news that our application was accepted, and we had secured the funding necessary to start the rehearsal process, there were only six weeks left to devise a brand-new, hour-long production based on the description we had submitted two years prior to the acceptance. In various meetings before the rehearsal process, most of discussions between us, had centred around issues relating to form and genre, our understanding of clowning (what it meant for each of us), and how we would attempt to merge clown principles with the political and social aims we had envisioned and were expected to adhere to by the

[12] 'About the National Arts Festival', 2018, online. (Available at: https://www.nationalartsfestival.co.za/about/; accessed January 2019).

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festival organizers. Four months prior to the start of rehearsals, we had submitted a short summary for advertising purposes giving some indication of what the show would be about:

> Fashioned after the male-centric double acts of South Africa's protest theatre troupe, the production consciously self-references the palimpsests of these canons – including prominent productions like *The Island* and *Woza Albert* – to interrogate our local performance heritage and, in particular, its relationship to woman as theatre activists and change-agents. There is also a tongue-in-cheek nod to the classic French work, *Waiting for Godot*, as we observe two South African clowns ... in limbo. One black, one white. They are living in a future South Africa. One beyond time – as we are currently living it. In a dystopia of Women's Day pink ribbons, fuchsia-glitter quicksand and the bloodied afterbirth of a new, New South Africa our clowns wait; while the outside world is in chaos – squabbling over fool's gold at the end of a nation's rainbow (National Arts Festival Programme, 2018:65).

At this time, I was already two years into the research for this dissertation and had read the seminal book *Clowns as Protagonists in 20th Century Theater* by Donald McManus (2003). This theatre-making opportunity offered a chance to explore my research questions regarding the degree to which clown principles could be integrated within a formal theatre context, moreover, a context in which we were expected to 'have something (political) to say'. The short summary in our proposal referenced, after all, our role as 'activists' and 'change-agents'.

My collaborator was primarily a theatre actress who received training at the Royal Shakespeare Company, University of Leeds and Rhodes University; she had also received some clowning experience. The director had no prior clown training or experience in directing clown performers, but was nevertheless a director, playwright and theatre-maker who had published numerous plays and received multiple theatre awards. Our initial idea was to improvise and play to create material that the playwright-director would then organise into scenes of repeatable material, thereby giving 'voice' to, or multiple perspectives on, some of the issues we wished to address – primarily our feeling of being stuck/trapped between a haunting past and an uncertain future as South Africans. We envisioned performing as two clown-protagonists, with myself playing the role of the Auguste clown, and my fellow performer that of the Whiteface clown.

In email correspondence with the company during the initial stages in which we discussed our ideas about stylistic choice and process, I stated that the aspect I considered non-negotiable was for the material to be, as far as possible, created from improvisations and our own impulses in play aimed at producing laughter; I also encouraged that decisions about performance, needed to be made as democratically as possible, as opposed to loyalty to a predetermined script or singular perspective narrative. I emphasised that it was important for our process to rely on playing games that would assist in shaping relationship and inciting laughter so that in performance the use of a tentative 'frame' would be sufficiently flexible to encourage improvisation and aspects of the 'flop'.

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We intended to spend the first two weeks using exercises to play and devise material towards drafting a basic 'action-script' or sequence of events/actions. However, the process soon exposed insurmountable challenges. The process of play had yielded some content, but it felt loose and incoherent; we struggled to create links and transitions between the various fragments/scenes without them feeling 'forced'. The director often commented that it felt as if we were 'not going anywhere' or that 'the playing was not making any sense'. We panicked. Most significantly, the process of play and improvisation required time and we seemed to discard as much material as we included. We became acutely aware that there were only six weeks in which to create a repeatable performance that was cohesive and that we collectively felt confident would satisfy the criteria used to promote the show – linking the work to political South African canons such as *Woza Albert,* or Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. We also felt the need to prioritise theatrical elements, a decision predominantly driven by our prior experience and assumed expectations of what it meant to perform on the Main Festival (as per the proposal that was submitted two years prior).

Unlike my experiences in the workshop environment – where the 'flop' was a tool for learning how to be a clown performer – we now felt pressured by the possibility of a very real 'flop' as 'professionally funded and promoted clown performers' who had been tasked with creating a coherent full-length, meaningful or 'mature' work of theatre with 'something to say'; and that was already, by nature of the process of selection, predetermined and relevant. Two weeks into the process, we had roughly twenty minutes of play that 'worked': this material had the potential to be laughter-inciting and had arisen from principles of failure. But there was a fair amount of other, often nonsensical, material that had to be worked into cohesive content to ensure the production length of one hour. To solve the dilemma, we agreed that a script would need to be written by the director-playwright so that we could all be clear about 'what we were saying' as a collective and where the play/performance was headed. We would use the remaining rehearsal time to make choices within a stable, pre-established frame of text and actions.

The script included the personas that we had devised in our period of play; however, these personas were now placed under the scrutiny of character development, and their actions motivated by psychology. We spent the remaining weeks of rehearsal memorising and enacting the written scripts that were passed onto us with the expectation that this would offer the necessary structure and confidence to improvise and 'clown around' with the audience in performance.

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Figure 5: Buhle Ngaba and Klara van Wyk as 'Muncho' and 'Lig', Makhanda Festival 2018. (Photo courtesy of Cue Media)

I am sitting on the stage in a main venue at the largest festival in South Africa. I watch as over two hundred audience members – strangers – amble into the auditorium to find their seats – there are no seats open. I squeeze my co-actress's hand and can already feel the pressure to perform for the pairs of eyes that now feel like a distant sea as opposed to our one director in the rehearsal room. Although it is the middle of winter, I feel a drop of sweat running off my nose. Everything feels tense and tight, full of expectation. We start the performance and I become aware of a constant tension: I feel an urge to improvise, to incite laughter, to take my time and engage with the audience, to feel pleasure; on the other hand, I must remember a complex script, a detailed list of actions to come, project my voice, remember sightlines, reserve enough energy for the dance sequence, remember where I had placed the prop so I can get it easily in the three seconds the music cue allows, and keep remembering my lines. After our final bows I felt like we had barely "survived" – our actions had been affected, the lines were said but the performance felt cold and stiff, there had been no pleasure.

We only have three performances of the show, squeezed into two days. After having had an opportunity to perform the show and practise the script for the first two performances, I felt determined to focus on the audience, to listen to them, to look at them, to feel and hear their laughter and responses. Essentially, 'to clown' by letting them see me.

We start the show again, this time slower, this time I become aware of their laughter, I look straight at them. When I see them looking at me, I respond and in moments where I am not speaking, I make eye contact with individual spectators. This works! They laugh more, I feel more relaxed and can see opportunities to improvise, to play, to take the proverbial 'step back' when there is no laughter, and repeat something or notice when there is laughter, acknowledging it with individual eye contact with audience members.

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At one point, I find myself standing at the edge of the stage watching and interacting with a girl in the fourth row who had laughed at something. However, I am supposed to be in a serious conversation with my fellow performer and for a moment I forget my next line. It is completely gone. I look at my co-actress and after a moment of silence, I notice panic in her eyes as she possibly recognises the blank stare on my face.

A few seconds pass and I have no idea what comes next, I laugh out loud, engulfed by panic, unsure of how to continue. The audience notices and laughs, but this only terrifies me more, since it is not laughter I am seeking, but the next line to the serious discussion I am supposed to be inside of and committed to. I become intensely aware of my (non-presence), of being preoccupied with my own thoughts and trying to find the next line. I am a terrible actress. How could I? What comes after this? What now?

Eventually I speak a line, but while I speak it, I realise it is one from about ten lines further into the script and omits one of the most important parts of the narrative progression. I can see and feel my co-actress's panic; she goes silent, turns around and 'rescues' the moment somehow by going on, making up new lines to include some of the narrative I had erased. I want to cry, to run off stage, to apologise. But instead I go on, keeping it together, carrying on like nothing happened. I no longer feel like I can play for or look at the audience.

3. "Stripped Bare for All to See"

> One day I suggested that the students should arrange themselves in a circle – recalling the circus ring – and make us laugh. One after the other, they tumbled, fooled around, tried out puns, each one more fanciful than the one before, but in vain! The result was catastrophic. Our throats dried up, our stomachs tensed, it was becoming tragic. When they realised what a failure it was, they stopped improvising and went back to their seats feeling frustrated, confused and embarrassed. It was at that point, when they saw their weaknesses, that everyone burst out laughing, not at the characters that they had tried to show us, but at the person underneath, stripped bare for all to see (Lecoq, 1997:143).

This statement emphasises Lecoq's view on the role of the clown performer and appears to offer a practical 'solution' for how the student-clown is meant to achieve this: to make an audience laugh by acknowledging and displaying their 'weaknesses'.

This solution to finding 'the clown', and the language employed to describe it[13], links back to some of the principles identified in the previous chapter – the personal clown, laughter and failure – and what

[13] I acknowledge that texts read by practitioners are often translations. Interpretations of key terms and practices are therefore dependent on the quality of the translation, as well as the unique patterns or methods that an interpreter might employ, posing a challenge to interpretations of certain terms and ideas today.

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remains a troubled relationship between clown training and performance. The students were described as arriving with a preconceived idea of what might provoke laughter, and it is only when their sense of failure led them to give up on displaying their ideas, and their shared recognition of 'the person underneath', that laughter was generated.

Babbelagtig (2018)

In 2018, I was an invited member to a group of South African performers that applied for National Lottery Funding to create a show for the KKNK festival, titled *Babbelagtig*[14]*.* The show was classified as 'clown theatre' since the director[15] and two of the performers were trained by clown teachers Giovanni Fuscetti and Phillipe Gaulier. The funding proposal was based on the same performance concept as *Slava's Snowshow* (refer to discussion later on in this Chapter), in that it would similarly consist of a sequence of clown entrées performed in succession with a connecting theme, that it would rely on 'clown principles', and that it would be staged in a theatre. The show went on to receive numerous awards and was well attended (mostly sold-out shows in large venues). The performances themselves seemed to evoke laughter from the audience throughout. I highlight this to remind the reader that this analysis does not serve to offer my opinion of the show *Babbelagtig* from an audience's perspective, or an assessment of whether the show should be perceived as successful clowning/theatre or not. Rather, my aim is to offer a reflection on my experience from *within* the process, from my perspective as performer and theatre-maker?.

We devised and rehearsed *Babbelagtig* in a four-week period. During the first two weeks, the process emulated a clown training class: most of the time was dedicated to playing games and engaging in exercises that would provoke spontaneous play amongst performers, drawing on exercises that derived from contemporary clown teachers such as Fusetti, Wright and Gaulier. The director, coming from the tradition of Giovanni Fuscetti, did not prioritise laughter as a measure of success (above all), but all the games foregrounded spontaneity and failure. We played games like *Grandmother's Footsteps*[16] and were encouraged to focus on the pleasure of the game in order to explore

[14] There is no direct translation of the name *Babbelagtig*; in Afrikaans to 'babbel' means to talk too much and without sense (nonsensical babbling). Therefore, Babbelagtig could be translated as 'babbling-like'.
[15] Jenine Collocott is the artistic director of "Contagious Theatre", an established physical theatre company that focuses on visual storytelling, physical theatre and mask work. Collocot studied clowning and various other forms at Helikos International with Giovanni Fusetti and graduated in 2012.
[16] A game where one player is 'it' (playing Grandma) on one side of the room with his/her back towards the other players. The aim is for the other players to move from the opposite side of the room towards 'Grandma' while her back is turned and until she shouts 'Grandmother's Footsteps'. When the player playing grandma turns around, the other players need to stand as still as possible. If Grandma catches a player moving, they are immediately eliminated from the game.

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relationships, discover hierarchical dynamics and become aware of the roles or status we enjoyed playing in the ensemble.

In a game of *Grandmother's Footsteps*, for example, we soon discovered that it was the most 'fun' and brought the most overall pleasure when an extremely bossy and mean clown would nominate himself to play 'grandma' and spend the entire game cheating by allowing his best 'friends' to win. The bossy clown would also repeatedly send two clowns to the back even when they were playing perfectly according to the rules, denying the other players the opportunity to play 'grandma'. In this instance, one clown took over the play and made the decisions and yet it seemed to be a dynamic to which we kept returning since it provided an exciting "dangerous" frame that often led to intensely suprising and exciting responses from the players. *Grandmother's Footsteps,* therefore, became a frame for an alternate world that encapsulated structures of authority, transgression and punishment.

During the devising process, the director also initiated other games with smaller groups where the rest of the company became a mock audience. The director played the role of provocateur, even though she did not assume a high-status/brutal persona such as the one Gaulier performs. In one exercise, for example, she provided each clown with a unique wrapped gift. The task was to open the gift in front of the audience and apply clown principles of "wrongness" (failure/stupidity/pleasure), providing the student with multiple opportunities to play and display wrongness.

Performers responded to the gift by for instance, performing the 'wrong' emotion when receiving the gift. A performer may, for example, open their gift and give a look to suggest they are unimpressed and hand it back to the director, or open the gift and show that they feel undeserving of their gift, the and for example try and return a gift by wrapping one of their shoes in the paper to to the director as a gift in return. In this way, the game revolved around the clown's 'wrongness' in an emotional social exchange (giving and receiving a gifts) and not necessarily about the gift or object itself. Other performers would however focus on the gift itself to provoke wrongessand and for example, open a box of crayons only to start eating them like a packet of crisps. In other words, Davison's categories, such the "object behaving wrongly" or an "object made from the wrong material" (2015:114–115) can be used to analyse the game's principles. The gift, how it was received and what was inside offered multiple spontaneous provocations, inviting the clown performer to make instant decisions on how to respond in relation to the audience, the provider of the gift and the gift itself *during* performance.

Between the first two weeks of what we referred to as the devising process, and the last two weeks which we referred to as rehearsals, there was a two-month break. During this time the director selected and organised the material (based on her viewing of the video-recorded exercises generated during the devising process) into a sequence of entrées that she perceived as having the most potential

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to create a repeatable performance. The director 'authored' this 'script' in collaboration with an award-winning lighting and set designer who was experienced with working in theatre but with no previous experience or understanding of clowning principles.

I am standing on stage, behind the closed curtain that separates me from the massive auditorium of the theatre. There are 10 minutes left before doors open to signal the start of the show. I check each of my nine props carefully and go through the action-script in my head. Opening scene – move out, walk over, come out from behind, fetch the whistle and airplane ribbon, make plane, move back, move paraventi[17]*. Next: Balloon scene – fetch balloon, watch for the signal, come on stage, wait until the balloon is popped, move to the back of the paraventi. I feel nervous. It is the opening show. We have had two technical rehearsals in the space, but the venue still feels foreign, gigantic, overwhelming.*

There are seven hundred people taking their seats in the auditorium in front of the curtain. The technical signal arrives. The show begins. It goes smoothly. I remember my complicated sequence of events. But I am surprised at how fast it feels – no time to breathe, to stop, to watch, to wonder. At some point I look at the audience and although I can hear their responses, their laughter, they feel removed from where I am standing on the stage, invisible, somewhere far away stuck inside a pool of darkness.

Towards the end of the show – in a blackout that signals a turnaround scene where we are supposed to move the paraventi as fast and effectively as possible – I find myself struggling to locate the small strips of green tape on the floor. They mark the place where I am supposed to position the paraventi to create a horse stable from which two performers enacting jockeys on feather-duster horses can enter. I become increasingly baffled, looking for the strips. Eventually I find them, position the paraventi and run off; but moments later a co-actress calls me from the stage, where she has just realised that I had placed my paraventi on her strips. I run back to try and move my paraventi to restore order but delay the blackout. Eventually I find my strips and move the paraventi to the correct predetermined spot, but not without noticing how the energy has dropped in the space. I leave the stage feeling frustrated and embarrassed, not looking forward to the 'shouting to' I will inevitably receive from the co-actress who I 'put in the shit'.

[17] A paraventi is a movable frame on wheels that acts as a backdrop and a concealing device.

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Figure 6: Klara van Wyk as the clown persona 'Agi', eating a banana. In the background are Sir Quintial and Gomi, KKNK 2017. (Photo courtesty of Nardus Engelbrecht Photography)

The resulting 'script' of *Babbelagtig* fulfilled many of the criteria implicit in the funding proposal that the company had submitted the previous year: it contained an hour's worth of preconceived play where the entire company (technicians, designers, performers, directors) had clearly defined roles; it worked with the technical and spatial requirements of the venue in which it would be performed, and; it gave the cast of players equal performance time and emphasis on stage.

The director's decision to provide equal stage time for the performers appeared to be motivated by a vision to prioritise ensemble playing. This was perceived as being best demonstrated by creating self-contained *entrées* of ten to fifteen minutes, involving all seven performers or repeatedly rotating performers in groups of three or four performers at a time[18]. The idea was that this prevented a character progression or relationship from evolving into a plot dependent on linear progression. In some cases, performers were completely disengaged from material they had originated as it was given over to another performer to ensure that the stage-time was divided evenly. The performer who was given this material then practiced or rehearsed a visual 'script' as it was observed from recordings that had been made during the devising process and learnt the actions or sequence of events.

The equal division of stage time prior to performance, and repeatedly across all performances, was in stark contrast to the training and rehearsal processes of clowning, where the clown performers were permitted, even encouraged, to disrupt the apparent rhythm and timing of a scenes and take over the game in the moment of play if it brought laughter and pleasure, as I discussed above in relation to our playing of *Grandmother's Footsteps*.

[18] Babbelagtig received two theatre awards for the 'best ensemble'.

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A clown persona arrives at the 'park' – he moves towards a 'bench' which is surrounded by 'trees', with the 'sounds' of 'birds chirping' and 'children playing' in the background. The clown performer is eating a sandwich, and after making himself comfortable on the bench, he initiates a game with the audience. He mimics the sound of aggressive ducks attacking him to steal his sandwich. With a gesture, he invites the audience to continue the quacking sounds. The more he berates the 'ducks' or shouts at them to "shut it" so he can eat in peace, the more they (the audience) quack. The interaction ends with the clown throwing large pieces of bread at the 'ducks', an action that incites laughter and joyful responses from audience members, especially children.

In one performance, the children enjoy the game so much they do not stop quacking.

There is a strict action-script determining the sequence and timing of events, enforced by rehearsed lighting and sound cues. The clown-performer feels impelled to move to his next cue, ignoring the audience's call to action and invitations for play. Despite the clown's attempts to move the action forward, the audience's insistence at continuing the game results in a disruption of the following scene. The clown's lack of agency is exposed. The freedom he demonstrated in throwing pieces of bread agressively into the auditorium is revealed to be an illusion, his 'liberated' behaviour suddenly authored and controlled.

Figure 7: Six of the seven clown performers in Babbelagtig creating the image of a plane. (Photo courtesy of Nardus Engelbrecht Photography)

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My experience in *Babbelagtig* highlighted an uncomfortable split between a type of performance envisioned for the stage and a type of performance which was initiated and experienced during the devising process. For me, the experience raised significant questions regarding authorship and agency, especially in instances where the clown performer had been separated from the material they originated. The elements of experimentation, risk, interruption and failure that were prioritised during the devising-process were not integrated into the follow-on sessions, but were suddenly replaced by prescribed directives of blocking, timing, prop handling, role-playing and overall execution as dictated by the choices of a single author-director.

During these sessions, attention was focused on creating visually pleasing images (from the director's outsider perspective) and integrating new technical elements – including musical cues, props, costumes, décor, a smoke machine and a new manoeuvrable backdrop, all of which had been selected and created by the director and designer in the interim between sessions. This meant that the greatest percentage of time was allocated to working with elements external to the clown's initial phase of play and improvisation.

A description of rehearsals offered by Bailes, as a "committed and finite space/time in which the attempt to make performative material is intrinsically bound up with the business of accident and mistakes which will eventually, through repetition, and refinement, be eliminated from the material" (2011:111), is appropriate for this part of the process. When the cast arrived back for the last two-week period of rehearsals, it felt as though the atmosphere had changed dramatically. In contrast to the devising process, where notions of exposure, vulnerability and spontaneous anarchic play had been encouraged, the rehearsals seemed to be driven by radically different expectations.

To understand the implications of this normalised theatre practice of 'rehearsal' for the clown, it is useful to draw on etymology. In British English, 'practise' is a verb and 'practice' is a noun. In American English, practice tends to be used for both the noun and verb form. Spelling aside, the idea of practice incorporates both senses of the word, which have subtle nuances to consider in relation to the discussion on repetition and refinement. Practise as a 'doing', an action ('I practiced throwing the ball in the air') relates to the repeated execution or purposeful carrying out of a defined task; practice as a 'noun', a unit ('The practice of clowning requires attention to audience laughter') relates to the notion of observing or advising on the teachings or rules of a profession. It is then possible to say that within the practice of clowning there are many practices, and a critical point of consideration for the clown in theatre is the dynamic relationship between these, and how, by what means, and by whom this relationship gets maintained.

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The discussion so far has considered three statements put forward by Lecoq as a way to find connections between disparate notions of the clown in theatre that contemporary practitioners have inherited and applied, and that give rise to complexities when shifted from the workshop to the stage environment. The findings seem to confirm the warning issued by McManus over a decade ago that:

> Different genres of performance frequently adopt the external signs of clown characters, their makeup and costume and traditional relationships but idealize their existence. In such cases, the characters are not really clowns. They are simply dancers or actors who look superficially like clowns (McManus, 2003:35).

Theatre as Place

In *Theatricality as a Medium* (2004), Samuel Weber alerts us to the fact that theatre and theory possess the same etymological root in the Greek word 'thea' which connotes "a place from which to observe or see" (2004:3). He clarifies the manner in which the 'privileging of sight' over the other senses illustrates an attempt by the viewer to "secure a position", remaining "at a distance" from the object in order to derive meaning from what is being seen (2004:3). Thus, for Weber, this is the first characteristic of a theatre: "the events it depicts are not indifferent to their placement" (2004:4).

Weber's critical observations illuminate how 'theatre' is a medium for negotiating distance and proximity: it requires a separation between performer and viewer, a sense of safety and security, and a simultaneous sharing of spatio-temporal conditions, a sense of risk and challenge. The audience is at once present in, and removed and absent from, the performance. The issue of 'safety' or 'security' in theatre is emphasised by other theorists such as Gareth White (2013). A social contract, code of conduct or agreement of some sort (whether implicit or explicit) must be in place for a 'successful' exchange to take place. And this code of conduct manages the levels of risk and safety, unpredictability and already known variables, for all participants in the exchange.

In Chapter Two I approached the workshop as a specific place dedicated to the teaching of clown principles as arranged and negotiated by the teacher or pedagogue. I argued that the aims of the workshop potentially transcend the notion of a self-contained school that teaches clowning – that is, teaches performers how to incite laughter; but is rather a live practice (consisting of play and performance) through which both viewer and performer are inducted into a particular performative relationship. This relationship is established with the aim of producing laughter and *complicité* (pleasure in performance and spectatorship), and when doing so, is effective in producing clowning.

I also argued that the pedagogue, through active and constant interaction, disruption, punishment and negotiation inhabits both the inside and the outside of performance or the game, often also transcending spatial boundaries between the audience and performer. The sense of 'safety' in the

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'sharing of spatio-temporal conditions' is thus managed largely by the pedagogue or provocateur. This performance training results in audiences and practitioners, some of them who are "in the know" and others who are left "in the dark", who need to come to understand the philosophy and particularity of laughter-centric clowning, a process I shared through the anecdote of my first day at Gaulier.

The pedagogue, in the process of transferring the philosophy of theatre, pins hopes of a 'correct way' of play or audience-performer engagement on the student-clown. In the workshop/training environment, the clown pedagogue prioritises the spectator's status and enjoyment (as reflected in laughter) and empowers spectators by allowing them free reign to insult or tease the clown performer, and often to directly determine the performative outcome. Gaulier purposefully creates danger and risk for the student-performer by foregrounding the persistent threat of failure. What happens then in the theatre where there is no provocateur to actively 'tutor' the audience in embracing their agency, and understanding the contract of engagement governing "the (right) way of seeing"? Who, or what, might fulfil this role that seems essential to the practice?

McAuley's comprehensive study, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in The Theatre* (2000), offers a significant contribution to the perspective that theatres, as architectural and geographic spaces, predetermine the boundaries and limits of their operations as well as prescribe, in concrete terms, the type of social engagement that is to take place. To outline the emergence and purpose of the theatre building, McCauley makes reference to *Bharata's*[19] account of the origin's of theatre in which the "enemies of the gods, angered at the portrayal in the play, disrupted the proceedings by terrorizing the actors, thus making them unable to speak, move or remember their lines." Constructing a stable, [enclosed] theatre building was the solution offered "to protect the performance from disruption and to provide a space for concentration and focus on the part of the performers and spectators" (2000:36).

Situated as 'historical landmarks' located near central business districts or cultural hubs, McCauley observes that the location of a theatre does not ultimately determine accessibility, but "nevertheless makes some kind of statement about who is expected and encouraged to participate and who might feel discouraged from attempting to do so" (2000:45). McAuley highlights how the theatrical event is linked to the operation of power by the design of the building:

> The building itself is one way in which control is exercised: a massively monumental theatre, dominating the surrounding urban space may make a strong statement about glamour, affluence, the desirability of access, and so on, but to the individual theatregoer the experience of climbing a

[19] Bharata Muni authored the Natyasastra an extensive text written in Sanskrit that dates to somewhere between 200 BC and AD 200.

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> huge flight of steps or of entering a building through a massive doorway may be rather a reminder of the individual's lack of power (McAuley, 2000:52).

The availability and cost of tickets (or other tokens that permit access) also become a form of control over the operations of the event.

Levels of risk and unpredictability in the exchange between spectator and performer/performance may then be negotiated through other means: promotional material that delineates a designated time of arrival and duration of engagement, and a designated venue; the spatial arrangement that is predetermined; a prior knowledge of shared themes and vocabulary; or a literary guide (invitation or programme note that details the content, style and players that will be present). A director may assume the role of judging distance, risk, focal points and interactions in the process of rehearsal; in which case they may pin most of their hopes on the architectural, literary, conventional and cultural signposts of theatre, of which the performer is just one. Unlike props, set pieces and other scenic devices, however, the performer has agency – and needs to be disciplined and inducted to ensure they do not derail the singular vision the director. The performers become representative of the singular vision that the audience may have of the performance.

Descriptions given by contemporary theatre critics, theorists and historians tend to emphasise the passive role taken by many contemporary theatre audiences, suggesting that there is an imbalance in the contract which does not permit audience contribution, risk and unpredictability to enter the exchange. Weber uses the metaphor of the "prisoners in Plato's cave" to explain this condition in contemporary theatre spectators. He argues that if Plato's cave is not an example of a "particular kind of theatre" it is a "particular interpretation of theatre", and the prisoners are spectators of a "very distinct kind":

> [They] are not merely fixed in place but riveted to their posts. They are 'prisoners' although – and this is what makes the scene so modern in many ways – they are prisoners unaware of their imprisonment. They do not know where they are, and hence they do not know how and who they are (Weber, 2004:4).

In Weber's use of the Platonic cave metaphor to discuss a particular interpretation of theatre, he argues that the cave is defined by its "vacuity" – a "hollow space beneath the earth" that is "profound, interior and yet precisely not self-contained" (2004:5). Weber's point is seminal in that it foregrounds theatrical practice as a perpetual negotiation between wanting to control and prioritise its own self-containment (or illusion thereof) – relating to Bharata's story – and at the same time demonstrating its equal dependence on the exchange. The metaphoric cave is always open to the "outside it excludes". McCauley offers a similar reminder that the relationship to power is "rather ambivalent [...] in that the activity theatres represent is *both desired and feared by power*, both supported and heavily

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policed and controlled" (2000:52, emphasis added). The dynamic configuration of forces (permissions/controls/authorities/liberations) in theatre is affirmed by Bailes:

> It helps to think about theatre as [...] a perceived (rather than given) system of production, distribution, and exchange, for if nothing else, this communal, fluid sense, reminds us of its proximity to other systems of value and exchange, and, equally, of the possibility for change within that system (Bailes, 2011:13–14).

Using these interpretations of theatre as a frame, the next section will broaden the discussion of 'clown-theatre' as it was initiated by my experiences as a clown-performer in a local context, to include observations and analyses of productions formally recognised as 'clown-theatre' by international practitioners. As in the previous discussion, the three statements made by Lecoq – concerning duration, failure/laughter and having something to say – provide the conceptual framework from which these productions and practises will be analysed.

Hilda and the Spectrum (2017)

Hilda and the Spectrum is a self-proclaimed 'clown show' that I viewed in November 2017 at *The Glory* in London. Both performers, Elf Lyons and Ryan Lane, are Gaulier graduates and the show is advertised as 'part clown, part autobiography' on the Glory Theatre's Booking Page. Once I had seen the show, it was clear that the 'part autobiography' description was intended as a joke that could only be accurate in so far as Elf Lyons might share 'having an allotment' with her character Mr. X (Mr. X describes himself as a 94-year-old sport trainer made mostly out of clay). As I walked out of the venue, I asked myself whether the show, lasting for almost an hour, performed in a space organised as a proscenium arch theatre, and created by two Gaulier graduates experienced in clowning, with a narrative involving two characters, could be described as 'clown-theatre'.

The show unquestionably involves two highly skilled performers demonstrating effective clowning techniques as taught by Gaulier and discussed at the end of Chapter Two, particularly demonstrating use of the 'flop' and acute awareness of audience appreciation. I later learned, on reading an interview, that the premise of the show was born at *Ecole Philippe Gaulier* during one of his clowning classes. According to Lyons, as expressed in a radio interview, the show is a good example of work that reflects Gaulier's philosophy:

> If anyone is intrigued by what Gaulier teaches you, *Hilda and the Spectrum* is quite a good insight into it because we did it together Ryan and I, and Phillipe watched it and went *adopts French accent again* 'Ah! 10 out of 10! You are good when you are dressed as a man, Elf!' (Lyons, cited in Head, 2017).

On the evening that I viewed the performance, Mr. X (Elf Lyons) and Hilda (Ryan Lane) were selling tickets for the show outside the auditorium and their success as clown performers was visible from

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their first interactions with the public, validated by roars of laughter. The show starts onstage and relies heavily on dialogue between the characters which provides information about their history and relationship: Hilda is from East Berlin and currently the tour guide of "London's Literary Walking Tour"; and Mr X is a 94-year-old mysterious man made from clay. These intricate character descriptions and detailed back stories created a sense of expectation for me as an audience member, and I sensed that a development of narrative would play an important role in the structure of the show.

After about fifteen minutes, however, I experienced the narrative disintegrating and becoming more confusing and nonsensical. It was clear to me, as an audience member – but also a practitioner with experience in clown training and performance – that the performers' use of *the 'flop'* and their responsiveness to the audience, were a priority, and that their quest lay in eliciting laughter, above all else. My interpretation of their motivation as performers was confirmed later when I read an interview with Lyons by Tom Innis in the *Voice Magazine* where she explains: "[W]hen I am on stage all I focus on is creating laughter, [it] is the only thing I pay attention to, and work out how to elicit it from the audience" (Lyons cited in Innis, 2017).

This emphasis on audience response is further supported by Lyons in a radio interview:

> All comedy totally relies on improvisation because if the audience don't like it, you've got to change, got to do something else. If you're doing clown and the audience don't like it, if you're in the 'flop', you've got to come up with a brand-new idea, even if it's the most stupid idea in the world, you've got to do something different (Lyons cited in Head, 2017).

This statement directly mirrors Gaulier's philosophy on laughter: "Where is my clown? He is born in laughter, lives near laughter and dies beside laughter" (2007:277). This strategy, however, also, makes a significant assumption in treating the audience as a hegemonic group: often how much an audience 'likes something' is equated directly with how much laughter the performer *hears*. The evening I watched, for example, there was a group of five or six spectators sitting near the front of the stage laughing particularly loudly, and after a while it felt as though the performers were responding directly to them, and the performance thereby, at times felt dictated by their laughter rather than taking into consideration the silence, for example, from other groups.

This reminded me of something I observed in Gaulier's workshops: student-spectators would often – as might be expected from a group who had worked together for two years – create a strong bond through 'inside jokes' that would elicit laughter from those already 'in the know'. A student-performer might, for example, through a process of trial and error and Gaulier's interruption, discover a catalyst that elicits laughter from a workshop audience; two weeks later, the student-performer, in a moment of desperation, may recall that catalyst and repeat it. Arguably, if the context was recognised by the audience, they would laugh once again, even if at the clown's desperate attempt to try the same

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'stupid' trick again or simply remembering the pleasure from the previous performance. However, the opposite effect could also be created and leave an audience feeling excluded and disengaged from the action if they were ignorant of its original context.

In the case of the clowning workshop that I participated in at Gaulier, I felt this exclusion happen regularly since I was one of the only new participants in the course. I would often find that I did not understand something the group clearly recognised as an action or idea that was performed before from within the multiple performances viewed by the large group of student-performers who had come to know each other intimately and had built up a history of experiences that they could draw from.

In the particular performance of *Hilda and the Spectrum* that I watched, the actors' responded to the laughter and silence of the audience – and the generation of new material, therefore, in performance – meant that the expectations of narrative set up at the beginning was continually compromised and adapted. Towards the end of the show, it seemed to me that the references to character history and narrative had been dismissed entirely.

The performers' interactions were based on principles of *the 'flop'*: and so, different strategies were employed to incite laughter from the audience, including 'corpsing[20]' (laughing out of character at their own material) or sharing their 'bafflement'[21] by declaring that: 'they had no idea what is going on' and breaking out of 'character' (the voice of Mr X) and speaking about being ill-prepared. For the most part, these techniques *did* incite more laughter and would therefore be perceived, in line with the training received, as 'successful clowning'. But it also led to my overall experience of the performance as an unstructured clown training class with no promise that it was 'going anywhere'. An explanation by Lyons of their process supports my sense of the performance:

> With Ryan our work is based on playing games with each other – and through playing games in our characters we create the scenes. In some ways *the narrative doesn't matter* – it is our silliness and relationship that does (Lyons cited in Moody 2017, emphasis added).

Since the narrative 'doesn't matter', it seems that the show could have ended anywhere after fifteen minutes and the clowning would have still been appreciated. I surmise that when they performed the 'skit'/show for Gaulier, whose drumsticks were in control of the duration of the performance, it would not have gone on for much longer than ten or maybe fifteen minutes at most. Based on my own

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[20] 'Corpsing' is when a performer laughs in performance, not in character, but because they have found their actions or behaviour funny.
[21] A term often used by John Wright to indicate the clown student's display of displacement or confusion.

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experience of his teaching practice, he would have certainly stopped their clowning as soon as the audience laughter dissipated.

My questions about this performance of *Hilda and the Spectrum* highlighted a central concern in my research on clown theatre. Is clowning, as suggested by Lecoq and traditionally understood by many, limited to existing as a short form, more applicable to *entreés* only? Or, is it possible to identify elements that were absent but that could be employed by a practitioner to extend and sustain a spectator's engagement for up to an hour? Has any Gaulier student ever kept going up to an hour in a class/workshop or even auto-course performance? Most importantly, would imposing these elements (such as narrative and character development) on the performance pose an overpowering threat to the clown and their dependence on spontaneous play and audience laughter? Do theatregoers expect a performance in a theatre to feel like it is *going somewhere*, saying something *meaningful,* or is it possible to teach the audience to appreciate clowning as its own medium with its own implicit rules and principles that might require a different duration and interaction even if it is performed in a theatre?

As historical texts demonstrate, it is not impossible for a sequence of clown *entrées* to be sustained for an hour without a complex dramatic narrative. Grock (1880–1959), arguably the most successful clown in history, was able to sustain his performances for up to an hour. The Fratellini Brothers, according to Towsen, "raised clowning to the level of an art" in the minds of the French public and Towsen proposes that their performances became more subtle and intricate when they moved from circuses to the Music halls, but always tended towards conventional clowning in which physical gags, acrobatics and musical skills were prioritised (1976:233).

The intention of Lyons and Lane to prioritise the clown elements through *the 'flop'*, and the relationship and silliness of the Auguste/Whiteface relationship, was similar to that of the devising process of *Tweespalt* (discussed earlier in this chapter) and further elucidates an understanding of stretching and adapting clown entrées to an hour show in a theatre. Not unlike *Hilda and the Spectrum*, our aim was to focus on contemporary clowning principles and the clown's relationships with the audience – paying little heed to dramatic elements. In our experience, the context and venue in which we performed, supported the employment of the short form. However, the presentation of the typical 'short form' within a theatre context informed by traditions and conventions of performance duration in direct relation to the cost of tickets – seemed inappropriate. It was perhaps awareness of this expectation that motivated Lyons and Lane to present a substantially longer performance incorporating dialogue, characterisation and the hint of narrative.

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500 Clown

Leslie Buxbaum Danzig, practitioner, director and co-founder of the company *500 Clown Theatre,* offers descriptions of both the 'clown' and 'theatre' that indicate the potential tensions and expectations that arise in clown-theatre:

> Clown offers a direct and immediate relationship with the audience, the privileging of spontaneous play over predetermined and complex narratives, and the unique presence of an individual performer as opposed to that of a fictional character. Theater offers, among other things, dramatic structures to sustain full-length productions and numerous conventions, which, though culturally specific, address fictional coherence, role of the audience, and repeatability of the event (Danzig, 2007:3).

Danzig's definition underlines the tensions and expectations that surround both clown and theatre, pointing to the discrepancy that may arise between 'spontaneous play' and 'predetermined or complex narratives' already alluded to earlier in this chapter. From the examples offered, it is possible to surmise that practitioners specialising in clowning within theatre have addressed this tension in one of two ways: 1) omit narrative and characterisation to focus on clown entrées that are connected thematically (as demonstrated in *Tweespalt* and *Babbelagtig*); 2) interweave elements of narrative and characterisation sporadically between their spontaneous play (as demonstrated in *Hilda and the Spectrum)*. In both cases an irreconcilable binary between clown and theatre has been maintained which arguably does not contribute to the innovative practice of contemporary clowning.

Danzig observes that although "clown and theatre each bring its own set of practices to the relationship", it is when the two come into contact that "conventions of both forms are put into play in surprising ways" (2007:19). She thus seems to offer a workable perspective on how 'clowning' and 'theatre' may be integrated to the benefit of both practices. An investigation of the clown theatre company *500 Clown*, and how they work to arrive at this complementary relationship between clown and theatre will follow.

Danzig's Dissertation*, Chicago's 500 Clown Theatre: Physical Action, Impulse and Narrative in Play* (2007), is arguably one of the most formal investigations of the term 'clown theatre' to date, aiming "to provoke further investigation and definition of this hybrid theatrical form" through an articulation of *500 Clown Theatre*'s practice (2007:3). Danzig and her partner, also a performer in the company, received their contemporary clown training from Jacques Lecoq and Phillipe Gaulier, contributing to their shared philosophy on clown performance (2007).

For Danzig, clown-theatre points to a dynamic performance arriving "not from a facile and complementary give and take of elements and conventions, but rather from tensions inherent in the interaction between clown and theatre" (2007:3). She delineates her understanding of the term 'clown

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theatre' by distinguishing it from 'Dramatic Theatre' which is "a literary structure that, per Lehmann, relies on linearity, suspense, rises and fall of action, character development and perhaps most importantly a totality of a fictional world" (2007:146). Clown-theatre, Danzig observes, "maintains a goal of dramatic narrative but crafts that narrative through the *disruptive force of presence*'' (2007:146, emphasis added).

According to Danzig, to achieve this interplay, *500 Clown Theatre* productions are reliant on a 'source-text' which is referenced in their titles: *500 Clown Macbeth* (2000–2007) and *500 Clown Frankenstein* (2003–2007). The narrative of this source-text acts as a context, providing the performers and audience with a shared outline from which to devise action and repeatable-play (for performers) and interpret the play (for the audience). Danzig explains how the company simultaneously diverges from the source-text, deconstructing it in the process of exploration, in order to build a 'new' narrative (2007:147). The text, therefore, serves the purpose of framing each production by creating an expectation, an authoritative frame or imaginative idea of how the narrative should play out, whilst also providing a shared context that provides the clown performers with the opportunity to play against the conventions imposed by the text establishing the Whiteface-Auguste dynamic.

To achieve a dialogue between the text and the clown performers, Danzig argues that it is important for the company to choose "popular and/or classic text[s]" with which most audience members are at least familiar, so that the imagined version of the play acts as a continual backdrop, providing the clown performers (and audience) with an imaginary frame to disrupt (2007:147). She adds that: "Without a well-known source text, there would be no expectations or at least not enough to sustain a full-length performance of disruptive play" (2007:148). Danzig explains that when the performance deviates too far from the original narrative and thematic links become unclear – that is, the spontaneous play moves too far away from the source structure – the clowning aspects may prove to be entertaining, but the quality of the theatre experience becomes compromised:

> [T]he first four incarnations of *500 Clown Frankenstein* failed to achieve a clear through-line and so the play of the clowns was fairly abstract. Though perhaps entertaining, the clowns' attention to the present moment did not create disruptions because there was no through-line to be disrupted. The production as a whole therefore lacked tension and drama, and was often meandering, unanchored and at its worst, indulgent (Danzig, 2007:151).

Danzig's observation is critical in relation to the current discussion: it points directly to common perceptions of the 'theatrical experience' as needing to fulfil the precondition of sustaining a 'full-length performance'; as well as satisfying the precondition of a dramatic structure without which, Danzig explains, the clown performer's play becomes "meandering, unanchored, and its worst, indulgent" (2007:151). Although Danzig's perception of 'Clown-Theatre' acknowledges the implicit

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tensions within the attempt to merge clowning and theatre practice, the vocabulary she employs still seems to reflect generalised applications. Danzig shares the need to "redefine or reimagine clown" by "losing the thick make up that masks honesty, truth, and vulnerability" (2007:63). In another instance, Danzig explains that her partner has "negative associations" with clown which "stem from the obvious fakeness of the clown" such as "the sad alcoholic, who pretends to be happy" (2007:63–64).

Danzig often quotes Gaulier - as former teacher – to support her understanding of the clown's purpose. It is therefore interesting to note that Gaulier, in contrast to the vehement search for 'truth', embraces theatre as a 'lie' and a game writing that: "It is better to enjoy pretending than to be water. So many patients are locked up in a mental hospital because they think they are Napoleon" (2007:184). This is particularly apparent in Gaulier's use of costumes; evident in the way in which he often proposes the use of costumes that contradict a student's observed personality or physical appearance, thereby emphasising the 'fakeness' or pretence of the role they are trying to embody. Gaulier explains:

> The Game allows things which are unbelievable and marvellous, not feelings. Enjoy pretending to feel, without feeling. The pleasure of lying will give your lies the appearance of truth. You will be believed. Theatre lives off this 'lying truth'. Why don't you feel anything? To liberate the joy of pretending, so you will not be soiled by truth [...] The truth kills the joy of imagining (Gaulier, 2007:190).

Slava's Snowshow (2016)

Slava's Snowshow (Snowshow) is considered the best-known and most commercially successful 'clown show' of recent times. *Snowshow* debuted in 1993 and has run in theatres for over 25 years. In 2009, the show received a Tony nomination for the Best Special Theatrical Event, as well as countless other global awards. I attended the show in Johannesburg in August 2016.

Snowshow is produced and partly directed by Vyacheslav Ivanovic Polunin (1950–present), popularly known as Slava Polunin. In 1968, Polunin launched a troupe *Licidei,* that created five hugely successful shows and ended in a dramatic funeral procession in the early 1990s marching through the streets of Leningrad. *Snowshow* was produced and created in collaboration with Viktor Kramer and it is referred to as 'clown-theatre' by theorists such as Louise Peacock (2009), as well as in marketing material, and by Polunin himself in an interview with LeBank and Bridel (2015). *Snowshow's* official website describes the show as "drama combined with laughter", a "theatrical experience" that is "tragic" and "poetic" or "tragi-comical" and refers to the performers as "circus clowns" and "characters". Despite his use of the term 'clown-theatre', Polunin makes it explicit that the marriage between clowning and a traditional understanding of 'theatre' is not a harmonious one:

> I want to clarify something. If we talk about 'the theater of clowning', the emphasis, for me, is on the word 'clown'. I'm cautious about the word 'theater.' In fact, clowns cannot abide by 'normal'

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> theatrical principles, not at all. Principles that guide actors are anti-intuitive to clowns. My troupe and I transformed these 'normal' stage principles. We created our own system (Polunin, cited in LeBank & Bridel, 2015:52, emphasis added).

Polunin also finds little interest in what he describes as 'modern dramatic theatre' (Kazmina, 2012) responding in an interview that 'there is little joy' in it: "That's why I try to visit it as seldom as possible. That kind of acting does not possess you; it doesn't flow over the footlights" (Polunin, in Kazima, 2012). On the other hand, Polunin *does* indicate a desire to merge clowning and theatre principles, pointing to notions of character, tragedy, drama and meaning:

> I wanted to dive inside tragicomedy, to measure the extent to which one can fuse drama with laughter […] in this Gogol & Beckett-like language and reunite in my character, both the epic and lyrical, tenderness and passion, wisdom and naïveness (Slava official website, 2019).

Snowshow consists of several clown *entrées*, gags and spectacular visual images, each lasting between two and ten minutes in duration, connected thematically and stylistically, but with no 'forced narrative' (Arratoon cited in Davison, 2013:116). In descriptions of his clown philosophy and teaching methods, Polunin claims to prioritise spontaneity above all:

> Clown is the most spontaneous creature on Earth. When you start restraining his freedom, he loses himself and whimpers like a child. [...] Clowns are very special, and they need a special treatment. Like the lunatics or, I don't know, like the drunkards or dogs. Freedom is everything to the clown (Polunin cited in Kazmina 2012).

Polunin distinguishes clowning from acting by arguing that: "You cannot be a smart clown", adding further that, "[a]s soon as the public sees your mind in your eyes, you become an actor" (Polunin in LeBank & Bridel 2015:52).

When I viewed the show in Johannesburg in 2016, as an audience member as well as a practitioner who had already embarked on this study, it was easy to identify the themes of freedom and imagination, to recognise the spectacles evoking mystery and surprise, and admire the awe-inspiring colours and imagery encapsulating childlike wonder. I wondered, however, about Polunin's emphasis on freedom and spontaneity in practice. I found it difficult to believe that the current version of the show, (and what I imagined to be the rehearsal process), could offer the performers the same creative agency that Polunin had when he first created his clown character, *Assisi*, the first inspiration for the show. What appeared most evident to me was the precision of visual images, spectacular visual effects, impressive manipulation of objects and well-executed mime sequences. I could identify the *themes* of freedom and playfulness that the illusory world created on stage encapsulated through sensate, image-based entrées, but there appeared little to no sign of *spontaneous* disruption or play. In his own analysis of contemporary reviews of the show, Davison recognises how the playfulness intrinsic to the show might not carry the same 'revolutionary potential' for an audience member 25 years later.

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Most of the discussions about, and reviews of, *Snowshow* centre on its value and meaning. Arretoon writes that "the show is purely about entertainment and no forced narrative or worthy message" (Arretoon in Davison, 2013:116). A statement that offers a kernel of insight into the nature of clown-theatre: the proposition that the show is about entertainment, rather than being entertaining, reveals a recognition, even if unconscious, of the integral relationship between form and content in a performance such as *Snowshow.* It may not be possible to say precisely what the show is about, but it is evident through what medium it communicates. In his discussion of *Snowshow,* and in response to Polunin's statement that the language employed in the show is 'Beckettian', Davison observes that "[i]f this is Beckettian, then it is Beckett without ideas" (2013:116).

Louise Peacock, author of *Serious Play: Modern Clown Performance* (2009), offers a potential solution to this binary by interpreting a review of the show offered by critic Nightingale, in which he explains that he "laughed a little at his St Sebastian parody and rather more at the episode in which he mistakes his hand for a groping stranger's Abut never a lot" (2009:84). For Peacock, Nightingale's response demonstrates a misunderstanding of the nature of the clowning and she argues that he "rather misses the point in his analysis" (2009:84). She distinguishes, instead, between two types of clowning:

> Nightingale has clearly come to the theatre expecting circus clowning and instead he gets existential clowning, which encourages the audience to evaluate their approach to life rather than just laughing at the clown on stage (Peacock, 2009:84).

Nightingale's comment is representative of a common split; it sheds light on a potentially ineffective value judgement between "just laughter" and "entertainment" and what is often proposed as its opposite, "meaningfulness" or "existential/poetic/philosophical" clowning. In other words, the suggestion is that theatre that evokes laughter can only be categorized as entertainment and is diametrically opposed to serious, meaningful or politicised theatre.

The statement is useful in raising possible distinctions about the *purposes* of laughter, which may differ from one performance to the next, or even from one moment in the same performance to another. Chapter Two investigated the purpose of laughter as a teaching tool to assist in co-authoring play with an audience, or as a marker for the success of a student-clown's performance. In that way the laughter evoked is usually aimed at the gag or disruption that Bailes describes as "pure assailable nonsense" – distinguishing between laughter for pure entertainment, or laughter to encourage a *double-take* from the viewer, inviting the audience to reflect on *why* they are laughing, this will be further discussed in the following chapter.

A different, but connected notion, is that of 'joy', a term often used to describe *Snowshow* and recognised as a replacement for laughter or affect that may or may not incite laughter. In her

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dissertation, Lucy Amsden refers to Oleg Popov (1930–2016), who explains that "[j]oy, an extremely rich emotion, may produce laughter or it may not" (Popov in Amsden, 2015:51). Amsden writes further that:

> Popov considers that his predecessors, the burlesque clowns, limit their intention to creating laughter, and criticises this: 'the aim of the gag is not to force laughter from the audience […] The thought that the object of a comic performance is just to make people laugh is the same as the belief that the only radiation sent out by an electric light bulb is light' (Popov cited in Amsden, 2015:51).

Laughter has been described by certain teachers as "non-negotiable", or a "simple contract" that is audible and tells us "where we stand" (Wright, 2007:5). Joy, on the other hand, seems more elusive, since it is inaudible and therefore more difficult to identify; related terms are 'pleasure' or 'delight'. Preiss refers to LeToy and Sidney's distinction between the effect on audience members who may be moved by "delight" or moved by "laughter", explaining that the former invites an "aesthetic response" and the other a "physical one" (2014:188). These extracts from reviews and the discussions thereof indicate a preoccupation with measuring the value of *Snowshow* as *theatre,* in connection with questions around meaning, purpose and intended impact on a spectator. Bailes reminds us that "meaning-making is a social activity, rather than a static act of singular authorization" (2011:15). She suggests that what makes a performance event meaningful, lies in the nature of the interaction such that, its:

> negotiation can effect change in the material world – that is, beyond the stage and staging of the event. Meaning is in one sense the meeting ground where currency and values attribute and distribute according to the logic and hierarchy determining the exchange. The potential for change lies not only in the story, therefore, but in the processes of telling, in the reciprocal relations established by and because of communication (Bailes, 2011:15).

In my viewing of *Snowshow,* the 'processes of telling' did not reflect the principle of disruption that is central to clowning. The clown performers seemed united in upholding a consensual and monologic worldview that seemed to have been 'authored' by a single authoritarian vision of the director-author. At the same time, I recognise that the structure offered by disciplined action and response, and the need for rehearsals to refine physical skills, sensitivity and comic rhythm/timing, have always been part of the clown's practice; although these principles of practice may be under-acknowledged or ignored in discussions by Polunin. McManus observes that "[c]lowns always destroy, or at least conflict with, the norm, whether that norm is manifested in the world of the audience or in the purely theatrical world of illusion" (2013:34).

> The clown might suggest a Utopia that lies outside of the visible world of the audience or in the purely theatrical world of the play but the clown cannot exist within such a world without losing his clown nature (McManus, 2013:34).

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With the inclusion of these examples, I aim to illuminate how clown-theatre has become an umbrella term for many different types of performance that to a greater or lesser extent incorporate clown principles. What is evident is that interpretations of "clowning" and "theatre" do not sit comfortably together.

In the first section of this chapter, I discussed my own practice by elucidating and reflecting on my experiences as clown practitioner. I began by interrogating the specific conditions that may have rendered it possible to create a show from clown principles by reflecting on my experience in *Tweespealt* (the duration, the venue and audience expectations), focusing on laughter, failure as well as pleasure. I also highlighted the challenges we experienced in transforming the ten-minute performance into a full-length (one-hour show) in a theatre. In the other two productions, *La Chair de Ma Chair* and *Babbelagtig*, I felt that various constructions limited the clown performer's ability to disrupt and retain agency as creative agent. This led to a brief discussion on the performance frame as an architectural authority that predetermines some of the exchange in terms of proximity, expectation and control.

Included in this discussion are my experiences beyond the footlights, as an audience member, where I have had the opportunity to recognise an incongruity within the language associated with the clown. There appears to exist a discrepancy between the practitioner's description of the creative process and the emphasis on games, spontaneity and freedom, and what a performer may perceive as a lack of agency and play during the theatrical event. When practitioners employ the term 'clown-theatre' they often additionally express the need to either "transform normal theatre principles" or "reimagine or redefine" the clown. In this process there has been a tendency to reduce inherited/traditional clowning principles to "just entertainment", or "circus clowning" that is "fake" or has no "worthy message", proposing that "clown theatre" is by extension "deeper", "more real", "existential" and "honest". This forces us to question what type of clown is required for the idea of clown theatre to stand.

It is clear from this discussion that although Polunin, Danzig and Lyons may hold opposing stances and value different priorities in terms of the type of work they make, they seem to agree, through an overemphasis in their vocabulary, that the prerequisite for the clowning they practise is freedom and spontaneity. Clowning, as delineated in this argument, has generally become equated with 'truth' and 'honesty', possibly stemming from the slippage introduced by Lecoq proposing that the key to becoming a clown requires that the performer reveals the 'person underneath, stripped bare for all to see' and avoids preconceived ideas. This widely employed taxonomy echoes Lecoq's vocabulary which

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is perpetuated in contemporary descriptions of the clown performer's process that supposedly values 'silliness', 'freedom' and 'spontaneity [...] above all' achieved when the performer avoids 'thinking'.

In my own view, the desire to fuse these ideas and practices has not been achieved without compromising the clown's disruptive and anarchic energies that seems to be the essence of many practitioner's veneration, in this sense entrapping the practice that is borrowed for its licentiousness. It has also become increasingly apparent that there is a lack of critical discussion about the process that lies between the initial play and origination of material, and the performance, with regards to the discipline, structure and attention to detail that these processes evidently require.

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CHAPTER FOUR: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

"In one especially popular entree the clown enters and takes a seat in the front row of the audience, refusing the ringmaster's request that he get back to work. The title in French is *Le Clown dans les Places*, and much of the dialogue revolves around the word place with its double meaning of "place" and "seat". Who is the clown, and where is his proper place? When the ringmaster informs the clown that those seats are reserved for the public, the clown replies that he too, is a small part of the public. When the ringmaster points out that he is merely a clown, the clown asks him how he arrived at that startling conclusion. Because he is wearing red, white and black makeup, explains the ringmaster. So what, says the clown, that means all the ladies in the audience with red, white and black on their faces are also clowns. And so on, as the ringmaster unsuccessfully tries to prove that the clown is not in fact a normal person." - John Towsen

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In a fictional account given in his book *The Tormentor* (2012), as well as in the workshop I attended (2014), Phillipe Gaulier attributes the "birth of the clown" to the circus in the nineteenth century (2012:263). The story begins with Jane and her scotch-drinking, "very very English" husband Andrew, who displays an exceedingly committed obsession with horses and riding. Andrew arrives home one day, seven minutes late, with no appetite, answering his wife's questions in syllables. After remaining in his study until the early hours of the morning, staying up "to think", Andrew joins Jane in bed and announces that he will buy a circus and "show the public how to train a horse" (2012:264). After buying and restoring a circus, Andrew hires two horse grooms from Scotland, one short and fat and the other tall and thin. One afternoon Jim (the short fat one) arrives early at the stable yard and comes across his partners clothes and while admiring them, he is suddenly "overcome by [an] irresistible urge" to try them on. When his partner Joe returns and, midway through undressing, notices the missing clothes from the hanger, Jim taunts him from the opposite side of the room. This initiates a furious chase by Joe. Terrified, Jim runs away and in his attempt at an escape, accidentally opens a door that leads onto the main circus ring. He steps into the middle of the arena where Andrew on horseback is exhibiting a difficult feat of dressage. This causes disruptive laughter from the audience, which increases when Joe, confused and half naked, wearing only long johns, enters the ring. To Jim and Joe's surprise, instead of being scolded or fired from their posts, they were instructed by Andrew to perform the exact same thing the next day at the same point – and just like that "two great clowns were born" (2012:264).

I have heard multiple versions of this accidental and spontaneous birth of the contemporary clown, the circus being one of the most recent places associated with the Western clown figure. This fragment of 'oral history', repeated and embellished by many, serves as a good example of the extent to which "clowns have often been the first to invent their own myths about themselves" (Davison, 2013:44–45).

> Where does the clown come from? How does he arrive at the circus? He doesn't use the entrance for the audience, nor the stage door. He comes in through the top of the big top. He comes down a length of a rope. He carries on walking. He notices the audience. He changes his way of walking slightly. He makes it more amusing, as if to greet the audience, modestly, politely. Where has he come from? (Gaulier, 2012:280).

As already discussed and demonstrated, attempting to answer questions about the clown's identity with the intention to entrench it as an archetypal, stylistic or cultural figure, is an unproductive pursuit. Similarly, it is impossible to provide an exhaustive study or offer a linear trajectory that traces the clown's presence on stage since clown performers have borrowed and adopted their styles from previous forms throughout history. A further key consideration in this regard is Davison's warning that one should remain cautious of making any assumptions about clowning that have not been witnessed

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in person, since clown entrées or descriptions of clowning remain oral records that are “dictated by their original performance, not works of literature” (2013:89). As McManus writes, “most theatrical traditions have characters that we recognize as clowns” (2003:11); nevertheless, the full details of past live performances forever remain inaccessible to the historian-researcher, and historical accounts are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural contexts of their time. Once these limitations are acknowledged, it is possible to consider the applicability of an historical account of clowns on stage for a contemporary practitioner.

McManus suggests that the “key feature uniting all clowns, therefore, is their ability, through skill or stupidity, to break the rules governing the fictional world” (2003:13). McManus further explains that the “clown's genius, or stupidity, is more than just a character trait” and “constitutes a distinct performance mode from that of the non-clown characters” (2003:12). It is through this lens that historical accounts of the clown’s place have been selected and analysed in this chapter. It is as a practitioner in search of ways to identify, apply and refine the principles of the clown in theatre – as a distinct performance mode – that I turn to the past.

The selected examples of ‘clowns on stage’ in this chapter are by no means representative of the many variations of clown performances that have existed on diverse stages and platforms throughout history. The examples have been selected in accordance with my practice-led methodology, and based on my assessment of how these historic example have a *direct bearing on* the laughter-centric training analysed in Chapter Two, and the performances that I have been involved with over the last few years.

For this reason, *Commedia dell’arte*, as one example, is not included although it is commonly and traditionally associated with clowning from a theoretical point of view. The influence of Commedia dell’arte on clowning in the 20th century can be easily traced, especially in relation to Lecoq who investigated “the relationship between commedia dell’arte and circus clowns” (1997:143) and his predecessor Copeau who were interested in reviving and experimenting with the form. It is probable that they have influenced how we speak about and recognize clowning today, in particular linking clowning and mask work by Lecoq’s referral to the red nose as “the smallest mask in the world” (Lecoq, 1997:145). Whether it is possible to recognise any kind of practical influence of *Commedia* in contemporary clowning is perhaps the scope of another study. The historical examples I have selected for the purposes of this study aid to illuminate a particular way of staging clown theatre which I hypothesize may prove productive for contemporary practice (in particular the type of clown-theatre I have witnessed and been involved with over the past decade). A significant motivation for the selection of historical examples in this Chapter was the familiarity and accessibility of the language

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used in secondary sources to describe the practice, or the synergy I felt the with actual elements described in relation to what I have been taught in current practice.

In this way, the enquiry in this chapter functions as a montage in keeping with the re-constructive purpose offered by Bailes as "seeking to build new alliances and new meanings" (2011:132). By highlighting isolated examples of the historical place of the clown-performer – how, when and why they have appeared in 'the circus ring', on 'stage' and in 'the theatre' – and then weaving these together, a multimodal perspective has emerged, deepening my understanding of what appears to be their recent re-occupation of theatre, and the complexities surrounding this return.

David Wiles (1987) and Richard Preiss (2014) foreground the importance of taking a holistic approach, proposing that a textual analysis of clowns is insufficient; to fully understand the clown's role, consideration must be given to the audience, space, playwright and performer. Along these lines, this chapter proposes the necessity of examining the circumstances surrounding the clown since the clown's function is relational, and as Preiss states, the "relations between production and reception, poet and player, player and audience, performance and text" are in constant need of resolution (2014:220). This discussion of the clown's place in theatre is thus valuable for activating dialogue regarding proxemics, power and control, which have a bearing on the understanding of the clown's identity and purpose.

A Brief History of the English Circus Clown

The English circus is one of the most recent European contexts with which the clown is often associated, and which clown practitioners such as Gaulier most often refer to as the "birth of the contemporary clown". The term 'clown' is a relatively recent addition to the English language, not in use before the 1570s. Borrowed from Low-German, it derives from the Latin term *colonus* meaning "a tiller of the soil", a countryman (Wiles, 1987:61, Helgerson, 1992:216). Wiles suggests that the term entered the English language in reference to a new iteration of an already familiar performance mode: ''the rustic who by virtue of his rusticity is necessarily inferior and ridiculous" (1987:61). Wiles further suggests that "[i]n its origins, the term clown was pejorative, it was affected or poetic in its use, and it related to rank" (1987:68). As a figure defined in relation to its opposite, this explanation offered by Wiles sheds light on how the term found its place in relation to "neo-chivalric discourse centred around the notion of 'gentility,'' adding that "to be a 'clown' is the obverse of being 'gentle'" (1987:62). The circus clown, according to Towsen (1976:88), became an amalgamation of different traditional forms and is the most accessible example of recent associations of the clown as 'performing in interludes' and being able to exist both inside and outside the spatial boundaries defined by the circus ring.

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There has been consensus amongst some Western scholars (Saxon 1975, Towsen 1976, Carlyon 2016) that the first circus performance was initiated by Philip Astley in 1768 in an open field on the outskirts of London. Astley was a trick horse rider and teacher, and after leaving the army, he popularised equestrian trick riding events and went on to open eighteen circuses throughout his lifetime. Less than a year after Astley's first equestrian event, he bought a piece of land and opened his doors to *Astley's Amphitheatre*. Although Astley initially performed in a circular ring that was 62 feet (19m) in diameter, it was soon established that the most "practical compromise between the centrifugal and centripetal forces" required between horse and rider, was a ring with a diameter of thirteen meters (Towsen, 1976:85). This diameter of the ring soon became standardised and was surrounded by a 4 foot (1.2m) wide barrier with enclosed seating, in an amphitheatre format considered optimal for spectators and performers alike.

Astley is not attributed with standardising the ring at thirteen meters, nor with popularising the name circus (meaning circle from Latin *ciculus*); nevertheless, he is renowned for being the first to have created a programme that integrated a variety of acts – including clowns, strong man acts and acrobatics – interspersed with the main equestrian events. Most importantly, by 1780 all circus venues were enclosed structures and often included a ring as well as a proscenium arch stage. The circus acts in the ring were set apart from those performed on the stage, such as the pantomime and *Burletta* acts (brief plays that relied on song). The acts performed in the makeshift ring became known as 'the scenes in the circle'; and the clowns, whose antics continually interrupted the circus activities, were known as the 'clowns in the ring' – a title that distinguished them from the pantomime comedians on stage (Towsen, 1976:88).

The equestrian events, and overall popularity of the horse-dominated performances of the early circus between 1768–1860, required that clown performers adapt their tricks to present them in the saddle: if the clown was a "tumbler, he had to be prepared to tumble off the back of a horse" (Towsen, 1976:89–90). Not surprisingly, most circus clowns, like Astley's first clown performer known as Merryman, started off their careers as highly skilled acrobats, tumblers and equestrians (Towsen, 1976:83). The comedy skills of these clowns did not simply arise or develop in a vacuum but rather derived from various preceding comic styles and traditions, which included the following:

> [...] the English Merry Andrew (or Jack Pudding) and the comic servants of the *commedia dell'Arte*, especially Pierrot, as well as such popular stereotypes as the physically inept tailor. The most direct derivation, however, was probably from the tradition of the British theatrical clown, a country yokel not unlike such Shakespearean buffoons as Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* (Towsen, Emphasis in Original 1976:88).

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Regardless of the derivation or tradition, it can be observed that since the clown's inception in the circus, their function has transcended that of pure entertainment. In *The Circus as Theatre: Astley's and Its Actors in the Age of Romanticism* (1975), Saxon argues that the clown "provided momentary rests to the artists in the midst of their strenuous exercises" (Saxon, 1975:307, Carlyon, 2016:175). As much as the clowns appeared to be interrupting or distracting the riders and causing chaos in the ring, they were tasked with various technical duties and responsibilities – for example, holding banners and hoops, providing props and chalking the performers feet – to enable or progress the performance event (Saxon, 1975:307). These momentary interludes became known as the 'reprise' and "lasted as long as twenty minutes" (Carlyon 2016:175).

Circuses were brought to America in 1793 by John Bill Rickets, and it was not until 1825 that Joshua Purdy Brown would revolutionise the circus with the iconic portable circus tent that was erected in Delaware, America. The traveling opportunities made possible through the establishment of new roads and railways throughout the United States of America also meant that circuses had increased access to smaller towns and audiences in rural areas. At the inception of the traveling circus, the company of performers was usually limited in number. This meant that all performers, but especially the clowns, were expected to fulfill multiple responsibilities. As a circus traveled from one town to another, it was the clown's role to announce and promote the show by moving through the streets or Village Green to interact with potential onlookers. This exchange would commonly take place on the day prior to the performance, and on the morning of the performance, with clowns sometimes leading the gathering crowd directly to the circus grounds (Towsen, 1976:110).

The appearance of the clown performer primarily in the interludes, meant that a key aspect of their *entrée* was focused around their entrances and exits. They entered persistently to interrupt the action and cause trouble; this usually resulted in their violent removal by the ringmaster, usually leading to a chase. The shape and layout of the canvas circus tents provided opportunities for the clown's access to both the performance space and that of the designated spectator seats; it was simultaneously possible for spectators, vendors and other performers to move around more freely between spaces with entrances from outside the tent remaining accessible throughout the event. The clown performers, therefore, became increasingly ingenious and creative in their entering and exiting strategies and began integrating these movements into successful acts.

One famous act, still prevailing fifty years after its first performance, demonstrates the clown performer's reliance on entrances. The *entrée*, recalled by theorists and practitioners such as Davison (2013), Towsen (1976) and Saxon (1975), is known as the 'Flying Wardrobe' or 'The Pheasant's Frolic' and involves the clown performer being 'planted' in the audience and disguised as an inebriated

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countryman. During one of the equestrian acts, the clown would come forward displaying bravado and express his desire to outperform the riders in the ring. Despite the ringmaster's warnings and attempts to discourage the drunken fool – sending him back to his seat – the clown performer would invariably break into the ring and attempt to mount a rearing horse. After several seemingly dangerous tumbles and scares, the clown performer would succeed in mounting the horse – but facing backwards. This foolery would continue until eventually the clown would 'get the hang of it', stand up on horseback and retain his balance while shedding several layers of costume – eventually revealing the colorful silk costume of a star performer.

I foreground the importance of recognising that the 'insider-outsider' status of the clown exists conceptually and thematically but is also *created and reinstated by the conditions set up by the physical arrangement of the performance space*. This is a vital consideration in understanding how the clowns attain and maintain their freedom by transcending the predefined 'stage'. This observation, that clowns may be defined by their placing/staging, may have important consequences when considering the options open to the clown's place in contemporary theatre.

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Clowns on Stage

i) The Vidusaka in Sanskrit Theatre

The *Vidusaka* is a clown figure in Indian Sanskrit Theatre, one of the oldest forms of theatre known today. Towsen makes the interesting observation that Sanskrit Theatre essentially involves "dramatizations of episodes from the classic Hindu epics" (1976:32), and although the original epics do not include any clown figures, in performance, according to Towsen, "a lion's share of the action is turned over to the clown servant, *Vidusaka*" (1976:32). Sanskrit Theatre makes use of stock characters: for example, the *Vidusaka* plays as the accomplice and close friend to the *Nãyaka* – a high-status character of noble birth, usually a prince or king. Debate surrounds the etymological translation of the term *Vidusaka*: some theorists translate it as "one given to abuse" which echoes the description of the Auguste as "the one who gets slapped" (Bhat 1982; Towsen, 1976:32); others argue that the correct translation is 'spoiler' (Shekhar, 1960:77). What they do agree upon is that the *Vidusaka* is a laughter-inciting, grotesque figure and Towsen describes him as 'a bald dwarf, with projecting teeth and red eyes' (Towsen, 1976:32) typically portrayed as an incompetent glutton preoccupied with the baser needs of his belly, popular with woman and always instigating fights or pulling pranks.

Further debate persists around the *Vidusaka's* emergence and origins. The *Vidusaka,* roguish in manner, was also a *Brahmin* – a highly revered priest. How it came about that a Brahmin could be associated and embodied as a fool still puzzles many theorists like Towsen who comments on the incongruity of a "spiritual hero" being placed against such a "buffoon" (1976:32). Jefferds and Bhat similarly recognise the peculiarity of the *Vidusaka* since Sanskrit theatre is imbued with a serious religious underpinning and was "nurtured and developed under strong religious impulse and influence" (Bhat, 1982:2). Sanskrit texts were written in both Sanskrit and Prakrit languages and the Sanskrit tongue was generally reserved for the gods, kings, Brahmin's and high caste; the *Vidusaka* communicates only in *Prakrit* – the common tongue spoken by women, children and the lower caste. Bhat describes the *Vidusaka's* role as follows:

> He does not remember the Gayathri mantra; he cannot speak cultured Sanskrit, he uses the vernacular spoken tongue; he does not even know the correct number of Vedas […] The Vidusaka is unable to read: but if he is confronted with written words, he is prepared to bluff his way out by declaring that the particular letters do not exist in the manuscript he studied. Although, untutored, he is resourceful enough to take a hurried bath at the garden-well, to make a show of muttering Vedic mantras and walking quickly towards the royal harem in order not to miss the meals and gifts offered by the queen. He is generally referred to as a maha-brahmana, meaning a fool. But that does not stop him demanding the honour and respect due to a Brahmin (Bhat, 1982:3–4).

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This description offers insight into the gap between the typical *role* of the *Brahmin* and the *Vidusaka*'s embodiment of that role – or rather, his *failure* to inhabit the role of *Brahmin.* Although he[22] fails to exhibit the expected behavior of a *Brahmin,* part of his 'performance' is his unique resourcefulness and 'clown logic', assisting him to initiate alternative ways of persuading or manipulating other characters so that he can enjoy the advantages of a true Brahmin. This bluffing game, innate to our general understanding of the clown, is apparent in the training offered to contemporary clown performers and the three pedagogues discussed in Chapter Two, who all emphasise the clown's *failure*. I have drawn attention to how, in Gaulier's workshops, the clown does not become the character suggested by the costume assigned to the student, but rather plays against it by focusing on the 'distance' between himself and the character suggested by the costume. Gaulier writes that:

> The costume is not the character. Its only aim is not make the audience say: 'Look at that idiot. They are trying to make us believe they're Zorro. How stupid! They really are thick. I love them. (Gaulier, 2012:281).

Similarly, Barnfather's audition game or 'Clown Olympics', requires students to complete ambitious tasks whilst not having all the information or skill to do so; the teacher-provocateur encourages them to really 'play the game' and commit to trying to accomplish the task in real-time in front of an audience. It is most often the student's commitment to the task and their willingness to play the game with foolish naiveté and simultaneous confidence in their ability that reveals the gap between the 'correct way' and the clown's failure to succeed, and which results in a potentially laughable performance. This idea of the performer playing the role as a game that he fails at, will be explored in more detail in different sections of this chapter and the following chapter, particularly in relation to the Elizabethan clown and Bertolt Brecht's 'estranged actor'.

The *Vidusaka* is placed alongside the high status *Nãyaka* character; and not unlike the scenario between the Whiteface and Auguste clowns, the *Nãyaka* serves as a constant authority figure and status figure, against which the behavior of the *Vidusaka* proves ridiculous and unexpected. In the comparative study, *Vidusaka versus Fool: A functional Analysis* (1981), Jefferds looks at similarities between the *Vidusaka* and the role of the Shakespearean fool. Particular attention is paid to the importance of the 'contrastive force' created by juxtaposing the roles of the *Nãyaka* and the *Vidusaka.* Jefferds argues that the *Vidusaka* disrupts the narrative without posing a threat to the *rasa* (or value) of the context in which he is depicted. This statement can be linked to the 'gag', earlier examined in

[22] I remind the reader that historically clowns were predominantly masculine or documented as masculine, and for that reason are only referred to in the masculine in this section.

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dialogue with Bailes's interpretation of gags where she identifies them as an explosive disruption which does not necessarily divert or threaten the forward flow or the ultimate progression of the event.

The typical Sanskrit narrative plot centers around abstract themes that display the *Nãyaka's* search for love from the queen that generally remains unrequited, with the *Vidusaka* providing companionship during the *Nãyaka*'s episodes of sorrow and longing. Jefferds notes how the *Vidusaka* "does not satirise the *Nãyaka*, nor does he – by word or deed – indict his undisputed better"; he is not in any sense a "wise fool" or "licensed critic," but a laughable counterweight to the potentially ponderous love-interest (Jefferds, 1981:61). Without threatening the king's status as *Nãyaka,* this bald, homely, and unheroic gourmand, gives the audience a kind of "human relief," returning us periodically from the hero's rarified heights of longing (Jefferds, 1981:61). It is significant to note that following this interpretation, the *Vidusaka* does not have "something to say" in terms of the narrative or content. The *Vidusaka* is placed at a distance from the inner and abstract subject matter of the play – namely, the *Nãyaka*'s perpetual quest to find love – and does not offer an *alternative message* to the *rasa* or religious 'message' of the play. Instead, he offers an *alternative perspective* or relatable seat from which the audience experiences the unfolding of the action. Jefferds describes how:

> A totally homogeneous field remains "unfelt" until interrupted by variation. Our physiology tunes out, for example, even a continuous ringing sound – which may remain totally forgotten unless it changes volume, pitch, and so on. The status quo – even the passionate love – longing of the *Nãyaka* in Sanskrit theatre – may fade, by our habituation to it, from too persistent foreground to forgotten background (Jefferds, 1981:62).

Davison's exercise with the newspaper article (described in Chapter Two as an extension of *the step-laugh* exercise), offers an example of clown teaching that allows a clown performer to interact with political and uncomfortable content without contributing to or contrasting the overall meaning or message. The exercise proposes that the performers focus on their connection with the audience, specifically their laughter response. Even though the clown performers use the basic outline of the event as material, they do not comment on the news event, but simply rely on the happening to co-create content with audience permission. In other words, when students focus on the direct and immediate response from the audience, the content of the article or described event serves only as a vehicle for audience/performer engagement. I explained, in Chapter Two, how this process of fore/backgrounding did not, to my surprise, result in an offensive mockery, but rather a shared dialogue between spectator and performer. This makes it easier to imagine how the *Vidusaka could* have portrayed a Brahmin with naïveté and playfulness without negating the serious subject matter and its religious grounding.

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It is also important to remember Towsen's statement that the *Vidusaka*'s role as scripted in the dramatic texts appeared to be minor, in contrast to the enacted or embodied role in which elements of mime and improvisation were more prevalent, magnifying the character's importance and resulting in an extended stage time. Towsen observes that "[e]pisodes that do not read well can become hilarious when performed by a talented clown" (1976:33). He highlights this idea further by drawing similarities between Sanskrit theatre and Chinese theatre. In the latter, according to Towsen, the clown figure, known as *ch'ou,* is also "the only actor to speak in colloquial idiom" and transcends the written script of the play by relying on improvisation and humor (1976:33).

> In one Chinese play (*Hung-li-chi*), for example, a drunken servant scene originally intended to last a few minutes at most is often enriched and expanded by the clown into a half hour of nonstop comedy (Towsen, 1976:33).

(ii) The Mountebank and his Zany in the Italian Middle Ages

Towsen reminds us of another historical clown figure, the Zany, who relied on spontaneity and disruption, performing on stages alongside the Mountebank or 'quack doctor' in the Italian Middle Ages. The Mountebank's name, according to Towsen, derives from "the practice of climbing onto a bench (mount-a-bank) in order to gather and address a crowd" (1976:49). The Mountebank and his Zany, or 'Merry Andrew', traveled to fairs and markets in different villages. As an unlicensed doctor, the Mountebank made good earnings by convincing gullible spectators to invest in homemade nostrums and potions.

> Traditionally the Mountebank operated as a huckster. Gaudily dressed and assisted by riddling, drum banging, pratfall turning zany and perhaps a monkey, he set up his stage in the marketplace, drew a crowd and then some teeth, doled out a few free bottles of julep and sold a few dozen more, and then rode out of town (Porter, 2001:200).

If he could afford to, the Mountebank with the help of Zany would erect a stage, and relying on wit, trickery and hypnotising language (often making use of Latin sounding words), he would *trick* the audience into paying for his services and products. According to Towsen, their short 'performance' relied on a detailed programme, structured carefully so that the Mountebank would act as a "pompous straight man" to the "comic disruptions" of his Zany (1976:51). The Zany would intervene and make fun of everything the Mountebank said by "pok(ing) his head out from behind the curtain" supposedly weakening his partner's sales pitch through taunts and mockery (Towsen, 1976:53). In similar ways to that of the *Vidusaka*'s performance, which tended to strengthen rather than diminish the serious message fundamental to Sanskrit Theatre, the Zany's mischief *lured* spectators into the Mountebank's sales pitch even as he pretended to undermine it.

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> While the clown seemingly encouraged the public *not* to buy the proffered merchandise, the Mountebank knew full well that the bystanders would easily be converted into customers as soon as they forgot that they were, in fact, supposed to be buying. Once the audience had been effectively hypnotized, once their judgement and willpower had been weakened, the real sales pitch could begin, with the Zany even contributing a comic jingle […] (Towsen, 1976:53).

These examples offer some insight into how the clown figure – as a lower status, laughter-inciting agent able to connect with the audience through spontaneous engagement – served the central thematic and philosophical concerns of the stage event even whilst pretending to subvert it. In these examples, the clown does not feature as protagonist but appears during the intervals and transitional spaces; and yet, remains indispensable to the overall performances, contributing conceptually and practically to the event.

In the next section I will consider how the clown performer was pivotal not only in contributing to the event, but ultimately delineating the event by embodying a critical function of negotiating and controlling the engagement as a type of on-stage director. In this role, the clown actively manages the relationship between audience and performers, controlling the allocation of stage time and commenting on, and contributing to, the central message of the event whilst retaining a low-status position.

The examples so far have provided a clearer picture of the specific circumstances necessary to facilitate the clown's embodiment of his role as disruptive agent. Apart from the imperative freedom the clown requires to improvise and disrupt the event, the discussion highlights the clown's dependence on a clear 'structure' or 'authority' to disrupt. As McManus proffers, there are "rules of performance, governing the mimetic conventions being used, and social rules, governing the cultural norms of the world being imitated on stage" (2013:13).

The structure - or unity of the event – may be upheld in different ways. For example, the clown performer's failure may be contextualised by placing an 'authority figure' beside him as a continuous reminder of the 'correct way'. Through the rhythm and rules introduced by other players, either as characters – such as the *Nãyaka* in Sanskrit Theatre – or as roles – such as the Ringmaster and Whiteface clowns in the circus – the clown's failure is contextualised. This effect may also be introduced when the clown performer attempts to inhabit a higher-status role which he is unable to maintain, such as the *Vidusaka* attempting to embody the role of a Brahmin.

The discussion in this chapter has, further, shed light on the clown figure's relationship with the philosophical or functional concerns of the various performance events. Although the clown performer was seen to enjoy a 'lion's share' of the action, the clown is never, in the examples discussed, perceived as the primary or stable structure. By bridging the gap between the staged event and the audience,

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the clown performer disrupts the main principle or theme of the event, and simultaneously supports it as laughter-inciting counterweight.

(iii) The Elizabethan Clown – Tarlton to Armin

The clown performer's indispensable presence in Early Modern Theatre and relationship with other role-players/participants offers an informative perspective of the transformation of the clown's function. This account will refer mainly to two comprehensive sources on this subject: David Wiles' seminal text, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan playhouse* (1987); and the more recent detailed examination by Richard Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship in Early Modern Theatre* (2014).

Preiss's argument explicates the relationship between clowning and authorship by investigating the clown's indispensable interlocutory function that came to represent a theatre that was heterogenous and participatory. By extension, Preiss argues that the 'erasure' of the clown as a dialogic, extemporising performer by the early 1600s also had implications for the central dynamic exchange upon which theatre had relied, resulting in the diminishing and near eradication of the participatory audience. An analysis of the development from clown to character, in which clown principles were demonstrated by the end of the 1600s to be employed *without* the disruptive function of the clown, offers an entryway to understanding how the clown was perceived by new modernists such as Bertolt Brecht (discussed in Chapter Five).

To understand the critical value of the clown's role it is necessary to keep in mind what Preiss refers to as the intensely "collaborative, dialogic nature of playgoing" that constituted the early Modern theatre experience (2014:47). By focusing attention on the Elizabethan audience's highly active participation in the theatrical event, Preiss further underlines how audiences were collaborators, actively contributing to the process of play-making through various expressive audible and visible gestures: "booing, hissing, clapping, laughing, roaring, humming, whistling, stamping, crying, repeating, requesting, talking back to the actors, talking to each other, exiting early, entering late, 'try[ing]', 'search[ing],' judging, quarrelling, food-throwing, 'pressing' the stage, "drowning" the stage, physically *taking* the stage" (2014:47).

Such vigorous engagement was reinforced by the spatial arrangement of the Elizabethan amphitheatre which accommodated a dialectical relationship between performer and spectator. Preiss goes on to describe how the close proximity of spectators to the stage, as well as the acoustics of the amphitheatre was, "designed to amplify the sound of the audience no less than that of the players," created equal and competing forces between playgoer and spectator (2014:87). Wiles (1987), offers a

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similar reminder that early Elizabethan theatre events hosted a diverse audience from different social groupings adding that "[a]ll spectators perceived in this environment that their own identities and moral codes existed in relation to opposites and alternatives" (1987:93).

Preiss repeatedly draws attention to the performances resembling a 'contest', with the event-making process residing in the interdependent relationship between player and playgoer. It is in this context that the clown's role emerged as a critical agent between the disruptive and agonistic energies of the playgoers and the play itself. This 'battle' for dominance ultimately became the foundation of *playmaking* – with any preconceived material at constant risk of being overpowered and derailed by its audience who were "competitive and aggressive" in their involvement (Wiles, 1987:14).

Richard Tarlton, William Kempe and Robert Armin can be identified as three major figures representing the changing theatre of this time (Towsen, 1975; Wiles, 1987; Davison, 2013; Preiss, 2014). For such an investigation, Wiles proposes that a "shift in academic priorities" is necessary (1987:164). Wiles highlights the importance of studying the *performer* in as much detail as the poet, the *performance* as well as the *text,* and advocates for "popular culture" to be as deserving of attention as its supposed alternative culture: "(to give but some of the antonyms) high/official/elite/aesthetic/canonical" (1987:164). In this section, the three figures identified will be discussed with emphasis on the connections being drawn between their context and the clown principles that were employed.

Preiss argues that initially the clown's "overriding role lay in pretending not to have one, or in spurning it" (2014:143). In so doing, his function developed as a mandatory on-stage tool of "negotiation and control" of the highly expressive and forceful audiences, and as a malleable force representing the audience's desire for agency (Preiss, 2014:80-81). Instead of functioning as a minor character, the clown's side-shows were often prized as the main attraction, the clown figure thereby obtaining status and directive control by inadvertently convincing the audience of his low-status persona, his supposed *lack* of power, rendering the rehearsed script and fictional characters an 'afterthought' in the performance event (Preiss, 2014:9).

> Insofar as the clown pretended to be a confused bystander drawn into the fiction of the play, he surrogated the role of the spectator; in so far as the unitary self he projected was itself a fiction, however, it was a second-order container for something that resisted the play's containment – in a word, playgoing (Preiss, 2014:76).

In alignment with the proposal by Wiles that the performers *themselves* should be perceived as *texts to be interpreted,* my understanding of the clown as performer has been informed by the ideas put forward by Samantha Prigge-Pienaar, in a recent article, 'Who's Game: embodied play in theatre as sport' (2018) in which she writes that "it is within the personal performing body that the tensions of both drama and script are carried and negotiated" (2018:137). A study or understanding of the clown

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performer's physicality, which I have already discussed as seminal to any discussion of the clown as performer, has been historically under acknowledged, since the transference of performance to scripted text, to a large extent, fails to communicate the performer's *body as text* (Wiles, 1987:154).

Tarlton performed as part of the *Queen's Men* from 1583 until his death in 1588. Preiss makes the bold and contentious statement that Tarlton "could be celebrated both as the first man of the theatre and as the last symbol of an enfranchised public" (2014:98). Helgerson similarly notes that: "Tarlton invented the role of clown and brought it to such prominence that it became an inevitable part of virtually every public-theater performance" (1992:216). The principles Tarlton employed, deriving from the tradition of the vice, enabled him to bridge and negotiate the relationship between the crowd, the other players and the dramatic action offering a valuable contribution to an understanding of the conditions under which Tarlton thrived. Preiss argues that as a showman, Tarlton was "less a vehicle of dramatic representation than its social precondition" (2014:143), his role "remain[ing] constant, insofar as he was always understood to be *playing himself*, no matter the fictional part he was assigned" (2014:73-75, emphasis added), or as Steele writes the clown figure "gives most pleasure, being most himself" (1977:213).

This statement echoes the discussion in the previous two chapters which exposed tensions made explicit by the vocabulary employed when describing the 'personal' or 'inner clown'. Tarlton is described by Preiss, as projecting a character that was ultimately a certain persona of 'himself', proposing that this displaying of a certain "self" was an *illusion* that stood in place of a fictional character; a "hyper-mimetic" persona that relied heavily on "spontaneity" as a tool in creating the *illusion of a consistent persona* that remained the same on stage as off (2014:73-75).

Tarlton therefore created the illusion of his own/personal failure, through his spontaneous banter with the audience, often referred to as 'Tarltonizing', creating the impression that he was separate from the company of players (Preiss, 2014:76, Monaghan, 1921:359). In Chapter Two, I described how teachers like Gaulier may teach performers how to recognise and embody a low status persona by providing the students with an *actual* experience of confusion (and often feelings of isolation) from an integrated group dynamic. The state of uncertainty is intensified by Gaulier's specific performance that dictates the dynamic of the group. Gaulier's disinterest in creating a comfortable environment or integrating students, as well as his ability to create a strong unified audience, results in student-performers feeling uncertain about what is expected and constantly aware that at any point their performances or personhood (physicaliy/mannerisms/choices) are at risk of being terminated and criticised.

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Preiss writes that the improvisation that Tarlton inspired was seen as destructive, not only in that it destabilised the preconceived narrative, but that "it keyed audience participation, which destabilized the terms of the theatrical event itself" (2014:179). Spontaneous play and Tarlton's ability to react to spectators, provided him with the ability to trick or ensnare the audience into participation, but inevitably outwitting them and refocusing the attention back to the scripted or planned performance. Wiles writes that:

> Tarlton always has the last laugh, but his genius lay in his ability to set up situations in which he himself would first be humiliated. Many of the tales in the *Jests* are anecdotes which Tarlton told against himself – tales of how he is apprehended by the watch, deceived by woman, or left penniless. Tarlton's manifest social and financial success provided these tales with their conext (1987:16).

Tarlton began performances with his signature entrance, not unlike the starting gestures offered by the Zany, he would peep his head out from behind the curtain causing eruptive laughter to signal the start of the action. Tarlton would then stretch this entrance to a "full-length tease" (Preiss, 2014:85; Towsen, 1976:58–59).

> If the clown mediated a complex negotiation for possession of the stage, he had to be the first upon it – and he began by establishing his liminality to that contest, for which physical deformity seems to have been a prerequisite trait (Preiss, 2014:84).

Preiss argues that Tarlton's death led to one of the most dramatic transitions in Western theatre: his perceived persona was "reproduced" in scripted texts through posthumous productions, standing as an example of the degree to which a clown's performances *could* be separated from the clown in performance, thereby making a case that the clown's performance could be contained, owned and duplicated by a single poet. Eventually this notion led to the recognition that the previous model of theatre, (based as it was on improvisation, risk and spontaneity, radically transforming in nature from one day to the next as well as recognising audience members as co-players) was ultimately "unsustainable", and lacking "reproducibility as a legible market commodity" (2014:97). Preiss suggests that this disembodiment of text from player also served to increase the production of texts as transferable commodities to which "ownership could attach" (2014:104).

Along with script production and an emphasis on narrative, there also emerged a desire for a performance mode that could be more extensively managed and controlled by a single author who had "something to say". William Kemp (1560–1603) proves the most influential example of a clown performer whose stylistic qualities acted as a bridge between these two worlds. Kemp embodied an ability to connect disparate social spheres: his jigs "perpetuated the kind of anarchic theatre that flourished under Tarlton" but he also began to play within the textual parameters of a role, representing the extent to which the clown may be contained and scripted (Wiles, 1987:47).

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Kemp began his career as a solo performer, becoming a principal player of the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594 as well as a major stakeholder (along with Shakespeare and Richard Burbage) by 1598. Kemp performed in roles written by Shakespeare, that was written to showcase an "improvisation effect", (Helgerson, 1992:224), but Kemp was most renowned for his 'jigs', which were short sub-literary forms, usually placed at the end of the scripted play (or at the end of a scene as a type of interval) to ensure that it would not disrupt the rhythm and only "minimally derail the plot" (Preiss, 2014:143). Jigs, like *entrées*, were self-contained and highly physical performances and depended on Kemp's skills as a dancer. They were also highly sexual in nature, usually depicting themes of adultery, and, according to Wiles, they maintained "the old balance between order and carnivalesque inversion," satisfying different performative needs and expectations across social stratifications (Wiles, 1987:43).

> Yet from a sociological standpoint the jig has to be seen as an essential component in the fragile balance which the Elizabethan theatre set up between popular and courtly modes. To a large though far from complete extent, the economically dominant occupants of the sixpenny gallery and the lords' room, together with the actors' patrons in the Privy Council, were able to dictate the tone in the public theatres; but at the end of a day's performance the balance shifted, and the actors surrendered a degree of control to those who stood in the yard (Wiles, 1987:46).

Like the *Vidusaka* who disrupted but did not ultimately challenge the content of Sanskrit Theatre, "Kemp's jigs neither mirrored nor reinforced the Shakespearean finale" (Wiles, 1987:56). Rather than altering the meaning of the event, Kemp physically "set up a complex relationship between two alien worlds" allowing him to "inhabit a world from which gentlemen are excluded, and where different values can therefore be obtained" (Wiles, 1987:56). Although it is impossible to ascertain exactly how Kemp moved from the scripted characters (Dogberry, Bottom, Cob, Peter, Falstaff) into the jigs in the postlude, it was the clown performer's function to guide the audience out of the scripted play and "into a different type of entertainment in which vigorous participation was expected" (Wiles, 1987:55). This task Kemp managed adroitly through his ability to maintain his status as "ordinary man" whilst performing as both the jig-maker and inside the roles of Dogberry or Peter (for example), whilst never "submerg[ing] his own personality into the role that he played" (Wiles, 1987:55). Kemp's role was further enabled by a striking physical identity that marked him as clown, his "ill-face", serving the same purpose as Tarlton's "squint" and was, according to Wiles, the sole reason why he would never be able to play the role of a "tragic-hero" (1987:24).

Kemp's use of his physical appearance as well as his display of 'self', whilst playing a character, allowed Kemp to be employed as a tool to manage and negotiate growing tensions within a model of theatre that was rapidly heading towards a monolithic event with a singular author in full control. Although Kemp managed, to a degree, to fulfil the role of both extemporising agent (clown) as well as interpreter of prescribed roles (character), there is a body of literature, (Biebster 2001, Helgerson 1992, MacCabe

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1988) that points to the growing tensions that emerged between author and clown, eventually leading to the contentious issue of Kemp's departure from the Chamberlain's Men in 1599, Biebster (2001) suggests that "Shakespeare needed to exercise a kind of control that was impossible as long as a clown in the improvising tradition of Tarlton remained on stage" (2001:238) adding that, "As the complaints about improvising clowns by Hamlet and other later characters show, Will Shakespeare was less than entirely sad to see Will Kemp go" (2001:238).

Preiss argues that with Kemp ended the entire "history of clowning", and dramatic authorship "emerges in exact, satisfying conjunction with that end" (Preiss, 2014:181). The elimination of jigs from the Globe Theatre which happened around the same time as Kemp's departure, also signalled the end of improvisation as a mode of performance (Preiss 2014:182). Preiss describes this shift as follows: "The clown stops improvising because the poet says so; audiences stop expecting him to improvise because the poet says so; the effect of this process - that a 'sharply increasing share of public attention… was being paid to the texts as texts and the authors as authors'" (Helgerson 1992 in Preiss, 2014:181).

To conclude this section, I will briefly refer to Richard Armin (1568–1615) who took Kemp's place in 1599. Armin, an intellectual and Londoner, as well as a successful author and publisher of multiple texts that revolved around the study of fools, became an ideal replacement to fit the needs of a closed event no longer seeking the contribution of an audience. Having set himself up as a writer and therefore seeing no "necessary tension between the purposes of the dramatist and the purposes of the actor/clown," as he did not pose a threat to the authority of the poet and the cohesiveness of a fictional world (Wiles, 1987:136).

Armin was not an extemporising agent and did not improvise or encourage direct audience contact, but rather became fully immersed in Shakespeare's scripts. Unlike Tarlton or Kemp, Armin did not project a socially identifiable "version of himself" that would have the audience believe that he belonged to the crowd, rather than the stage. Preiss describes his function as a "mimic", or an actor who merely "*played* the fool" by "performing not himself but others", or as a character whose performance ended when the play ended meaning that he simply became a direct mouthpiece or "extension of the author's words and will" (2014:183).

Wiles emphasises that to render a committed study into Armin's role as a fool, it is imperative to place attention on Shakespeare as a playwright and director whose "casting has crucial implications for interpretative study" (Wiles, 1987:154). He further points out that because it is Shakespeare's *texts* rather than the *performances* that have been historically transmitted, the "actor's function has been ignored" (1987:154). This is an observation that is supported by Bert States (1985), who offers the

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reminder that whenever the playwright is "[c]omposing for the actor, whether for the actor within oneself or the actor in one's theater company," he is always "composing for the human instrument with all its stops and ventages" (1985:131).

Shakespeare, therefore, not only wrote characters in his texts according to Armin's specific rhythms and pace, but also paid attention to Armin's physicality and how it could contradict the character he was playing: "What the audience sees with its eyes is a grotesque clown, older, thicker-limbed, *beneath* Posthumous in height and *beyond* him in girth" (Wiles, 1987:154). Armin's short stature and deformed body could be employed to contradict and counteract the scripted lines – the clown's presence could then be felt surfacing against the authority of the lines through the same "instrument" as the actor:

> Shakespeare took advantage of this potential for ridiculous imitation when he wrote for Armin such routines as Lavatch's repetition of 'Oh Lord, Sir!' and Touchstone's account of a courtly quarrel. The lines are written on the assumption that body and voice are set in opposition and speak, as it were, different languages (Wiles, 1987:150).

If the appearance of the performer and scripted text are viewed as existing in possible opposition to the actor who speaks the lines (to the extent of undermining them), it is easier to postulate how Armin and the character or role in which he was cast by Shakespeare could have been an early predecessor of Brecht's use of clown principles which informed the concept of the "estranged actor,'' a notion that will be explored in detail in the following chapter.

In Conclusion

This chapter has identified recurring characteristics of the clown performer in history with the aim to provide theoretical understanding of the principles discussed in Chapter Two and Three. In particular, this chapter examines the means through which the clown establishes and sustains connection with the audience, focusing on aspects such as: the clown performer's physical and personal presence, and display of a fictional self outside of the proposed fictional role; the extension of the clown's performance beyond the confines of the stage; the clown performer's use of improvisation and spontaneity within the structured event. These are some of the principles the clown performer has historically employed on stage in the role of negotiating, controlling and manipulating theatre audiences, by *tricking* them into interpreting the clown as their on-stage accomplice. To fulfill this function, the clown performer is repeatedly described as *appearing* to distance himself from the central event and other players or characters by embodying a hyper-mimetic persona that depicts apparent naivete/stupidity or ugliness.

The discussions also make apparent that central to the clown's ability to initiate and maintain a direct audience relationship, are the conditions that allow this relationship to be spontaneous. The clown's

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function is *relational;* it is in relation to the surrounding authority, frame or context that the clown is perceived as failing or falling short, which establishes *complicité* with the audience and incites laughter. In the final section I turned my attention to the Elizabethan era specifically exploring the way in which the clown's function fundamentally transformed and became almost unrecognisable when the theatrical event was remodeled with the arrival of the authoritarian scripted texts as a *precursor* to performance.

Preiss's argument makes apparent the view that before clowns were erased, clown performers were responsible for the entire theatrical structure as the primary negotiators of the fundamental engagement between performer and audience (Preiss, 2014). The realisation that clown principles could be scripted, and improvisation could, to an extent, be imitated and reconstructed, led to a transformation in authority and agency. With the author-director taking on this role of agent – able to negotiate the disruption and distance in the exchange between audience/performer – the development of a more sustainable model of theatre was perceived. Sustainability is understood, in this context, as inviting less improvisation and therefore less disruption or interference beyond the footlights that would result in a more predictable outcome of the sequence of the event and more control in terms of the timeframe/message and meaning and possible disturbances/interruptions from the audience. This idea relates back to the discussion on Weber's metaphorical cave and the degree of self-containment in a monologic theatre event. Based on the desire for a reduction in failures and glitches through the employment of a scripted sequence of events, this process also resulted in less innovation from the performer as well as from the audience.

This historical examination of the clown's place in theatre has foregrounded how and why some of the complexities confronting the clown in contemporary theatre have arisen. In the following chapter, I will turn my attention to Bertolt Brecht and his attempt to renew a holistic approach in theatre, in large part by reintroducing the function of the clown. This discussion will assist in paving the way towards reflection on my own practices as *acteur-auteur*, and how clown principles may be self-consciously employed in contemporary theatre practice.

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CHAPTER FIVE: 'AUTEUR-ACTEUR'

"The task of the dramatist, then, is to offer the actor a text with which he can perform his unique service – to be fully present, to change before our eyes, even if the change consists in the remaining himself at all times." - Bert States

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A primary approach in some of the performances discussed in Chapter Three is that of the ensemble or small company – in which the roles of performer, scriptwriter and director are independently defined but also interdependent, in some instances to the extent of being interchangeable. This foregrounds another principle often present in clown-theatre that elucidates some of the challenges encountered for the clown performer in the shift from workshop to the theatre. The issues of authorship and agency discussed in the previous three chapters relate specifically to Lecoq’s assertion that the performer is good when they have ‘something to say’.

According to Davison, Lecoq's notion of the acteur-auteur reinstated a “power-shift” in Western theatre that saw the emergence of smaller, independent democratically managed companies in which performers took renewed interest in, and responsibility for, the devising process (2013:287). This is an outlook that stemmed from Lecoq’s predecessor and mentor, Jacques Copeau.

Jacques Copeau (1879–1949) is arguably one of the most influential directors and teachers of the early 20th Century. His practice contributed towards the emergence of a new model of Western theatre that included: i) attention being paid to ensemble performance, thereby redirecting creative agency to performers; ii) renewed interest in improvisation as a rehearsal tool; and iii) a focus on the revival of popular forms, specifically mime and clowning principles deriving from his interest in Commedia Dell'arte (McManus, 2003:30). Copeau’s interest in clowning directly complements his philosophy of theatre and concern with a return to ‘purity’ and honest forms (McManus, 2003:31). Throughout this dissertation I have referred to the tendency among practitioners to link clowning and truthfulness.

Copeau’s relationship to the clown in this new model of theatre is significant. In the foreword of Pierre Mariel’s 1923 biography of the Fratellini, Copeau expresses his admiration for the Fratellini Brothers, praising them for their “pure style of technical perfection and especially muscular perfection in the service of a spontaneous and sincere feeling” (Copeau in McManus, 2003:31). In his compelling and detailed study, *No Kidding! Clowns as Protagonist in 20th Century Theatre* (2003), McManus points out that although Copeau took clowns more seriously than any other artist of the period, his attitude towards them was essentially ‘patronizing’ (2003:33). McManus argues that Copeau misinterpreted the clown’s ability to function “outside of the conventions then common in European theater”, perceiving it as naivete that represents the purity at the core of their technique instead of a “self conscious, structured theatrical technique in itself” (McManus, 2003:32).

Copeau invited the Fratellini’s to teach at his school, but they were only employed to teach physical forms such as “acrobatics and juggling” and the instruction of more “intellectual topics as form and structure in acting technique” was given to his son-in-law Jean Dasté to teach (McManus, 2003:32–33).

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> [Copeau] greatly admired [the Frattelinis'] improvisational ability [...] but the form of improvisation that his school developed, and that is still used in theater training around the world, serves an entirely different purpose from clowning. [...] [I]mprovisation in theatre pedagogy, as developed by Copeau and his disciples, focuses on "freeing" students from their intellectual selves. Of Albert Fratellini, Copeau would tell his students, "what an actor he would have made", implying that Albert's clowning prevented him from acting (McManus, 2003:33).

McManus critically observes that Copeau failed to recognise the understanding of structure and character that was implicit in the improvisational play employed by the clowns, and the dependence of their play on "acute sensitivity to the audience's perceptions of these aspects" (2003:33). Davison points out that this opportunity for clown performers to be acteur-auteurs, expected to "write as well as perform", may have "wed itself to the mistrust of the 'pre-prepared' and 'fake'" in contemporary clowning and clown theatre, where what the clown performer is expected to "write" should be spontaneous (2013:287).

> This new equation gives us the result that what the performer produces without preparing is, by definition, 'true'. And if it is 'true', then it is not only an option but also an obligation. The performer, consequently, *must* 'have something to say'. We now have the actor as a kind of 'super-artist', not the old singing-dancing-acting all-rounder, but a performer-writer-director all rolled into the same body (Davison, 2013:287).

When it comes to clowning, and the clown in theatre, this idea of the 'super-artist' becomes even more complex. The discussions on clown training, together with Lecoq's statement of personal exposure, have demonstrated that the 'flop' is highly dependent on a frame being provided by the teacher-provocateur and student-spectators. In the workshop, the clown-student's principle task is to demonstrate failure by disrupting the frame to produce laughter; the frame is clearly enforced by the provocateur and his student-spectator accomplices, who ultimately determine the duration of the 'performance'. In Chapter Four, the historical clown performer was perceived, in most instances, as being free of the pressure to have 'something to say' and instead utilized the stable frame of a forward moving narrative provided by other characters or figures (either fictional or actual).

If the clown performer is expected to take on the dual roles of author/director and clown, then by implication the clown-performer/creator will require the ability to realise and construct a repeatable frame, as well as be provided with the license to break, disrupt and surprise within that frame (in accordance with the clown principles identified in contemporary clown training). The issue of the acteur-auteur who is expected to have "something to say" is further complicated when it comes to the clown performer who is expected to have something spontaneous, direct and immediate to say.

There seems inadequate discussion offered by Lecoq himself to explain in what context he identified the need for the student to find the *quelque chose à dire*. One way to address this is to investigate the surrounding discussions by Lecoq's ex-students and theorists who have unpacked the issue to offer an

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understanding for performer-practitioners. One such example is found in Simon Murray's book, *Jacques Lecoq and the British Theatre* (2002), which cites Jon Potter, a former student of Lecoq:

> [C]oming from my background I had always connected *having something to say* with being political. But Lecoq's *quelque chose à dire* is a very *personal* thing. When you are communicating something effective about your world – or yourself then you are finding something to say. Everyone has something to say (cited in Murray, 2002:39).

Another former student of Lecoq, Beatrice Pemberton, links having 'something to say' with "being honest and using whatever it is that you are good at […]. If that happens then that works as a piece of theatre" (cited in Murray, 2002:39). Murray posits his own interpretation of the statement suggesting that "*having something to say* is largely achieved by sensate means – through movement and physicality – rather than as a consequence of cerebration" (2002:40).

These statements do not pull free of the tensions created by separating the 'personal' from the 'political' or drawing links between 'truthfulness' and 'meaningfulness'. Nevertheless, they offer a useful gateway to open new discussions and interpretations applicable to the acteur-auteur. It is necessary then to create a distinction between the acteur or performer for whom a staged reality or performance is always to some extent personal, in that it derives from their particular physiology, personality, rhythms and spontaneous reactions and choices, and the *auteur* or director who oversees, arranges and constructs the performance as a whole from an external point of view.

One way to understand this issue is by equating the "something that is being said" to the notion of a 'text', drawing on recent scholarly perspectives of what the term implies. Prigge-Pienaar, in a recent article on theatre-sports, discusses the performative text in relation to Eugenio Barba, who proposes that, "[t]he word text, before referring to a written or spoken, printed or manuscript text, meant 'a weaving together'. In this sense, there is no performance which does not have 'text'" (Barba in Prigge Pienaar 2018:137). Prigge-Pienaar discusses the transmission of script as "the performer's ability to recognize [sic], expose and shape [personal] action", she goes on to reference Grotowski for whom "the creative process exists [...] in not only revealing ourselves, but structuring what is revealed" (Grotowski, in Prigge-Pienaar, 2018). Prigge-Pienaar's article is particularly illuminating for this discussion as it revealed suprising connections that could be drawn between clowning and theatre sports, particularly in terms of the contest-like improvisation and audience participation theatre sport encourages.

This interpretation of the text in theatre, when viewed in connection with Murray's observation that Lecoq's *quelque chose à dire* might be indicative of the performer communicating effectively about his/her world through sensate rather than cerebral processes, directly connects what is being said with how it is being said. This in turn echoes the notion of the 'artistic microcosm' proposed by Stephen

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Halliwell which refers to the fictional universe that an artwork creates, or the autonomous "world within the world" with its own governing rules. It is possible to interpret this as referring to an artwork that is not motivated by, or deliberately created in response to, identifiable content outside of the performer. Such an artwork may be perceived as presumably apolitical, resulting in a split being made between the "personal" and "political" (Potter in Murray 2002:39). Theodor W Adorno challenges this binary asserting that the "idea of a conservative artwork is inherently absurd"; when artists "emphatically separate[e] themselves from the empirical world, their other, they bear witness that the world should be other than it is; they are the unconscious schemata of the world's transformation" (Adorno in Bailes, 2011:86).

In her own analysis, Bailes states:

> The political force of theatre as a representation of reality lies not only in its ability to show the conditions that exist in such a light that we might imagine their alterability [...] but, as critically, in its potential to organise the world according to a diversified notion of norms, logics, and the structural limitations that enables society to be conceived of differently and in difference (Bailes, 2011:86).

The 'flop', as I have shown, requires the presence and responsiveness – through laughter or silence – of an audience. The gag – a short physical sequence or pratfall, described by Bailes as "an instance of revolt that causes a "subversion of progressive or hierarchical order" by introducing the viewer to "pure, unassimilable felicitous nonsense" – does not require a live audience, as demonstrated in Charlie Chaplin's films, although the presence of an audience may be helpful in testing if the gag works (2011:45).

Both the gag and the 'flop' communicate through sensate means in the immediate contexts of the self-contained world in which they are implicit. Although they emerge from the performer's display of failure through the recognition of having been unable to make the audience laugh (in the case of the 'flop'), or displayed failure through inverted rules, personal rhythms and timing or physical abilities and choices (in the case of the gag), these praxes may be authored or directed, that is, framed either by an external figure or by the performer who embodies a different role of author-director to frame the clowning either inside a narrative or simply within a particular context. An example of this can be found in Charlie Chaplin's films, in which he 'authors' both the 'frame' (the lens of perception) and the narrative (the content/character within the lens). Within the frame of the film, gags become an "excess necessary to film's process of containment" (Gunning in Bailes, 2011:45). According to this logic, "gags function as contrapuntal rather than oppositional in relation to narrative, producing formal resistance to the cohesive world that narrative seeks to establish" (Bailes, 2011:45).

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> The gag is, however, a constituent of that narrative, an ineradicable intervention within its logic, running through and alongside it. It enables narrative to continue without altering its status and directionality. In this way, gag culture models an economy in which failure and breakdown are constitutive (Bailes, 2011:45).

I have drawn attention to how the 'flop', in contrast to the gag, is dependent on an audience and therefore impossible to remove from the context within which the clown is shown to fail. In Chaplin's films, and in the medium of cinema where there is no audience immediately present to the performer, the progression of the narrative never relies directly on audience laughter; nor are the actions of the performer affected by an audience and their responses, even though Chaplin shows an acute sense of timing as if he imagines the presence of audience laughter.

Therefore, for these ideas to be critically discussed, it is important to recognise the distinction between: i) the clown performer whose primary expressive device relies on the 'flop' and gags, and ii) the author/director whose function is ultimately concerned with selecting, arranging and positioning the material (including the persona who fails, and the sequence of gags), providing a frame or context of authority within which the clown performer may operate effectively.

I have demonstrated how, in a workshop environment, the provocateur may end a performance within minutes, since the central expectation of the audience is to witness the clown's ability to incite laughter, and not what the clown 'has to say'. Davison's extended *step-laugh* exercise, for example, is dependent on the clown's ability to listen and respond to laughter even when politically loaded content is being used to move the action forward. Davison writes that:

> A side-effect of the clown's solution to the actor's paradox is lack of interest in 'content'. As a clown, what is of interest is not what I am doing or trying to communicate, which 'the 'flop' reveals to be laughable. The question then is: what am I trying to convince the audience of? (Davison, 2013:207).

Considering Towsen's proposition that "[t]hroughout history, in fact, there have been writers who have tried – more or less unsuccessfully – to script plays specifically for clowns" (1976:42), it seems beneficial to question to what extent it is possible for the clowns to be pre-authored by someone other than themselves and whether the clown-performer could still retain a degree of agency with the author-director holding the reins. Answering this question may offer the practitioner a means to understand how and to what extent clown principles may be scripted or utilised by the auteur-auteur in contemporary performance.

Donald McManus (2003) offers the most widely studied interrogation of the re-emergence of the clown figure in theatre after World War II particularly exemplifying the clown principles employed by Georgio Strehler, Vsevelod Meyerhold, Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, and Dario Fo. What was it that Modernist practitioners sought to borrow from such a popular form? To what extent could these

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principles and practices be effectively introduced to the theatre of the time – a theatre that had only recently abandoned naturalistic stage conventions and which still staged performances in the same venues with strictly prescribed spatial relationships? McManus sheds some light on this resurgent interest in clowning:

> From the earliest union of clown and modern theater, two contradictory aspects of clown attracted dramatists and performers. One was the *free-wheeling, anarchic quality* that seemed to provide an antidote to realism and naturalism, but another aspect, equally attractive, was the physical prowess that clowns seemed to always possess. Their contradictory logic suggested a *liberated* stage character, while their physical prowess presented auteur directors with the ultimate *utilitarian* actor (McManus, 2003:39, emphasis added).

The following discussion will focus on Bertolt Brecht, in relation to his interest in clown principles interconnected with ideas of proximity, pleasure and audience connection. Brecht's own writings, notes and diary entries, as well as scripted plays, provide significant demonstrations of how the clown performer or actor may make use of clown principles. An investigation of Brecht's theatrical philosophy offers the opportunity to draw links between issues of space, audience, character/clown, authorship and performance which I propose may be further illuminated by considering the performance of the protagonist-clown in one of Brecht's earliest plays *Mann ist Mann*.

Bertolt Brecht

In the following extract from one of Brecht's journals, he brings to the surface and critically links three issues that I have raised through multiple avenues in the preceding sections:

> Once I get my hooks on a theatre, I shall hire two clowns. They will perform in the interval and pretend to be spectators. They will bandy opinions about the play and about the members of the audience [...] The clowns will laugh about any hero as about a private individual. *Make bets on the outcome*. […] The idea would be to bring reality back to the things on stage. For God's sake, it's the things that need to be criticized – the actions, words, gestures – not their execution (Brecht in Schechter, 1985:18).

Brecht imagines the clown performer as: a) occupying a position in and amongst the audience as a means of, b) tricking the audience by pretending to be spectators for the particular purpose of, c) enabling the vision of the author who has "something to say". The interdependence of these issues and how they are linked, critically addressed and practically imagined through Brecht's aesthetic vision of an ideal Epic Theatre, remain relevant in understanding the clown's presence in theatre today.

From Brecht's writings it is possible to glean what motivated his interest in clowns: he was clear and outspoken about his desire to reinstate the clown's presence in theatre as a response to the "demoralization of our theatre" in which "neither theatre nor audience has any idea what is supposed to go on there" (Brecht in Willett, 1964:6). This statement links strongly to an earlier reference I made

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to Weber, who described theatre audience members as prisoners ”riveted to their posts” and “unaware of their imprisonment” (2004:4). Brecht’s description of audiences, as if caught in a trance, concurs with this view:

> Looking about us, we see somewhat motionless figures in a peculiar condition [...]. They scarcely communicate with each other; their relations are those of a lot of sleepers [...]. True, their eyes are open, but they stare rather than see, just as they listen rather than hear. They look as if in a trance (Brecht in Willet, 1964:187).

Brecht recognised that the clown performer and the performance mode of clowning could assist in deconstructing the theatrical event of the time in its entirety, specifically the relationship between audience and performer which he recognised as dependent on the empowerment of the audience through the performer-spectator dynamic. Brecht often wrote about sporting events and their relationship with spectators as a desirable model for the type of theatre which interested him:

> When people at sporting establishments buy their tickets, they know exactly what is going to take place; and that is exactly what takes place once they are in their seats: viz. highly trained persons developing their peculiar powers in the way most suited to them, with the greatest sense of responsibility yet in such a way to make one feel like they are doing it primarily for their own fun. *Against that the traditional theatre is nowadays quite lacking in character* (Willett 1964:6).

By implication, Brecht was interested in forms that would enable clown performers to perform as creative agents with the ability to make extensive use of improvisation and spontaneity; at the time, clown-performers were performing in circus or cabaret shows that were in accessible venues, generally perceived as non-elitist and less concerned with an adherence to dramatic principles such as narrative or character, and thus addressed spectators directly. The influence of clown performers such as Karl Valentin, Charlie Chaplin and the Fratellini Brothers on Brecht’s understanding and implementation of clowning has been discussed by several theorists, including Schechter (1985), McManus (2003) and Bey (2008), generally pointing to Brecht’s fascination with Valentin’s use of language, the Fratellini's mastery of physical comedy and Chaplin’s naiveté and failure.

Brecht’s interest in clowning was fuelled by his conceptual interest in, and practical experimentation with, manipulating physical and aesthetic distance. States offers a general frame or perspective from which to view theatre: “In one way or another, the history of theater can be viewed as a history of flirtation with the physical distance between stage and audience” (1985:96). Brecht’s thinking around ‘distance’ and ‘proximity’ is particularly developed through his conceptualisation of the *Verfremdungseffekt,* a contentious term that roughly translates to an effect of ‘alienation’ or ‘distancing’.

Brecht imagines, as suggested in the opening quote to this section, that the clown figure may possess the ability to ‘tutor’ the audience into essentially *failing* in their inherited roles as “good” or

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conventional theatre audience members entitling them, as proposed by Brecht, to *not* leave their coats at the door and to smoke, laugh and loudly voice their opinions. Brecht recognised in clowns their ability to induce the spectator into a different 'way of seeing'. Perhaps Brecht imagined the same dynamic depicted in contemporary clowning contexts such as the mock-audience set up by Gaulier in his workshops, in which Gaulier performs as a type of 'Whiteface clown' that 'tutors' the audiences on how to engage with the performances (refer to Chapter Two). In this chapter, I also noted how Gaulier encourages the student-audience to voice their opinions, often dictating the direction and duration of the student-performances. Brecht asserts that: "*A theatre which makes no contact with the public is a nonsense*. Our theatre is accordingly a nonsense. The reason why the theatre has at present no contact with the public is that it has no idea what is wanted of it" (Brecht in Willett, 1964:7).

The audience engagement Brecht proposes and imagines, therefore, echoes the rowdy Elizabethan spectators negotiated by Tarlton or spectators at sporting events in which the clown's role was key to eliciting audience contribution. It is, however, important to recognise that although Brecht employed clowning principles in the writing and directing of the characters, the clown performer's relationship with the audience was not spontaneous and the clown performer had little creative agency in terms of authorship. If the characteristic of spontaneity in the clown's performance, or rather a spontaneous relationship with the audience, was absent, how and to what extent did Brecht create the *illusion* of clowning as spontaneous? What principles of clowning did he draw from? And if the clown performers were described as protagonists by Brecht, how did they remain loyal to a single conceptual or thematic vision whilst also maintaining an appearance of freedom and spontaneity or attempting to alter audience exchange?

In Daniel Bey's dissertation*, Clowning in the Brechtian Tradition* (2008), he considers three of Brecht's texts – *Mann ist Mann*, *The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent* and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* as means to explore the extent to which Brecht utilised clown principles to augment his ambition of a critical theatre. Bey questions to what extent clowning was included and more importantly sustained in the plays. He draws the conclusion that in *Mann ist Mann* the clowning was employed as a tool to serve Brecht's particular political project but was not sustained throughout: "Brecht is using clowning for politico-theatrical ends and does not serve the form to the hilt, only taking it as far as it is useful" (2008:151). In *The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent* clowning was sustained, but Bey maintains that it was only made possible because the play is extremely short (twenty minutes). This leads Bey to question whether clowning could ever be "sustained for a full-length piece, without *sacrificing political effect*" (2008:161, emphasis added), a question that connects to the complexities raised in Chapter Three regarding Lecoq's preference for "shorter forms" in relation to having "something to say".

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Actor, Clown and Character

Polly: *Can it really be done Uriah? Changing one man into another?*

Uriah: *Yes, one man is like the other. Man equals man.*

(Brecht, *Mann ist Mann* Scene 8*,* 1979:37).

Brecht describes *Mann ist Mann* as a play about "a man being taken to pieces and rebuilt as someone else for a particular purpose" (Brecht in Willet, 1964:16). The themes of death and rebirth, as well as the tropes around the construction of character or reconstruction of man, directly reflect Brecht's theoretical and practical concerns around performance, identity and empathy; they also reflect a history of clown *entrées* in which themes of death and rebirth are a popular trope, in particular relation to the Auguste clown figure.

> A man's a man: this is not fidelity to any single essence of one's own, but a continual readiness to admit a new essence (Benjamin, 1998:xii).

This section will advance the previous ideas by focusing attention on: a) the actor as a performer embodying a scripted character; b) the character Galy Gay (as scripted by Brecht); and c) the director's interpretation of clowning based on the principles of pleasure, failure, commitment to the game, and laughter. Through examples, I will clarify an understanding of the interplay between the actor, the character and the clown principles in *Mann ist Mann* as fictional qualities employed for the purposes of Brecht's Epic Theatre.

Shortly after Brecht's revised production of *Mann ist Mann* was performed at the *Staatstheater* in Berlin in 1931, Brecht wrote a letter to the *Berliner Börsen Courier*. In it, he discusses the public's feedback concerning the actor Peter Lorre, who played the character of Galy Gay, and whose acting was 'adversely criticized' by many (Brecht in Willet, 1964:56). Brecht explains that the criticism was essentially centered around Lorre's lack of "carrying-power", as well as the fact that he supposedly lacked the "gift of making his meaning clear" (Brecht in Willet, 1964:53).

In the letter, Brecht defends Lorre's performance asserting that the criticism was unjust: the actor *did* possess these qualities – evidenced at the start of the rehearsal process – but his performance style was influenced by Brecht during the rehearsal process and was therefore determined by Brecht's deliberate stylistic choices. Brecht argues that it is his characterisation of Galy Gay that had to a large extent informed the nature of Lorre's performance. For Brecht, it was Galy Gay as *character* that the audience should have been criticising and not the actor's *performance*, affirming his view that it is the "things on stage" that deserve criticism, not their "execution".

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It may be interpreted, from Brecht's letter and the audience response, that through his scripting and direction of Lorre, Brecht created a "hyper-mimetic" illusion that the actor Lorre and the character Galy Gay are the same person, or at least share many qualities. Benjamin (1998), describes Brecht's heroes as "resourceful, humorous nobodies" (1998, xii); Brecht similarly describes the character of Galy Gay as "a great liar" and "incorrigible optimist" who very seldom allows himself "an opinion of his own" and the audience mistakes, Brecht argues, the character's questionable decisions and actions for that of the actor's (Brecht in Willet, 1964:19). This letter is significant for understanding Brecht's philosophy of the *Verfremdungseffekt,* which constantly and overtly reminds the audience that no virtuosity is taking place, and that the actor is only playing a role or constructing a lie.

In critical texts on *Mann ist Mann,* the protagonist Galy Gay is often identified and referred to as a clown figure (Schechter 1985; Bey 2008; McManus 2013), made evident through the principles Brecht employed in conceptualising the role. In a dramatic plot, protagonists are generally perceived as responsible for driving a narrative forward through the weighting of their actions and decisions which offer a singular and potentially predictable ordering. Keeping in mind the previous discussion of the clown's traditional role on stage, it is difficult to imagine the clown performer as possessing the dual ability to act as both protagonist and disruptive agent – maintaining and upholding a single mode of thinking and behaving, *as well as* disrupting it. In the opening to this chapter, Chaplin was referenced as a particular performer who acted as both protagonist and disruptor through the execution of a sequence of gags in-between narrative plot; it is important to note, however, that his performance is contained in the medium of film and is in no way aimed at affecting a live audience.

To understand the clown performer's disruptive potential, it is important to make evident that the clown's disruption is not *necessarily* of themes or script or narrative, but rather the disruption of an accepted or predetermined mode of organising reality; and the clown does not *deliberately* disrupt (since this would mean the clown functions from within the established order) but rather, the clown *is disruptive* by nature when placed *in relation* to a singular cohesive authority. Brecht explains the way in which his understanding of clowns, and their contradictory nature, mirrors his philosophy of human nature.

> Even when a character behaves by contradictions that's only because nobody can be identically the same at two unidentical moments. Changes in his exterior continually lead to an inner reshuffling. The continuity of the ego is a myth. A man is an atom that continually breaks up and forms anew. We have to show things as they are (Brecht in Willet, 1964:15).

The clown's disruption, or the contrasting force he presents, is never psychologically or emotionally justified or explained since this would imply a predictable or measurable causality; instead, the disruptions of the clown are acausal and non-linear, achieved through self-contained gags and/or

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spontaneous interactions based on principles of failure or the ‘flop’. McManus explains: “While the behaviour of normative characters is based on their emotional responses to the plot and other characters, the clown's behavior stems from an attempt to logically negotiate the arbitrary rules that govern the plot and characters (2003:12).

Brecht contrasts the Epic actor and dramatic actor explaining that the latter has his character “established from the first and simply exposes it to the inclemencies of the world and the tragedy”; the epic actor, on the other hand, “lets his *character grow before the spectator’s eyes out of the way in which he behaves*” (Brecht in Willet, 1964:56). Brecht further observes:

> ‘This way of joining up’, ‘this way of selling an elephant’, ‘this way of conducting the case’, do not altogether add up to a single unchangeable character but one that changes all the time and becomes more and more clearly defined in course of ‘this way of changing’ (Brecht in Willet, 1964:56).

The above is useful towards understanding how Brecht may have chosen to organise the material and write the character of Galy Gay with the aim of creating the illusion that the performer as clown makes decisions that appear as if born from impulse in the present moment. Brecht’s explanation clearly differentiates a psychologically motivated character, guided or predetermined by a logical progression of actions, from the clown character, whose actions are impulsive and lead to seemingly unrelated self-contained moments. This echoes the way in which game play, as discussed in Chapter Two, forms the foundation of the clown performer’s motivation, actions and interactions as regulated by the teacher or provocateur. Brecht positions or constructs Galy Gay with the same potential to respond to provocations rather than initiate them.

In *Mann ist Mann*, other characters acting as authority figures propose multiple roles for Galy Gay to play. It is possible to imagine, in a reading of the script, that Galy Gay’s failure and ridiculousness are played further in response to the audience’s laughter; it would be possible to create the illusion that it is the actor, Lorre, who is responding to the laughter (by acknowledging or clocking the audience), and that their laughter impacts the performance and encourages more game-playing. In the first scene, for example, Bey observes that Galy Gay is ‘playing the game’ of pretending to be a husband (2008), and the role-as-game is introduced by the character-provocateur of “his wife”.

> ***Galy Gay:*** sits one morning upon his chair and tells his wife: *Dear wife, I have decided in accordance with our income to buy a fish today. That would be within the means of a porter who drinks not at all, smokes very little and has almost no vices. Do you think I should buy a big fish or do you require a small one?*
>
> ***Wife****: A small one.* (Brecht, 1979:3)

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Bey emphasises the “ridiculousness” of Galy Gay “expressing a desire to buy a fish in such inflated language”, making it obvious that he “plays the game of being a rhetorician” and fails as a convincing role of husband by employing inappropriate language for a casual conversation with one’s wife about dinner (2008:131). Bey further posits that the “grandeur to Galy Gay’s announcement” is at “bathetic odds with the banality of its content,” highlighting its pretense (2008:131). Galy Gay’s performance of a husband in the opening lines of the play immediately serves the project of the Epic character who simultaneously enacts the role of husband (taking it on as real) and comments on it (observing it as illusion or artifice).

Although Galy Gay tries to demonstrate his importance through his pretentious speech, his wife – the Whiteface figure in this scene – instantly diminishes his status, by offering a simple, straightforward reply that ‘normalises’ the situation and provides the audience with a recognisable frame. If the actress playing Galy Gay’s wife were to clock the audience before or after saying her line – “A small one” – this could serve to signal her awareness of Galy Gay’s game, and thereby collapse the distance between the actress and the audience. In another scene, the soldier Uriah proposes to Galy Gay that he play the role of businessman in order to sell a fake elephant:

> ***Galy Gay:*** *That is entirely clear. Who is auctioning him off?*
>
> ***Uriah:*** *Someone who signs as owner.*
>
> ***Galy Gay****: Who is to sign as owner?*
>
> ***Uriah:*** *Would you care to sign as owner, Mr Gay?*
>
> ***Galy gay****: Have we a buyer?*
>
> ***Uriah****: Yes.*
>
> ***Galy Gay:*** *My name, of course, must not be mentioned.*
>
> (*Mann ist Mann,* Brecht, Scene 9, 1979:41).

Uriah enforces the ridiculous game of Galy Gay as businessman by providing Gay with the invitation provocation of a respectable identity by addressing Galy Gay as ‘Mr Gay’. Galy Gay plays the game of seller and owner, but the ridiculous statement he makes – that his name is not to be mentioned – undermines his authority, as it is of course impossible to sign your name without mentioning it. Although the Whiteface clown characters in the play possess more authority than Galy Gay and appear more aware of a correct way of behaving in the world, their roles are nevertheless ridiculous and grounded in stupidity. The brutal and terrifying sergeant, for example, is known as ‘Bloody Five human Typhoon, Tiger of Kalkoa’. The overstated terror in his name instantly declares that he is playing a game

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and taking on the role of being terrifying. This ironically exposes the imagined 'person underneath', or 'stupid idea' of wanting to trick the audience and intimidate the other characters, signaling a failure to achieve the embodiment of a brutal, authoritative sergeant. In some instances, the pretended roles (as games) are declared directly; for example, when Widow Begbick is asked if she would 'play the buyer' and simply steps into the role of buyer by agreeing (Brecht, 1979:41). The performative mechanisms of role-playing and character-making are therefore exposed.

Gestic acting is employed so that characters display their attempts at role-playing with obvious and demonstrative actions, statements and physical indications that reveal the gaps between the character or role. In a discussion with Walter Benjamin, Brecht tells an anecdote about how 'the idea of Epic Theatre first came into his head' with reference to the stylistic Whiteface make-up in place of emotion:

> The battle in the play is supposed to occupy the stage for three-quarters of an hour. Brecht could not stage manage the soldiers, and neither could Asya [Lacis], his production assistant. Finally he turned in despair to Karl Valentin, at that time one of his closest friends, who was attending the rehearsal, and asked him: 'Well, what is it? What's the truth about these soldiers? What about them?' Valentin: 'They're pale, they're scared, that's what!' The remark settled the issue, Brecht adding: 'They're tired.' Whereupon the soldiers' faces were thickly made up with chalk, and that was the day the production's style was determined (Benjamin, 1966:115).

In other words, Widow Bedgebick *becomes* the buyer when she says 'I want to buy the elephant'; Galy Gay *becomes* a soldier by wearing the uniform of a soldier or *becomes* a corpse when he hears a shooting noise. Brecht offers the following explanation of Galy Gay's roles and how they are perceived from an authorial perspective:

> The character's development has been very carefully divided into four phases*, for which four masks* are employed – the packer's face, up to the trial; the 'natural face', up to his awakening after being shot; the 'blank page', up to his reassembly after the funeral speech; finally the soldier's face (Brecht in Willet 1964:55, emphasis added).

The choice of the word 'mask' is highly significant in that it points directly to the notion of "honest fakery". The contemporary Lecoq lineage also makes continuous reference to the "mask". Both Lecoq and Gaulier refer to the red nose as the "smallest mask in the world", Gaulier writing that it has an important virtue in revealing "the student's face, their body, their dreams, their foolishness and their shyness (or arrogance) when they reached the age of seven" (2012:281). Brecht employs masks both conceptually as well as through specific stylistic devices in direct reference to the circus clown tradition where the clown makes explicit their 'double-face' or 'otherness'. Oliver Double explains how the use of stylistic indicators derived from Karl Valentin.

> Even if Brecht came up with the white make-up himself, it was his familiarity with Valentin's work that allowed him to see how Valentin himself would have solved the problem in his own performances. Indeed, photographic documentation of Valentin in performance indicates that he did indeed use makeup and prosthetics in a similar way – the actual make-up (or false nose or

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> moustache) was often outlandish in appearance, but applied with simplicity and restraint and, perhaps more significantly, used to indicate the social attitude of the character (for example, a wild-haired wig for artistic genius or outrageous whiskers for an old-fashioned militarist) (Double, 2006:41).

According to Brecht, in the creation of *Mann ist Mann* with Peter Lorre, opinions differed as to when would be the best phase for white powder to be applied to Galy Gay's face to indicate a different phase or role being adopted. Brecht explains that Lorre chose to employ the 'Whiteface mask', by applying actual white powder, in the phase where Galy Gay is described in script as wearing the "blank face, up to his reassembly after the funeral speech". In some performances, Lorre performed on stilts, as a physical signifier and indication of the terrifying killer that Galy Gay becomes in the final scene. Similarly, to represent Galy Gay's earlier innocence and naivity in the play, Brecht references the stylistic attributes of a typical Auguste clown. The other soldiers dress Galy Gay in Jeriah Jip's ill-fitting uniform, described by Uriah as the "noble garb of the glorious British army" (*Mann ist Mann*, 1979:16). But, similarly to the Chaplinesque suit, the uniform is "too small" and the boots "pinch horribly" (Brecht, Scene 4, 1979:17). In other words, the "costume is not the character", but acts as a frame against which the clown physically fails (Gaulier, 2012:281).

In *Mann ist Mann* a distinguishable gap exists between the *character* Galy Gay (the protagonist written by Brecht with a back story as porter with a wife working on the docks who goes out to buy a fish one day), and the *roles* Galy Gay adopts (businessman, husband, soldier, drunkard, corpse, to name a few) which contradict the fictional character. There is also a further level of distanciation that might be created through casting an actor with a reputation, personality and physicality that may further contrast with the character and the roles he plays. This distance is in opposition to the illusion of virtuosity that performers achieve when they succeed in convincing audiences, through the suspension of disbelief, that they *are* the character they are attempting to portray. This illusion requires that our perception of the performer's physicality merges with that of the fictional character and the *roles* the fictional character might embody as teacher, victim, electrician or murderer – rendering it impossible to imagine or recognise the potential 'gaps' in personality or physicality between the actor, character and roles they play.

It is evident from the discussion on the Elizabethan clowns Kemp and Tarlton, however, that the actor may project a hyper-mimetic illusion of himself as an actor, which may be visible beneath the characters or roles played, aimed at convincing the audience of a 'fictional self' who, as a clown, may play a confused or a 'bad actor' displaying low status. This introduces another fictional layer that may seem very close to the performer's actual or perceivable self. To understand Brecht's interest in the projection of the performer him/herself I turn to a tribute written by Brecht to Frank Wedekind. Double explains that Brecht's admiration for Wedekind, especially as a performer, was "hot-blooded hero

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worship" and that he apparently named his son Frank after the actor and playwright (Double, 2006:51). Brecht describes Wedekind as:

> […] not a particularly *good actor* (he even kept forgetting the limp which he himself had prescribed, and couldn't remember his lines), but as Marquis von Keith he put the professionals in the shade. He filled every corner with his *personality.* There he stood, *ugly, brutal, dangerous,* with close-cropped red hair, his hands in his trouser pockets, and one felt that the devil himself couldn't shift him (Willet, 1964:3, emphasis added).

This description draws attention to Wedekind's 'personal' presence and obvious, non-disguisable physicality – in other words, his failed attempt at the characterisation of Marquis von Keith is associated firstly through his physicality, and secondly through his performance or presentation of the character. It is possible to connect Brecht's description of Wedekind's performance to the previous discussions and texts that repeatedly described the various clowns, specifically in terms of their ugliness, drawing attention to their physical oddities. "Clown presence depends on failure" or "absence of success" (Davison, 2013:207).

Preiss, in the discussion on Tarlton, similarly suggested that his physical presence contributed towards securing the relationship with his audience (2014:84). It is not always evident from the previous discussions of clown history, how much of the physicality was altered to create the illusion of ugliness (as a mask), especially in the earlier forms (*Vidusaka* and *Zany*) and how much of the perceived 'ugliness' was already implicit in the performer's physicality such as Armin's short stature or Tarlton's "flat nose, curly hair and squint" that contributed to their 'otherness' (Steele, 1977:213).

The issue of the performer as failure can also be linked to Brecht's interest in amateur theatre. Bailes explains that when Brecht was in exile in Scandinavia and "virtually cut-off from all professional theatre," he became intrigued with what amateur acting could offer, wondering whether it "could reveal the conditions of theatre and the potential for change in the world" (2011:32-33).

> Professional theatre […] could not achieve such a revelation because of its slick façade which rendered most if not all of its labor invisible, presenting the ideology and values of bourgeois society as universal and unchanging. According to Brecht, professional theatre, founded on bourgeois aesthetic and cultural values, could learn from the 'image of the world' presented by amateur theatre with its 'rudimentary, distorted, spontaneous efforts'; for the ways, then, in which the *in*ability to do something might overwhelm ability and instead radiate different values and beliefs (Bailes, 2011:149).

In addition to having an interest in the actor's physical presence (as actual, innate physiological characteristics that the actor may become aware of, and use to his/her advantage), Brecht was also interested in Chinese theatre and ways in which distancing techniques could be employed by performers. For example, Brecht describes the actor in Chinese theatre as an "artist" who "expresses his awareness of being watched" and constantly "observes himself" and makes the audience aware of

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his own observations during performance. An amateur performer, in a similar fashion, might not be able to hide the labour the performance requires. Brecht provides an example of a Chinese actor in a performance "representing a cloud" describing how he would show its "unexpected appearance" and its rapid yet gradual transformation.

> [H]e will occasionally look at the audience as if to say: isn't it just like that? At the same time, he also observes his own arms and legs, adducing them, testing them and perhaps finally approving them. An obvious glance to the floor, so as to judge the space available to him for his act, does not strike him as liable to break the illusion (Brecht in Willet, 1964:92).

The performer draws attention to his experience in performance, collapsing the distance between performer and audience; the audience recognises and empathises with the actor/performer doing the work and in so doing creates distance between the audience and the characters. Brecht explains that in this way "empathy was not entirely rejected. The audience identifies itself with the actor as being an observer, and accordingly develops his attitude of observing or looking on" (Brecht in Willet, 1964:93).

However, in relation to Brecht's concerns with audience misinterpretation of Lorre's acting style, it is important to question audience reception and the degree to which Brecht as an author/director managed to induct the audience into reading/interpreting his choices as *deliberate techniques*, or whether they could be used to trick the audience into a particular relationship with the performers. Brecht sheds light on this issue in an interview where he discusses the need for a particular 'type of audience', in a *Dialogue about Acting'* (1929):

> ***Q:*** *The actors always score great successes in your plays. Are you yourself satisfied with them?*
>
> ***Brecht:*** *No.*
>
> ***Q:*** *Because they act badly?*
>
> ***Brecht:*** *No. Because they act wrong.*
>
> ***Q:*** *Can't you tell the actor then how he ought to perform?*
>
> ***Brecht:*** *No. At present he is entirely dependent on the audience, blindly subject to it.*
>
> ***Q:*** *Haven't you ever tried?*
>
> ***Brecht:*** *Indeed. Again and again.*
>
> ***Q:*** *Could he do it?*

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> ***Brecht:*** *Sometimes, yes; if he was gifted and still naive, and still found it fun; but then only at rehearsals and only so long as I was present and nobody else, in other words, so long as he had the type of audience I was telling you about.* (Brecht in Willet, 1964:27–28).

This interview is seminal to this discussion since it illuminates Brecht's view that a mode of performance might require a specific audience for the performer to act in a certain way.

Recent texts on the Elizabethan clown (as previously discussed) highlighted to what extent audience participation often shaped the event. In Chapter Two I proposed that in the workshop environment, the teacher-provocateur also cultivates a very particular audience: the students are tutored by Gaulier to become a type of "mock" audience accustomed to cues and signals that point to a specific game to which they are invited and are provided with an example of how to respond. I have also pointed out (in the anecdotes), that as an audience-observer I felt disempowered and removed from the game (not in the know) – so in a sense the attempt to cultivate the right audience also leads to its opposite effect. These reflections might provide insight into Brecht's frustrations with the audience's response to Peter Lorre's acting. According to Brecht, the audience misunderstood the mode of audience-performer relationship and their subsequent role in it. He explains that he often presents an incident onstage that is deliberately conceived as 'bad' so that the audience can learn how to think for itself: "That's why I need a quick witted audience that knows how to observe" (Brecht in Willet, 1964:14).

At the end of *Mann ist Mann,* the relationship between Galy Gay and the audience, as well as between Galy Gay and the other characters, transforms when Brecht no longer employs clown principles in his writing of the character. Suddenly the audience are distanced from the performer/hyper-mimetic illusion of the performer as Galy Gay is no longer seen as playing a 'game', contradicting the role or responding to provocations. Bey writes: "[H]e is no longer playing the game of being a hardened soldier, he *is* a hardened soldier" (2008:150), he has become terrifying in character because he is, in line with Stanislavski's actor as described by Esslin, "completely alone, completely wrapped up in himself and unaware of being observed" (Esslin, 1985:22). The playwright closes the distance of identification/immersion between character and role and widens the distance between audience and actor. Galy Gay no longer asks the audience for permission to proceed (by performing in a way that might incite laughter); he does not fail, and he deliberately pushes through with his ideas and opinions. Although the other characters become Auguste clowns, his status is raised above the Whiteface status in that there is no space for 'stupidity'. Brecht explains that Galy Gay "becomes the strongest once he has ceased to be a private person" (Brecht in Willet, 1964:19). Bey articulately describes this shift in the mode of performance:

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> [W]e stop laughing, as we realise that our laughter has been saying ‘yes’, and now, in this final scene, we realise what that means. Galy Gay, in the final act of transformation, loses his bafflement, ceases to be a clown, and does something successfully, something we could never endorse. ‘He wins’, says Brecht. He wins in the context of a capitalist-imperialist society, and when the idiot becomes a useful idiot, we lose. The clown is a deeply appealing figure, but when he ceases to be a clown, he becomes dangerous (Bey, 2008:151).

Bey concludes, *Mann ist Mann is "*less than complete as a clown show", suggesting that in a clown show Galy Gay would perhaps, "purely by accident, find a fish on the Tibetan border and remember everything about his quest, before taking it home to his wife" (2008:151).

According to Bey's analysis, Brecht employs the clown to provide the audience with a particular ‘place from which to see’ the laughter in relation to its use as a device to show pleasure or fun. The audience is given permission to laugh at the clown, but they are also shown how this laughter is connected to their ‘safety’; so that when the consequences turn serious and the audience have not stopped laughing, they realise their role in encouraging the performer and thereby contributing to the tragedy. This different mode of performance – employed by Brecht here, as well as the pedagogues discussed in Chapter Two – acknowledges the double-play made possible in theatre: the theatre entraps or conditions the audience to a ‘way of seeing’ and it is from within this place of entrapment that they employ the clown performer to disrupt the hegemony and offer the audience a liberated perspective.

At the end of *Mann ist Mann* Galy Gay transforms, the clown figure, the performance mode that draws on clowning alters, leading to a sudden, unexpected rupture. Through the performer's transformation from clown to actor (no longer sensitive to audience engagement or response and no longer appearing to be playing a game) the laughter itself is questioned. Suddenly, it is the audience and their laughter that becomes absurd or questionable since it can no longer be directed towards the clown, or mediated through the clown's actions, and instead is shown to be directed at the atrocities of war. Suddenly it becomes clear that the playwright is asking the audience, ‘What are you laughing at?’.

Galy Gay is again juxtaposed to the action of the play and the other characters who become low status in relation to his character as an unstoppable war-machine, suddenly succeeding as a soldier, his transformation as unpredictable and disruptive as his foolishness had been. If, in other words, a theatrical premise sets up chaotic behaviour through spontaneity, laughter, responsiveness, as the norm, then stability scripted action, non-responsiveness, attentiveness to content and a linear trajectory, inverts the norm, and it is this sudden inversion that, through surprise, may have the potential to invite a new perspective or a questioning audience: Why are we laughing? Is it acceptable to laugh at this? In other words, the clown plays the role as mediator, neither fully immersed in the narrative/illusion or fully outside of it, so it is through the clown that the audience directs their

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attention. One could argue that there are other theatrical devices that function in a similar way, only that they usually do not rely on audience participation through laughter as their feedback system.

This chapter has aimed to shed light on some of the principles Brecht employed as a scriptwriter/author, using the clown as a cipher through which he could 'have something to say'. It has revealed the potential process by which a clown-author may employ clown principles in a text or script to 'resemble' a spontaneous relationship with the audience. The following chapter will identify the challenges and outcomes of my own process as auteur-auteur 'with something to say', by employing clown principles as taught in contemporary clown training to create an hour-long sustainable event.

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CHAPTER SIX: UNFINISHED THINKING

"One has to take risks; that is to say, uncertainty has to be worked for." - Maurice Blanchot

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When I woke up on the Monday morning of my last week with Phillipe Gaulier, I decided I could not get myself on the train to Etampés to spend another day filled with embarrassment and dismissal. Gaulier does not make it compulsory to attend class. Part of his approach is to allow students to take responsibility for their own learning and so no register is kept and there are no consequences for not attending. I made up my mind to take a day off and walk around Paris; 'to think', I told myself. By now I had spent two weeks at École Philippe Gaulier, but no more than five minutes on stage without being insulted or aggressively dismissed.

I was not doing well.

At the start of the workshop, the insults and rejection had felt relatively innocent and entertaining; I was able to remind myself that this was part of the game, the 'flop', that I would eventually get there - I just needed to persist, to persevere, to try again. But now, as we were nearing the end, I had the distinct feeling that I was not going to improve.

I spent the day in a small café, watching YouTube videos, reading various books I had brought along and making notes, trying anything to make sense of the process.

I was determined to arrive at class the next day with a plan, to have improved, to stay just a minute longer, to receive even just a single 'not bad' from Gaulier that would indicate miracle improvement ... I found some videos of clowns I thought were funny and practised a new 'persona' by copying some of their mannerisms. I also decided to work on the costume Gaulier had suggested … the 'academic', a costume which I found rather … unfunny ...

What could possibly be funny about it? Could he not have given me Brigitte Bardot, or a gorilla, or, something less …. Boring? How was I supposed to make them laugh as an academic?

Armed with some adjustments to my costume, a set of new gestures and a whole lot of theory on being stupid, ridiculous, finding pleasure and 'lightness', I arrived the next day believing I was better prepared for the last few days of the clown workshop.

The result of my preparation was …

"Up ze ass boring". The worst thing Gaulier "had ever seen since WW2".

It wasn't fun for me, either. I did not understand ... I had had enough. I wanted to go home. I was not a clown and that was fine.

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I stopped volunteering to participate and withdrew from the process. Gaulier did not seem to mind or even notice. I was convinced that he had something personally against me.

The following morning, we were split into small groups for the final 'auto-course'. I knew that this would be my last chance to succeed or learn something, and I made sure I ended up in a group of 'professionals' – a group of talented clown performers that often managed to make (even) Gaulier laugh and who had all been attending the school for at least a year or longer.

I was determined to work hard in the group, to show them that I was dedicated, and funny. I brought ideas and plans to every rehearsal - something I had watched, an adjustment to my costume, something I had seen someone else do that we could copy.

We created a ten-minute entrée in which we pretended to be incompetent circus performers - a presenter, an acrobat, a juggler and a tiger trainer - who kept messing up scenes or fighting with each other to get the spotlight. We planned to go up one by one, to have the best chance of spending the most time on stage before being dismissed. For this same reason it was decided that I would enter last.

I now stand nervously behind the flats. I can hear the performance is going well, which makes me even more nervous to enter. The presenter calls: "And NOW LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, we are welcoming to this circus FROM SOUTH AFRICA … the tiger trainer, clap everybody, YES, clap!"

My heart is racing. I hold my breath and run on stage, as if being forced into a burning building - desperate to be funny, to be liked, to be seen….

I run frantically up and down, performing the rehearsed version of a tiger trainer who has lost her tiger: "Have you seen my tiger? I lost him. Tiger, Tiger!" I start looking underneath some of the audience members ... It only lasts a few seconds, and then...

BANG.

The abrupt sound ends my frantic search and stops me in my tracks. I am not surprised. It felt agonising to perform so I can only imagine what it must have looked like.

Gaulier is silent. Everyone's eyes are on me. I look down, despite the invitation to try something else. They wait for me to respond.

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The blood rushes to my head. I fall on the floor and kick my legs in the air, desperate to do something, anything else.

I get up and sing opera. I run to the wall and bang my head against it. Nothing works. No laughter. Embarrassing, weird, and...

"Horrible!" Gaulier shouts.

I can't look at them. I surrender. Gaulier gives his final drumbeat and I move a step forward, ready to sit down at the back of the audience and never to look up at them again ... to go and pack my bags at the yogurt-smelling Airbnb and leave for a safer place ... for home.

BANG.

I am still on stage. The other students are trying to 'save' us/me by going back to something they had done before which had received laughter – Sophie tries to eat another banana with the peel on, a highlight of the day, and Paul tries to go back to playing golf with the toothbrush, to divert the attention, but it's too late. No laughter. I stand looking at my feet. Unarmoured. The other performers come to stand next to me. Silently, we await our punishment. "I'm sorry", I whisper.

Gaulier is silent for a few moments and then asks the audience what they thought of each of our performances by pointing to us individually with his drumsticks. Starting with the aerialist, he prompts them: "Did we like her?" The audience laughs and nods. He moves over to the acrobat and before he can even ask whether they liked her, everyone bursts out laughing. She drops her handbag again as she had in the performance, and everyone laughs so much she repeats it three times. Gaulier then points his stick at me.

Deafening silence.

Gaulier begins: "Oh, the tiger tamer from Africa. Do we say: 'Oh, I love the tiger tamer from Africa?' or do we say, 'I want to cook her in the strongest acid we can find until her eyes pop out so we can sell them on the black market'?"

Samuel, in the first row, raises his hand and answers with unnecessary malice.

Gaulier: "Yes, Samuel?"

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Samuel: "Gaulier, I think that we say: 'We want to cook the tiger tamer in the strongest acid we can find until her eyes pop out and we can sell them on the black market'".

This causes a little laughter. I roll my eyes, I don't find it funny, I don't even look up. What is this sick game?

Gaulier continues: "Do we like it when we see her come running like a drunk wildebeest or do we say, 'I want her to be thrown down a pit with a 1000 rabid mosquitoes'?"

Another student affirms: "Mmmmm, yes Gaulier, I think that we want to throw her in a pit with 1000 rabid mosquitos." The provider of this insult, Roberto, is an Italian and he struggles to repeat the sentence, causing laughter.

My body tenses, I can feel my face getting red with anger and embarrassment. Why am I being victimised? Why did I waste so much money and time to be so rudely insulted?

In my mind I list reasons why not being funny is not my fault. He didn't teach us anything, it's a cult. I had to perform with students who were way more experienced than myself, what did he expect?

They are bullies, that's it! Gaulier, a professional bully, who chose for me this UNFUNNY costume just so I can be the object of their bullying.

I keep quiet. Still looking down, I nod.

Gaulier demands: "Sit down, all of you!"

Before I sit down, I give a final glance at the audience, so smug in their safe, comfortable positions on the floor … It makes me furious … and under my breath I mumble: "It's not fair, Gaulier".

Gaulier hears it.

BANG.

Gaulier: "What is that you say?"

Deafening silence.

I go on, dead serious. A little louder: "I said, it's not fair."

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Silence. Everyone seems surprised at my rebuke. I look straight at them.

"I didn't WANT to be the tiger tamer in the first place, or this 'academic'. Why did you choose it for me Gaulier, it's not even funny and you know it. "

Some giggling from the back of the class.

But at this stage I am not interested in this type of laughter. I am angry and no longer care to be insulted or laughed at. I take a step forward, about to leave.

Gaulier puts up his hand indicating I should stay.

Good ... Then I will stay … I stare out at the smug-looking audience ... and at Kimberly in the front row, who looks especially comfortable, whispering something to her friend next to her. This sets me off.

"What is that, Kim-ber-ly?? YOU, always watching me with a dull face, a face like…" I imitate her face, looking unimpressed with my performance.

A lot of laughter.

"Why couldn't you laugh just once? I know you actually think I'm funny, but – but nooooo, instead you choose to watch me like this …" I pull the face again.

Loud laughter.

Kimberley, seemingly surprised and shocked to be included, doesn't answer and only looks to Gaulier for sympathy.

But Gaulier asks me to repeat Kimberley's 'dull face'.

There is laughter from the rest of the audience. I sense that they are enjoying my blaming game and I exaggerate Kimberley's face.

More laughter, even from Kimberley.

And then silence. Anticipation. Who will I blame next? Will I make more fun, or will I go back to being punished? There is sudden pleasure in the anticipation and being allowed to continue.

I walk up to Kimberley and beg (really pleading): "Why, Kimberley, why?"

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An eruption of uncontrollable laughter. I am completely thrown. Is that what they wanted? Something about my confusion or look of surprise seems to set them off even further.

I think to myself, why are they laughing? I don't get it.

A moment of realisation. Really hearing the laughter - unexpected and spontaneous – I can feel the fun - being mean, being a brat. Blaming and taking no responsibility. THEY are having fun, too. I don't have to think, I just continue.

"YOU, GAULIEEER, YOU secretly think I am funny, I know it … I am … I WAS funny even when I did that cartwheel … you know ... like this …" I demonstrate.

There is more laughter, and everyone looks to Gaulier for his response. Gaulier glares at me from under his glasses, his hand still on his drum and stick. "Boh." BANG. He silences the class: "Like how?" He gives one tap on his drum, but this time I can see the pretense. I understand the invitation.

I move quickly in time to his beat of the drum to do a terrible cartwheel and start laughing mid-way through.

Gaulier: "No laughing! Like how?"

I do another one trying to suppress my laughter.

Gaulier: "Not even smiling!"

He lets me know who is in charge, but nevertheless invites me to stay. I look at the audience and at Gaulier.

Gaulier: "Faster!"

I do a cartwheel, quickly, badly. I am trying not to laugh and putting on an angry face in between. There is more laughter.

"More!" he shouts. I do one more and then he stops me, but this time he seems pleased.

The laughter dies down and Gaulier asks: "Do we like her angry with a chromosome problem?" There is nodding from the audience, a change in energy.

Is this it? Is this how it feels, pleasure?

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Did I succeed?

Where to from here?

Working Towards Uncertainty

This dissertation set out to 'identify and explore' the principles of the clown in theatre by means of a practice-led approach. The need for a practice-led methodology was in large-part motivated by my struggle as a theatre-maker, educator and performer to communicate the practical learning and processes involved in activating and experimenting with clown principles in performance. Fleishman (2012) asks how a practitioner may gain "access to the immaterial remains of performance embodied in the self…and how one may […] communicate this experience that is embodied and ephemeral to someone who probably did not experience it themselves?" He responds simply by acknowledging that "it is with difficulty and certainly not in a straightforward manner" (2012:54).

Issues regarding sequencing, linearity and progression have arisen persistently for me throughout this research enquiry. In the early phases of research, it became evident that the central proposition of this study, to "identify and explore the principles of the clown in theatre", suggested a sequential ordering of activity which was problematic. Could an identification of the principles take place *before* the exploration? Or was it more likely, and even a requisite, for the exploration (playing, surveying or seeking in a state of not-knowing) to take place *before* the process of delineating, naming and sharing? Finding answers to these questions became integral to the study.

Fleishman offers insight into the key terms of my enquiry which has significant bearing:

> to **explore** suggests a state of not knowing and therefore a need to find a way as you go along; ... to **describe** suggests an observation in progress - discovery by way of working through; ... to **explain** requires a state of knowing and therefore the knowledge to share with others (Fleishman, 2012:62).

Based on the observations, experiences and findings of this dissertation, the practices of exploration and identification, seeking and delineation, are not inseparable. By adopting the approach of keeping their boundaries intentionally broad, permeable and inclusive, this study has allowed territories to emerge within which to pursue unanticipated routes and navigate unchartered pathways; and to invite the presence of chance, surprise and redirection in practice, deliberately resisting premature closure.

What are some of the requisite conditions that have allowed this study to host moments of contrast and chaos, to map and share the inconsistencies picked up along the way, the U-turns, repetitions and hurdles implicit in the creation processes when introducing clowning into the theatre? What solutions

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or alternatives for ethical and productive ways to share embodied knowledge has my chosen methodology and methods offered?

Borgdorff (2010), writes that "artistic research seeks not so much to make explicit the knowledge that art is said to *produce,* but rather to provide a specific articulation of the pre-reflective, non-conceptual content of art" (2010:43). Dwelling on this thought has left me to consider this final chapter as a rogue chapter, a chapter that has resisted continuity, and a neat reconciliation of loose ends. I conclude that this has to do with the processes and practises involved that are not containable or stable, even though I have, by means of previous conceptual and theoretical chapters, attempted to create a foundation from which these questions could be advanced and reach conclusion. In Chapters Two to Five, I presented a multimodal approach that explored and identified principles as they surfaced in my diverse roles as practitioner: i) as a South African-based student-performer in training with European-based contemporary clown teachers, ii) as participant-observer in several contemporary productions associated with, or referred to as, 'Clown-Theatre', and iii) as literary analyst exploring existing descriptions and definitions of clown principles on stage as given in various historical texts.

In accordance with the central premise of artistic research as proposed by Borgdorff, this last chapter is offered as a demonstration of, and invitation to, "unfinished thinking", offering opportunities for further research and innovation in practice. This chapter is unconventional in its longer length, almost double the length of the previous chapters. I propose that it reflects the ideas of length and duration, previously discussed acting like, "shorter forms" small entrée-like, fragments that are organised to form a cohesive whole, 'coherence'. In other words, this last chapter demonstrates, by reflecting the compositional qualities discussed, some of the principles highlighted in previous chapters.

This dissertation has illuminated the clown performer's critical dependence on an audience, where laughter is a core prerequisite for the definition of clowning to be upheld. One of the unexpected findings that has surfaced is the threat posed to the contemporary clown performer's agency when uprooted from an environment which encourages audience interaction and spontaneous play and transposed into certain contexts or interpretations of theatre. As outlined in Chapter Three, many contemporary theatrical events, organized according to predetermined constrictions and pre-established conventions such as duration, meaningfulness and spatial constraint, may strip the clown performer of agency and creative freedom, making it impossible to invite the audience to a different way of seeing.

A critical tension has been identified between the playwright/director and the clown performer under certain conditions. As deduced from my experience in theatrical productions such as *Babbelagtig* and *La Chair de Ma chair*, the author-director's insistence on maintaining creative and procedural 'control'

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over the event is ensured through several means. One way to secure this control is by divorcing a devising process, in which free-play and games are often encouraged, from a rehearsal and performance process. The 'rehearsal process' places emphasis on refining and repeating scripted material, offering limited opportunities for spontaneous or disruptive action, and so is ultimately authored and prescribed by the director-author. This is not to put forward an argument in which discipline, structure, and repetition are viewed as intrinsically contrary to the clown performer's skillset, rather, I have proposed that these elements are underrepresented in the vocabulary of most contemporary clown training and performance taxonomies, overridden by the veneration of 'truthfulness, spontaneity and pleasure'.

These tensions have resulted in the clown's failure as a performative tool, rather than the clown's *use* of failure as a performative tool. Contemporary clown practitioners have very little access to resources and examples by which to understand 'best practice' or employ relevant methods for creating repeatable and scriptable material. So how can a clown performer create from failure? What does failure offer the practitioner? What necessitates and enables the failure that may lead to pleasure and connection rather than feelings of shame and humiliation, for both the clown and the audience?

This chapter makes room for an exploration of these questions, by reflecting on the employment of principles (as they have been identified and explored in Chapters Two through Five) towards the creation and performance of a full-length production, *You Suck and Other Inescapable Truths* (2014). In this chapter, attention will be focused on my dual role as *acteur-auteur* as discussed in Chapter Five. In keeping with Fleishman's observation, and my own practice-led findings, this dual role does not function as sequential or chronological (actor before author, or author before actor) but is *simultaneous*. As a demonstration of this, examples from multiple points-of-view are offered to highlight how the clown performer's learning and generation of material is most effective in a context of performance, in direct relation to an audience through which the clown can discover and recognise moments of failure that may lead to laughter. Simultaneously, examples will be offered that pay attention to the auteur - the organiser or composer of a text. Material in this chapter is organized in a cyclical (spherical) manner rather than a linear (consequential) manner.

In Chapter Five, I referred to Barba's observation of a performative text as 'a weaving together' (Barba, 1991:68). He suggests that the organizing principle in performance may become apparent through immediate choices and actions being made. While this immediacy may imply lack of control or organization (as an unobserved spontaneous gesture), as a performative tool employed by an experienced practitioner, able to reflect while doing, or observe while being observed, it implies an organizing principle. This approach is exemplified in the anecdotes of my participant-observation at

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Gaulier's workshops. In these contexts, I 'wrote in my head' (as per Gaulier's instructions) the moments that were successful in establishing *complicité* - the pleasurable relationship with the audience through the 'flop'. In these moments, the gap between *acteur* and *auteur* is diminished, and both roles simultaneously inform the performance event.

Similarly, in the process of reflecting on the creation and over one-hundred performances of *You Suck,* it became increasingly apparent that a series of moments of *learning in performance* had contributed towards my practice, rather than a single idea of 'something to say'. The first of such moments is described above in my recollection of a final performance at a Gaulier workshop; the second is a recollection of a performance exam in my third year of undergraduate studies. While the first recollection was on the surface of my thinking at the start of writing the dissertation, this second recollection only came to me towards the end of writing this dissertation; these recollections are non-linear, non-sequential bits of implicit knowledge that arrived at different moments but nonetheless offer insight about what has informed my practice.

It is also important to acknowledge that the production was initially created prior to the commencement of this study, but further opportunities to refine, revise and perform the show once this study had commenced offered an opportunity to apply the research questions directly to its evolution and further practice.

Flooded with hope

> *In my third year of undergraduate performance studies at Wits University I took a course called: "Transformation in Performance". Our final exam requirement involved a site-specific performance in which we were instructed to explore autobiographical content drawing on theory and teachings on ritual and efficacy in performance.*
>
> *I wrote a monologue about my traumatic birth interspersed with lines from the Greek Tragedy Medea. I found a large piece of strong plastic and remodelled it to resemble an enormous bag (large and strong enough to hold me standing upright) as a representation of a giant womb. During the six months that the course ran, I extensively researched various experimental performance companies, performance art practitioners and movement practitioners to create an "interdisciplinary, avante-garde, performance poem" (as far as my nineteen-year old self could conceptualise and understand what this meant).*
>
> *About three weeks before the examination I received feedback from my lecturer, and from memory it was something along the lines of:*

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*"Klara, what is this? **What are you trying to do?"** (Interrupted by my protesting). "Yes, I can see you have read the books, but this is a Performance, which means it is **for us…** And right now we have no idea what you are doing and, most importantly, we do not **feel** anything. It is tragic to watch you, but not in the way you want us to experience this tragedy, do you understand? So go think about what you **want to say,** leave the books and papers and the, well - the Stuff, we don't care about it. The object is very beautiful, though … you may keep it."*

*Despite the feedback, I was persistent. I would not give up on my **ideas**. Instead of eliminating material or trying a different approach, I added things: additional lines to speak, the soundtrack of a foetus in the womb, a voice-over of me reading a childhood diary entry. And I read more books and practised physical movements to accompany the monologue.*

In the morning of the day of the examination, we were required to present a final showing to the course facilitator and the rest of the students, followed by a question and answer session. I armoured myself with a large pile of books and notes to defend my choices, planning to read quotes from Adorno or show a clip from the Pina Bausch performance 'The Rite of Spring' (1984). The students and lecturers entered and sat down to watch me perform in my chosen performance space - a pitch black loading bay of the main theatre. I had asked two co-students to help with the lighting and sound transitions, and they sat crouched under the table on which the womb was placed for the duration of the performance. The soundtrack of a heartbeat signalled the start of the performance. Slowly I stood up inside of suspended womb, dimly lit by a pink light and started speaking the lines of my monologue.

I was not even a minute into the performance when I first sensed, and then became acutely aware of, the audience's boredom…The words I was speaking felt stale, dead, as if they did not belong to me. I became intrigued by a distinct experience of watching myself speak the lines from outside of my body, feeling as if I were a part of the audience and experiencing the boredom they felt. I knew my words so well, having had months to learn them, but found myself stopping mid-performance, abruptly forgetting my next line - aware that I had no idea where in the monologue I was or what I was going to say next.

During rehearsals, I had placed a copy of my monologue at the back of the "womb" contraption and now, greatly relieved, I remembered that it was still there. With great subtlety, I used my toe to excavate and lift it from its hiding place; then, with less subtlety, I grabbed it with my one hand so I could read the next line. Someone in the audience noticed

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and I heard an outburst of laughter. I felt a wave of embarrassment. Holding the text at arm's length, I searched for the place on the page from which to speak my next line, but it was too dark to read.

I read the start of the same, incorrect, line three times and then looked up at the audience, defeated.

Pause.

"I'm sorry … I'm really sorry, I can't" ... Most of the audience are looking down, looking away, from embarrassment ...I continue: "I don't know the next line."

Silence. No response.

"I feel stuck and … and now I cannot read my next line … because, because of the lights". Pause. I gesture to indicate the lights. "They're off." This invites some students to look up and leads to some unexpected laughter - a break in the anxiety, in the silence.

Gerard[23]*"? I call to the lecturer.*

Pause.

"I don't know what to do…Can I stop?"

Silence.

"I <u>did</u> learn my lines, I knew them, you were here yesterday, and you heard …"

Finally, a response from Gerard: "It's OK, go on, tell us what is happening. What are you feeling?"

"Sorry guys, I'm so sorry, I just…I had it here and now, the pages, it is too dark and somehow I just forgot it …. But really I had it, like this morning. And I prepared, I mean look at those books, I read all of them… Adorno".

Laughter.

"Also, I have low blood sugar."

[23] This story is based on my own experiences and personal recollection and in no way includes the explicit views or interpretations of the event by the lecturer, Gerard Bester.

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A lot of laughter.

"It is a condition I've had since I was born. Low blood sugar. Gerard, I worked so hard, all semester, look at this, look at these books I read. Let me show you…"

I turn to where one of my assistants is sitting, and politely ask: "Mbali, please put on the lights."

Pause.

"Mbali?"

Mbali crawls out from beneath the table onto which the womb contraption is placed switching on the torchlight on her cellphone.

The small group of audience laughs, laughter that seemed to have been provoked by her sudden, unexpected presence.

Suddenly, there it is, a recognition. I hear the laughter and manage to take note of the strangeness of it, the unfolding of this event causing a sudden break, a change, a shift - something completely unplanned in the engagement and I realise…but I <u>am</u> performing. I am playing into the game of being exposed and it is working. I realise I do not know what I am doing or what will happen next, but it is no longer terrifying, the audience and I have entered into a new contract, we are playing a game now. They are enjoying seeing me struggle, observing me sulk, and watching it all break down.

"Thank you, Mbali."

"It's a pleasure, Klara."

Again laughter. I am perplexed - why is <u>that</u> so funny?

Bright fluorescent lights suddenly illuminate the entire loading bay, exposing the machinery I had carefully concealed under black fabric, the cables, Mbali and Jason's spot under the table, Jason still sitting there, crouched into the shape of a small ball with the script in his hands.

I watch the audience as they observe my effort's being suddenly exposed.

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I shout: "No, please don't look at the stuff! You weren't supposed to see this, look away!" I position myself as to conceal the backdrops/clothing rails and rostrums in the loading bay, which I tried to mask by covering them in black sheets.

I have no idea what to do next, but I spot the piles of book. I walk over to them and pick one up. "I read them. See?"

"And this difficult stuff on…" I turn the book to look at its cover "…Foucault."

Everyone laughs. Mbali, now back in place under the table, corrects me by whispering loudly: "Focou not FOKALT." I carry on: "Ok, Foucou. Do you even understand Focoult? It's hard, that's what I tried to make here, you know knowledge and power, and…" I turn to the lecturer. "Ja."

Laughter.

Gerard stops the performance and tells me to repeat the performance for the examination that night.

I did but added all the notes that I had worked on in the previous six months to the giant (womb) bag.

The examination lasted for twenty minutes, most of it improvised, but following the same structure and 'transformation' that had accidentally occurred in the showing. This time I pretended to forget my lines, played the state of utter confusion and embarrassment, and enjoyed shifting the blame.

This memory of a moment of learning, together with the anecdote of my realization at Gaulier's workshop that opened this chapter, are not that different from the countless testimonials I have previously heard or read about from clown students who described it in numerous terms: the first 'measure of success', a 'miracle', 'an epiphany', the day it 'clicked' or 'finding your clown'.

My retelling of these experiences leans heavily on the language of the accidental and personal which has been criticised for perpetuating the tendency to equate clowning with authenticity and spontaneity. This tendency has been vilified for drawing solely on the imaginary, elusive experience of clowning and, in so doing, preventing a critical analysis of the processes of creating, interpreting and repeating a clown performance. As discussed in Chapter Two, this is a hazard raised by Jon Davison, who through his ongoing practical and theoretical research intends to provide alternatives to this potentially limiting rhetoric.

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> In a sense then, the development of a theory of failure in performance is a constructive and revisionary optic through which one can begin to consider the political value to be found in coping and recovery, the continuation after the disaster, adaptation and accommodation, and the use of what is revealed through breakdown and compromised circumstance. According to the hierarchy of success there is but one way to succeed, whilst there are countless ways to fail, some of them utterly predictable but many of them as yet unimaginable (Bailes, 2011:xx).

In his discussions on witnessing, acknowledging and sharing clown failure, Davison describes how the clown performer "com[es] into contact with something deep and authentic in themselves rather than a mere technique"; he also describes the feeling that the viewer experiences, as if they are watching something "usually hidden is being revealed" (Davison, 2013:199). The import of these feelings of failure, and issues of self or the 'personal clown', was raised in Chapter Two and remains an elusive issue. Kendrick has explained that the "most complex ludus Gaulier's player can encounter is the negotiation between the self and its clown" (2010:169).

> Gaulier insists all play must be present, happening in the moment of interaction, but that the clown is also constructed and prepared; for instance, players are asked to 'write in their head' what was funny in a game and encouraged to repeat this the next day. The clown persona can be prepared, refined and developed over the years but how the clown relates to, incorporates or emerges from the player's self remains unclear (Kendrick, 2010:169).

In the experiences described in the anecdotes, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly which exchanges provided the repository of insight that fuelled my ongoing interest in, and willingness to explore, the value of failure and its strange and immediate connection to laughter. How did these encounters, marked by failure, enrich my understanding of the partitions between real and fictional spaces, of the multidimensional self of the performer able to hover between moments of concealing, playing, pretending and revealing, pointing or showing – a performer open to the diverting effect of chance, and willing to propel the performance into the realm of the unknown? My experience of this slippery territory is affirmed by a description offered by Bailes who contends:

> The chasm between (R)eal and represented, between 'thing' and 'a thing about a thing' frequently concealed but at other times crudely exposed, describes the territory where performances that fail, performances *as* failure, and the failure of performance gain their ground (Bailes, 2011:12).

In Chapter Three I made reference to Weber's discussion of Plato's cave as a particular "interpretation" of theatre, interpretation as an idea that signals operation beyond '"the theatre" as a particular geographically locatable place defined by its architecture and spatial arrangement. The examination performance described was intended to be site-specific, and I chose to create and present it in a loading bay – an area adjoining, but demarcated as *outside* of, the playing space of the theatre. Yet, I set-up and arranged the site to consciously recreate and resemble the self-contained space of the stage, enclosed by darkness, seeking to be left undisturbed, removed from other activities, protected

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from the 'outside world'. This desire, however, was instantly undermined by the presence of the audience on which the activity was also dependent, an audience that does not belong 'inside' and leaves the performance "in direct contact with the outside it [tried to] exclude" (Weber 2004:4), thus revealing the illusion of my intended self-containment.

At the point that I ignored or dismissed the critical engagement between myself and audience, attempting to uphold a sense of isolation and distance, I experienced the performance stagnating. I invited the audience to be present only as silent "prisoners, riveted to their posts" as Weber describes, "not know[ing] where they are" and therefore not knowing "how and who they are'' (2004:4). When I unwittingly - against convention and intention - became aware of the presence and response, or non-response, of the audience (their silence and their boredom) I was 'distracted' by the outside and this engagement activated the emergence of a 'clown', a Whiteface figure who pointed to the falsified engagement I had tried to set up and in so doing, provoked laughter that re-energised the dynamic by exposing undiscovered performance potential.

Both anecdotes deal with the process of uncovering. In the final performance at Gaulier, my feelings of frustration and disappointment, suppressed for the three weeks of workshops and suddenly revealed under specific conditions, were unmasked. In the performance examination my effort, my attempts to succeed in an ambitious experimental performance and my inability to do so, suddenly became apparent. A single moment of distraction in the performance resulted in a landslide of disintegration, shattering the illusion of control and containment thereby possibly providing the audience with the feeling that they were witnessing something that was not expected or going according to plan. Providing glimpses into material and ideas to construct a world that would convince the audience of my artistic precocity.

The bright fluorescent lights, switched on by my assistant Mbali, suddenly illuminated an amalgamation of past efforts, revealing the material scaffolding that had kept the illusion in place. The black fabric covering the machinery in the loading bay, the many cables leading to the lights and sound system crudely exposed, the "awkwardness" of the two assistant stage-managers sitting uncomfortably crouched beneath the table, 'displaced' and left without a purpose, were all elements contributing to the instantaneous awareness of the audience of "how and where they were" - that they were in fact observers sitting on a cold floor in a loading bay watching a performance examination going terribly wrong.

In her analysis of the working methods of the ensemble *Forced Entertainment,* Bailes identifies the act of trying to do or say something as "an explicit mechanism":

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> The aim to achieve a moment often subsumes the possibility of its successful execution, so that intention is flooded with the excess of desire and effort, and the disappointment of hope occupies the stage (Bailes, 2011:189).

The effort or ambition underlying the act of 'striving towards' demarcates a fertile performance territory, filled with opportunity for failure; an outline of the imagined successful event remains faintly visible under the failed attempts, alluding to what could have transpired and so providing the impetus and material on which a failing structure can be constructed. The birth of my performance persona under the conditions of the examination was not unlike the 'birth of the clown' described by Gaulier. The untimely, accidental entrance into the circus ring by the two grooms eventually became a standard routine, repeated night after night to unsuspecting audiences; similarly, the examination performance became a demonstration of how the transformation from failure in the planned event (things going wrong, feelings of embarrassment, a sense of disintegration and chaos) to laughter and pleasure may provide a template for further creative production. Earlier in her book, also in relation to Forced Entertainment, Bailes explains how they draw on the "amateur-machine", a term borrowed from, adopting amateurism "as a condition that makes possible the emergence of the performance just as it prevents it from being realized" (2011:93).

I acknowledge that the anecdote of the examination performance is only able to showcase the principles of clowning in a limited scope, since: i) I had no intention of being a clown, or provoking laughter, ii) there were no external signals to indicate to the audience that they should interpret the performance as clowning, and iii) I had, at that point, no previous clown training. Certainly, the described performance event was not framed by the research questions central to this dissertation. It is fruitful to consider what might have occurred if I had intended the show to end in laughter or clowning. Would I have had the necessary tools, the experience or the material at that point from which to construct such an illusion? Would I have recognised the conditions necessary to convince or trick the audience into believing that they were witnessing something 'real', 'actual' and 'authentic' unfolding? Could I have imagined a similar 'script' if I had attempted to write a text intended to disintegrate, or if I had taken six months to rehearse a collapsing performance?

Attempting to answer these questions that relate to an imaginary outcome are, of course, impractical, but they do stimulate some of the core preoccupations of the final chapter that begs the question: What are the conditions that may assist in creating clown performance in theatre or turning failure into laughter, rendering failure as a productive performative tool? The previous discussions, particularly around Davison's *step-laugh* experiment, illustrated how laughter in both events was not necessarily aimed at me, or belonging to me, as a subject. Instead, the laughter began as a result of the complex interplay of expectations between me and the audience. My intention to satisfy their

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expectations created a high-stakes environment leading to hyper-awareness of my asinine desire to please and convince, a desire that when leaked and exposed was rendered ridiculous and laughter-provoking.

Reflecting on some of the responses that brought the most laughter, for example my statement that 'I have low blood sugar', I cannot imagine that I would have ever preconceived its potential as a laughter-provoking justification for the series of misfires. But in performance, motivated by my actual feelings of bafflement, it belonged to the performance state of refusing to take responsibility and provided an understanding of a type of justification of failure that could be explored further – and repeated.

The rest of the 'performance text', similarly, became a template which I could develop, interpret and enhance the potential for failure. In the second performance, I made deliberate choices – such as asking my assistant Mbali to crawl to the light switch, pretending to avoid being seen and to act bewildered when noticed – and so positioning her as co-player in the action, inviting her to construct a performance persona. The success of the performance, in other words, lay in the ability *to act baffled*, as if the confusion were happening for the first time. Although the template allowed for a measure of improvisation, in follow-up performances I felt equipped with a clear, predetermined structure of where the performance 'was going' and did not experience any actual panic as a performer. Bailes asserts that "the wrongness or the mistakeability of theatre - that theatre can and will make mistakes - is in part how we know it to be theatre:"

> [...] which is to say that failure as an index of the undoing inherent in all theatre acts can nevertheless be structural and orderly, though the particular order is of a different kind than the orderliness in good practice or work that thrives upon demonstrating its value by concealing its labor (Bailes, 2011:73).

My actions and choices in this examination event serve as an example of how a performative engagement born from spontaneity, accident and a highly charged emotional interaction may offer the potential for sustainability. These performances acted as initial drafts of a script that I continued to build on and that eventually led to the creation of the persona Pretina de Jager, the protagonist in *You Suck,* providing me with a particular tried and tested 'play-state' a 'hyper-mimetic version' of a performative self.

In keeping with a good academic practice of providing context and background to a discussion, I had intended to offer a summary of the context of *You Suck*, making available the necessary background information such as: i) when and how was it created? ii) where and to whom was it was performed? iii) how was the character developed? iv) who wrote the script? I soon realized that I was being tripped up by language, coming up against uncomfortable contradictions or inconsistencies that interrupted

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any cohesive translation of the process. I decided to write down a series of simple questions as if I were being interviewed as a way to structure my thoughts, for example: 'How long did it take to create *You Suck*?', or 'What did the rehearsal process entail?' In the first phase of answering the questions, I provided equally simple responses, such as: 'It took six weeks of rehearsals', or 'My director acted as a provocateur and I responded through improvisation and playing games to generate material.'

When I reflected on my own answers to these questions, I recognized how much they resembled many of the responses given by clown theatre practitioners in texts and interviews, as discussed in Chapter Three. It was in Chapter Three that I indicated the tendency for practitioners to avoid discussing critical aspects of the process of making specifically how they related to discipline, structure and relationship to an authoritative vision, in contrast to the more excessively applied vocabulary of 'freedom', 'spontaneity' and 'play' concomitant with the practice. What became increasingly evident to me was that although the responses by practitioners were accurate regarding some aspects of the process or could be applied to the devising stages, other processes seminal to the creation and performance of the clown in theatre remain hidden and underexplored.

The practice of writing, of answering my own questions, led to an understanding that a more flexible framework of analysis and interpretation is required to avoid simplifying or reducing the multiple processes of theatre-making – especially in the role of the *acteur-auteur*. Fleishman insists that practitioners should write to "emphasise relational patterns over autonomous ones, contradiction and difference over consistency and sameness and opacity over transparency" (2012:54). My own attempts to fix and simplify the process in writing by eliminating possible contradiction, led to a recognition of the necessity for a more accommodating and ductile textual framework. After some reflection, I envisaged a framework that would make it possible for the questions to be answered by multiple voices that personified the different roles I embodied in the process of creating and performing *You Suck*, foregrounding rather than concealing the inconsistencies.

What follows is a performative script written in an interview style which provides a frame to encompass the multiple roles and contradictory approaches often implicit in a practice-led project such as this one. The voices appear as: the academic, referred to as the **Questioner**; the **Theatre-Maker**, representing both the author and organising/structuring role; **Pretina**, the clown persona; and the **Critic**, representative of audience members. The **Questioner** is representative of my role as an academic and scholar, and one that is informed by the academic writings and research of other scholars in the field. The **Critic** is based on an amalgamation of selected published reviews of *You Suck* over a three-year period.

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Many Voices, One Room

[Lights up]

On stage: The Questioner. She is a scholar and has a pen in hand. She is wearing glasses and a graduation cap. She waits impatiently, her leg is shaking. She stares at her sports watch, pours water into a glass in front of her and straightens the books with her prepared questions. She has read the dissertation up to this point and made detailed notes on places where there is room for improvement. Gaps. She puts her Smartphone on aeroplane mode, she is 10 minutes early, as one should be, it's only polite. She takes out a small mirror from her handbag. She has just eaten a salad for lunch and is concerned that a piece of steamed broccoli might be stuck in her teeth. She checks her top right teeth. Nothing. Bottom left? Nothing. She clocks the audience. They laugh a little. She checks her teeth again...

The Theatre-maker enters. She apologises for being late, she was concluding an interview with a writer for the student newspaper. She sips from a Styrofoam coffee cup. She takes out her MacBook and phone, quickly replies to a Whatsapp message: 'I hope its chill …' she tells the audience and then clocks them…she bends down to indicate her trendy tekkies and smiles with pride. The audience laughs. She opens her computer and types really fast, "typeTypeTypetype …. Enter … TypetypeType, Enter …" There! *She closes her laptop and clocks the audience again.* Done!

Questioner: *(has been staring at the Theatre-maker, now turns to the audience, rolls her eyes)* Ok, who are we waiting for?

Questioner and Theatre-Maker: *(in unison)* Pretina! *(surprised to be answering at the same time, they clock the audience. Laughter. The Questioner smiles with pride.)*

Pretina has been practicing her entrances. She takes two steps onto the stage and looks at the audience. They do not laugh. She leaves, they laugh. She enters again, they laugh. She goes back out to show she can do it just as well the second time and reappears. They laugh again. She moves to the table, pulls out a chair and wipes it off with care, but puts her bag on the chair instead of sitting on it, the audience laughs, particularly a guy in front wearing a hat. She looks at him and his hat and then takes out her own hat 'inviting competition', puts it on, takes a selfie of them together, puts her phone in the bag and sits down. Everyone is watching Pretina now and she knows it.

She looks to the audience and indicates that they should stop laughing and that her performance is over.

Pretina: Shhhhht! *Audience laughs.*

Pretina gestures the audience to look away. More laughter. She heaps her books in front of her face but peeks over whenever the laughter dissipates, only to cause more disruption.

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Questioner: *(takes out a small spray water bottle from her laptop bag and sprays Pretina as punishment.)* Let us commence. With the reminder that we are NOT in a clown show but in the middle of a serious dissertation. It was unfortunate to realise I would indeed require your presence, Pretina, but I need no more interjections or distractions, is that clear? Just straight-up answers to my questions. Theatre-Maker, please tell me about the one-person show, the practice that informs the questions central to this dissertation?

Theatre-Maker clears her throat loudly. Pretina clears her throat even louder. There is laughter, while the Theatre-Maker and Pretina start a throat-clearing challenge. Every time the Questioner tries to speak, they let out a small 'uhum' to clear their throats. After the third interruption the Questioner takes out a small rolled newspaper which puts an end to the battle.

Theatre-Maker: *(reading from her laptop in a bored tone as if reporting the weather) You Suck and Other Inescapable Truths* is a one-woman show that was performed for the first time in September 2015, in The Alexander Bar and Theatre in Cape Town. The show was performed over a period of three years, the last show performed in Johannesburg in December 2018. I wrote and performed the show and it was directed and designed by Francesco Nassimbeni, a co-student at the time.

Questioner: Very good. How many shows did you perform?

Pretina: *(chips in*) EXACTLY ONE HUNDRED.

Theatre-Maker: That's my question, Pretina!

Someone in the audience laughs and Pretina hears it. She peeks from over her books and gets another laugh. She indicates to the audience member to 'please keep quiet, shhhhh' and stop laughing. This causes more laughter. The Questioner catches her gesture.

Questioner: Pretina!

Pretina: It was dat woman wearing the dress what is red, *she* laughed![24]

Questioner: *(turns to woman-in-red)*: Did you laugh, even after I gave my instruction?
The woman-in-red nods. The Questioner's strict tone only causes her to laugh more.

Questioner: You will come and speak to me after the interview, please. We have a strict policy about audience members who disobey instructions. Can we continue now?

Pretina makes small spitballs that she blows through a straw at the Theatre-Maker's face and each time one lands she turns to the audience to share her excitement. Until the

[24] Pretina speaks, as well as writes, in a flat Afrikaans accent, replacing 'th' with 'd' as in 'dat' ('that'), or 'th' with 'ff' as in 'wiff' ('with'). Please refer to Addendum B for a further list of translated terms.

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Theatre-Maker turns to Pretina and she gets such a fright that she falls backwards onto the floor and looks at the audience from the opening under the table. She waves at them. The audience laughs.

Pretina senses she is in trouble and glances at the Questioner.

The Questioner points to the corner and Pretina slowly gets up and moves to pick up the hat that fell, she steps on it and it lands perfectly on her head.

Questioner: Move!

Pretina shuffles to the corner.

Questioner: In what kind of venues did you perform? And what were your audience numbers like?

Theatre-Maker: The show was performed at various venues as part of the fringe at arts festivals, and later as part of a bullying awareness campaign mainly performed in school halls. The show was performed to as many as one thousand learners and to as few as two audience members at a time.

Questioner: How long did it take to create *You Suck*?

Theatre-Maker: Six weeks of active rehearsals.

Pretina: OKAY… *(turns around, supposedly very upset)* No, but really, I was there wayyyyy longer than that, you better tell them that.

Theatre-Maker: Yes, fine, sure, but not in this form…

Pretina: What do you mean 'not in this form'? No one understands what you're saying, I mean... *(looks at audience and indicates that they should all nod)*

The audience members nod, following Pretina's instructions.

Questioner: Fine! Pretina has a point. Theatre-Maker, I believe it's important at this stage. People need to know.

Pretina smiles and looks to the audience to log her achievement.

Theatre-Maker: Ok, ok. Although Pretina only formally existed as 'Pretina' for the six weeks of rehearsals before the show, the persona and some of 'her story' had been explored in different processes, and evolved through various phases, over a period of five years.

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Questioner: Who funded the show?

Theatre-Maker: The show was initially self-funded and cost around R500 to produce. A co-student Francesco Nassimbeni[25] directed and designed the set. We used a large pack of papers as a backdrop and some old furniture and crates we had at home.

Questioner: Where was the show first performed?

Theatre-Maker: I struggled to get it accepted into a theatre because I wasn't sure how to describe what it was *about.* When I presented it to theatre managers as 'clowning' or about a teenager's struggle with bullying at school, many replied that they weren't interested in children's theatre or 'that type of thing'. After the show was accepted at the *Alexander Bar and Theatre,* the run was extended and as the material settled the duration of the performance increased until eventually it reached the hour mark. I performed the show at various festivals and, after receiving funding, the show was mainly performed to high school audiences as part of a bullying awareness campaign.

Questioner: Ok, so what would you describe the show as being about?

Pretina: ME. Duh.

Critic: (*From somewhere in the audience, he gets up and clears his throat. He is dressed all in black and wearing very tiny glasses. He takes out a large notebook and turns the pages until he finds the correct page*) AHA! *(reads)* "the politics of education is not the subject of *You Suck (and other inescapable truths).* Not overtly at any rate. Rather, *You Suck* examines the politics of being a teenage girl, a psychological trauma for which the public schooling system is partly to blame. Advertising and marketing (which itself rests on the politics of Capitalism) takes care of the rest."[26]

Questioner: Thank you very much for that astute reading, Critic! Tell me, before you sit down, did you laugh in the show?

Critic: Give me a second! *(pages roughly through the book, tearing out half the pages as he turns them until there is only one page left; he puts on a pair of glasses over the glasses he is already wearing and looks at audience)*

Laughter.

Critic: AHAHA!

---

[25] Francesco Nassimbeni is an interdisciplinary performing arts practitioner and director. He recently completed a Masters in Theatre-Making at UCT, studying the overlap between graphic design and performance.

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He clocks the audience and clears his throat. Pretina and the Theatre-Maker also clear their throats.

Critic: There were a few minutes about halfway through the second scene, where I was not sure who was being pilloried, whether it was the character of Klara and her desperate desire for acceptance, or the school bullies who refused to see beyond her accent and Afrikaans upbringing. It was a fine line she was treading and I resented being made complicit in mocking the very character with whom I had developed empathy until I realised that of course I could choose what to laugh at, or whether to laugh at all. She places the response in our hands, which made me like her all the more.[27]

Pretina: Pilloried, what's dat?

Theatre-Maker: Look it up.

Pretina pulls out a huge dictionary that was hidden in her jacket. She walks to the Critic and asks to borrow his glasses. He gives her one pair. She opens the dictionary and pretends that she can't read and gestures for the other pair of glasses. She puts on both pairs.

Pretina: AH, AH, ah ha! (*looks at critic to show she, too, is important*) Pi-llo-ried *(she reads over-emphasising each syllable)* – to attack or ridicule someone.

Questioner: Thank you, Pretina. Theatre-Maker, in which category do you place the show?

Pretina: Very PROFESSIONAL Theatre.

Laughter.

Theatre-Maker: I have struggled with this one, but for the purposes of marketing and because ninety percent of the show elicits laughter, I have usually described it as 'comedy' and sometimes just categorised it as 'theatre' in advertising and festival applications.

Critic raises his/her hand.

Questioner: Yes?

Critic: I would suggest that Pretina de Jager's story should be placed in another category, perhaps – tragic-comedy. That is an important differentiation (and maybe this writer is opening up too much by exposing that). The festival guide lists it as a comedy. This production is definitely not a comedy, even though there is a lot of laughing. Perhaps it is

[27] Kretzman, S. 'Skool is krool', 2015, online. Available at: http://thecritter.co.za/?p=774, accessed 2 June 2019.

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here where one should allow for a discussion on how fair the script writer should be in selling theatre to a potential audience. Do we, as an audience, not want to be surprised, even if it is so that our own prejudices might be exposed and reflected upon? To get us to the theatre - past our possible defences - maybe a little white lie must be told?[28]

Questioner: Thank you for that contribution, Critic. Theatre-Maker, did you work from a script?

Pretina: No, I say what I want, I am too good at acting to need a script. A real professional who knows what to say before I even wrote it. A … *(turns to Theatre-Maker)* …what is that thing what Mozart is? Is it called a prodigy? People always say dis about me, look der she goes, da real prodigy, Pretina. Gobsmacked at my talents.

Theatre-Maker: Yes Pretina, but we did discuss the narrative arc of the show beforehand, right? Just like we did with this meeting, we kind of planned how it was going to go, the questions that will be asked and the order?

Pretina: Yes, doofus, but is it going as we planned?

Theatre-Maker: No, not with your constant interjections and… *(pulls face, supposedly imitating Pretina's face)* …horsing A-rOUnD!

Questioner picks up newspaper. Pretina and Theatre-Maker slide back into their chairs submissively.

Theatre-Maker: *(reading like a weather reporter again)* There are beats of story and narrative that are rehearsed and dictated by me. When the show first opened there was no written script and only thirty-five minutes of material, but I had a narrative arc as a structured storyline, points that I had written in my notebook and 'something to say' (*winks at Questioner*) like a message I wanted people to get. But I wouldn't really call it a script, you know? It looked kind of like this…

Theatre-Maker walks to the wings of the stage in a kind of Chalk-Girl sway and wheels a blackboard onto the stage. She smiles at the audience, logging her effort.

They laugh slightly. She turns around to write:

Fold origami (Birth story)

[28] Translated from a review by Roberts, C. (2018), Resensie-you-suck-en-ander-afgryslike-waarhede**.** *NetW24/KRIT* 4 April. Available at https://www.netwerk24.com/ZA/Krit/Nuus/resensie-you-suck-en-ander-afgryslike-waarhede-20180403, accessed 22 July 2019.

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English school - Achievements

DO excercises

BElly RING- LIFE RUINED

Hip Hop Dancing

Rainbow - Falls in love

Sings Katy Perry

Get dressed in Big Jacket and funny hat

Northgate Mission

Everything goes wrong

Do trick with Mouse

Read poem

She looks at the audience and remembers something she'd forgotten to write, the heart. She draws a heart and clocks the audience who seemed to enjoy the declaration of love necessary for the completion of the demonstration.

Theatre-Maker: *(rolls her eyes)* After I had performed about forty shows and learnt what worked through the step-laugh process *(responding to the audience's laughter)* the frame or structure remained, but the in-between bits got longer and fuller each time it was performed. I removed parts that seemed less successful and added material each time.

Questioner: Tell me about the rehearsal process. How did you create this 'frame', as you call it?

Critic: *(interrupts)* I believe that the director did well to allow space for Pretina's off-the-cuff remarks to audience reactions, which the Performer managed adroitly and in so doing, she reinstated the authenticity of her character[29].

Pretina: Adroitly, what means – in a clever or skilful way – Fanks!

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[29] Kretzman, S. 'Skool is krool', 2015, online. (Available at: http://thecritter.co.za/?p=774).

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Theatre-Maker: Hold on!

The Theatre-Maker's laptop starts ringing, indicating a Skype call. The Theatre-Maker presses the green button and on a projector screen, visible to the audience, the Director's face appears.

Theatre-Maker: Just in time. Care to answer the Questioner's question? *(smiles)*

Director: Actually, just the other day someone asked me about the rehearsal process and I told them it was very strange, unlike any I had experienced previously. In the beginning, the Performer and I just sat joking with each other, in an Afrikaans accent. I would ask her questions and she would answer, always in that accent, telling stories about school, other people or her day - you know, just improvising. We would identify the stories we enjoyed, and then she created a flow of material, a sequence of actions. She would often just be like: 'Ok, I'm going to sit there and then fold the origami and then get up and start singing here and then place this there'. I would say that I kind of held the space, acted as an active audience member, watching, laughing, looking bored and asking questions to which she could respond performatively. She had a preconceived idea of where she wanted the story to go, being about her own experience of bullying that resulted in an actual death, although in the show it was represented by the death of a mouse. As theatre-makers, we spoke about death and transformation, the critical moment of deciding to leave a part of yourself behind whether it be through an actual death or an event that leads to a need to personally transform to an extent where you become almost unrecognisable.

Questioner: In keeping with the subject matter of my research. Death and transformation are part of a constant underlying trope in clowning practice. "To write one's autobiography in order either to confess or to engage in self-analysis or in order to expose oneself like a work of art, to the gaze of all, is perhaps to seek, to survive, but through a perpetual suicide - a death which is total inasmuch as fragmentary."[30]

Pretina: Ja, a story what I managed to tell very adroitly, even if I have to say so myself.

Pretina finds a poem between the Critic's fallen papers and picks it up. She lights a candle, kneels and reads, in her 'Eistedfodd voice'.

Pretina: If you compare yourself wiff others, you may become vain or bitter, for always der will be greater and lesser persons dan yourself (*she is silent, then continues)* Copyright Max Ehrmann 1927.

Pretina blows out the candle.

[30] Blanchot, 1995:64.

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It becomes apparent, through the multimodal enquiries of this study, that for an investigation of clown principles to be complete, the issue of clown agency requires urgent attention. As has been demonstrated, the principles of failure, laughter and pleasure, that have come to represent the practice of clowning as inherited from Lecoq, are intimately connected to the structures of authority in which the clown figure finds him/herself. This dissertation has employed varied methods to map and interrogate the relationship of the clown figure to power and organisational structures, towards a deeper understanding of the conditions required for clowning to thrive.

This study was not motivated by a need to categorise performances as *either* clowning *or* theatre; nor has it aimed to draw distinct lines and argue for whether clowns should be perceived as clown performers or characters. The primary incentive has been to identify clown principles as taught and experienced in contemporary clown workshops and assess to what extent these may be employed and sustained in a theatrical context. The issue of category that surfaced in the interview is significant, however, as the first point of contact between a theatre-maker and a potential audience when promoting or requesting funding for a show. Categories inevitably draw on audience assumptions about, and expectations of, a performance. Potential viewers and funders want to know: What will this show be about? What will it expect of me? What will it offer me? A performance described as clowning will elicit different associations to that proposed as comedy, and different expectations when it is promoted as serious theatre that aims to illustrate the consequences of, for example, bullying.

This section will look at brief examples of how the principle of failure may be utilised as an authoring/scripting technique, by turning to Davison's 'Encyclopedia of Wrongness' (2015) as a workable framework for interpreting and conveying choices that were made to enhance the effect of failure.

An extract from *You Suck and Other Inescapable Truths* (2017) is offered to illustrate the aspects of failure.

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The 'Wrongness' of Things: Scripting Failure

Preset: Pretina is sitting on the floor behind a table, chewing gum, folding origami, intimating the audience members as they enter. Pretina stories are often located in fictional places (the shopping mall or her school) but she is located inside her bedroom, surrounded by her things, (toys, a bookshelf, a small table, couch and posters on the backdrop that serves as a wall). When she receives clearance from the stage manager, the scene starts with her changing the song on her radio.

Figure 8: Klara van Wyk as Pretina showing Sarah Walker's perfect origami mouse, performed at KKNK, 2018. (Photo courtesy of Vulture Photography)

Origanum is really hard, do you know what dat is? It's actually Japanese paper art folding what we have to do for orts and crofts on Friday. *(Pause.)* But I've been folding all afternoon and dis is Sarah Walker's mouse *(shows mouse*) and dis is my mouse *(shows a ball of tissues hardly resembling a mouse*). Sarah Walker is talented at everyfing like sculpturing, collage, modge podge, long distance running, instagramming ... being beautiful.

It's so unfair, dat people are borned wiff a lot of talents, what makes dem lucky because everyfing in life is actually just one big test. In fact, when you get borned da first fing what happens to you is a test, it's called the agbar, you know what dat is? *(Stands up to explain).*

Its dis fing where you are sitting comfortably in the womb and the next moment you get pulled out by doctors and den you look up to see another doctor standing der wiff a clipboard giving you score on how well you were at getting borned. And it's really easy to fail because even though you were in there for nine months you had no idea der is a test waiting so you didn't prepare but have to come out of the womb and already perform good.

Sits staring at audience for a while. In no rush to continue.

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> But don't worry, I actually fought of a cunning plan, I stole Sarah Walker's mouse out of her bag and I'm gunna make one exactly the same as hers, I mean EXACTLY but just better, one wiff like glitter glue and those googly eyes (*illustrates*). The only problem is dis (*shows tissue ball hardly representing a mouse in any form, moves both mice to her bookshelf*). But I did find my niche what is like your top talent and mine is Eisteddfod. Do you even know what Eisteddfod is? It's dis fing where 40 people go up on stage and say the exact same poem like dis: 'Die slim ou haas het eendag daaaar in die gras gaan wei'[31] like dat, and then you get a certificate for how well you did your poem. Like if you were really really good, you will get a Diploma like me. If you are medium good you get a gold and silver and if you're like pathetic and you forgot your words or peed your pants then you will just get a certificate what says 'fanks for coming'. Here is my diploma I got. You can send it around *(walks to an audience member in the front row and hands him/her the certificate).*
>
> *To the audience member:* You can only touch if your hands are clean, so don't touch it if you had like KFC today and please don't make like dat pig ears on my certificate, also I want it back afterwards, fanks.
>
> *(Walks back to the stage and inspects her wall, points to another certificate she received for Hip Hop.)* Den I also got dis, it's for Hip Hop Most Improved, because I was really bad when I started and den I got really good. And dis, dis is for Ballet, and den dis is for Voortrekkers[32], you know what dat is? *(waits for answer, usually nothing)*
>
> Ok I will tell you. It's a fing only for Afrikaans people, (because Afrikaaners are always under fret apparently), so dis tests dem and dey have to survive in the wild and build shelters and make potjie-kos so dey won't go extinct.
>
> It all went really good wiff my talents until one day my mother put me in an English school in grade 9 … to learn da language of da world. Now what is extremely hard about dis is that I wasn't sure about da rules, like should I wear my socks up or down and what hairstyle is in for grade 9's, should I make a bolla or two ponies? Plus, worst of all, on my first day I said: 'I frew him wiff a chair' instead of 'I frew da chair at him', so I didn't start off wiff a solid footing as you can imagine.
>
> I have seen dat wiff a lot of hard work and determination I can overcome anyfing so I made myself dis chart (*points to chart/poster on wall*) wiff different categories of what's important to be successful in the new school: 1 - Academic, 2 - Body and fitness, 3- A skill like hip hop, and 4 – (most important of all) Social, in other words making friends and becoming popular. (van Wyk, 2017).

Pretina de Jager, a gum-chewing, pink-haired sixteen-year-old confidently occupies the stage as the audience enters. She is wearing what resembles a school uniform. This setting points to ample opportunity for failure; we may imagine a plethora of ways in which a clown figure may fall short or miss the mark in a school environment. High schools particularly regulate behaviour through systems

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[31] This Afrikaans poetic line translates to "A clever hare grazes in an open field".

[32] The Voortrekkers refers to an Afrikaans Youth Movement that aims to "empower […] Afrikaaners to be successful as positive citizens and dependable Christians" ('Wie is ons?' (Who are we?), online. Available at: https://voortrekkers.co.za/wie-is-ons/.

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of control instituted by both explicit and implicit rules usually dictated by a peer-group mentality that prohibits deviation from the norm and discourages expression of individuality. High school may therefore be interpreted as a proverbial battlefield operating in a similar way to the warzone in *Mann ist Mann*, which McManus describes as follows:

> War is, in fact, the perfect context in which to stage a clown act because it is the most extreme example of a social situation where the arbitrary rule of war must be obeyed. The Auguste-White Clown dichotomy fits naturally into a battlefield situation. The Auguste character cannot adjust to the necessities of war. He cannot learn to march properly or carry a gun because his clown persona stops him from being able to understand, or physically comply with these activities in a normal way (McManus, 2003:56).

Pretina's inflated self-confidence is evident from her first audience interactions - she barks instructions to individual audience members as to where they should sit, loudly chews her gum, and sings along to the house music while fumbling with pieces of paper, trying to fold an origami mouse. Her display of self-possession and status is contradicted the first time Pretina speaks in a flat Afrikaans accent. The first scene (in the extract above) sets the stage for Pretina's obsessive desire for recognition, a trope that continues throughout the play. Pretina overstates insignificant achievements such as her third place in a 'Hot Dog Eating competition' and waxes lyrical about successes in Eisteddfod, her bragging easily recognisable as a feeble attempt to cover her insecurities and failure to fit into the new school, drawing attention to her insatiable desire for acceptance and recognition.

Typical clown action relies on the clown's unique 'logic' to solve problems, generally resulting in further problems that require resolution since the clown performer usually solves problems accidentally via an unexpected route. Pretina interprets her displacement and outcast status as a principal problem to solve. Through an over-zealous approach, Pretina applies disciplined attention to her search for acceptance: she configures complex 'success charts' that outline the categories she observes as the key to gaining acceptance in her new school; listing them as "Academic Success, Extramural Skills, Body and Fitness and Social Success". Bailes asserts that the:

> discourse of failure as reflected in western art and literature seems to counter the very ideas of progress and victory that simultaneously dominate historical narratives. It undermines the perceived stability of mainstream capitalist ideology's preferred aspiration to achieve, succeed or win, and the accumulation of material wealth as proof and effect arranged by those aims. Failure challenges the cultural dominance of instrumental rationality and the fictions of continuity that bind the way we imagine and manufacture the world (Bailes, 2011:2).

Pretina draws on the naive belief that demonstrating proficiency in certain skills will earn her recognition and popularity. The clown's performance of skills is a category in Davison's 'Encyclopedia of Wrongness' (2015), according to which the clown's dexterity of skills are either too low or unnecessarily high in relation to the task at hand. In *You Suck,* Pretina is convinced that her skills will

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earn her recognition in a social sphere. She believes, for example, that she could win the heart of her crush 'Jonathan' (a tall, good looking eleventh grader) by serenading him with an Eisteddfod song. She employs an operatic style to sing Katy Perry's *Teenage Dream* and although her singing is not below par, the context and style she employs to demonstrate her singing skills are 'wrong'.

Figure 9: Pretina demonstrating her pie chart of "how to get into the A-group', Makhanda Performance, 2016.

Pretina brags about her mastery of Hip Hop dancing and in the context of the persona established, this seems an improbable skill. She takes the audience by surprise when demonstrating proficiency as a dancer to the 'correct' Hip hop music (she dances to Azealia Banks' *212)*. However, her dexterity is at complete odds with the persona established up to that point (a conservative, innocent, middle-class Afrikaans girl) who often passes judgement on anything outside of her frame of reference. This is noticeable in her visit to the tattoo parlour when she judges the shop assistant, whose hair she describes as being cut into a "hawkmo [a mohawk]" and who even "smokes incense".

As performer, I acknowledged the lines that indicate Pretina's judgement with a gesture, clocking the audience to indicate my awareness of the "clown-like opinion" grounded in stupidity. In so doing, I indicate distance between the performance persona and the role of Pretina, demonstrating my awareness as a performer of the ridiculousness of the statements. Another line serves a similar function and is spoken when Pretina plays the game of being an educator who informs the audience on drug usage: "Dagga is a gateway drug, if Monday you want to smoke dagga, Tuesday you will smoke cocaine and then on Sunday my Predikant[33] will have to pray on you to release the demons".

[33] Predikant, Afrikaans word for "priest".

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Pretina fails at the role of educator by relating facts about drugs that are obviously 'wrong', but offers the audience insight to the ways in which she might have been educated about drugs through fear-inciting tactics instead, thereby providing the audience with a glimpse of the author's 'opinion'. Pretina similarly provides a description of the "Voortrekkers", explaining that "Voortrekkers are only for Afrikaans people, since Afrikaners are always under threat", a line delivered with a clear look to the audience to signal its stupidity and intention to invite laughter, as well as providing the audience with a political viewpoint.

One of the categories on Pretina's chart of success is "Body and Fitness" and she expresses her awareness of the importance of a presentation of 'self' in the high school setting. She compares herself with the girl she identifies as the "A-group leader", Sarah Walker, who she describes as a "blonde girl what is tall and have straight teeth and perfekt hairs". In this way, an opinion of a stereotypical view of Western beauty is introduced as an authority against which Pretina measures herself. It also provides the clown with another impossible problem to solve - "how to look like Sarah Walker". Pretina describes various mishaps that occur through her multiple 'incorrect' attempts to try and be beautiful, for instance when she tapes her legs with gaffer tape to shape them so that they have a 'thigh-gap'. She also relates the surge of misadventures as a consequence of getting a belly-ring (an act done to impress Sarah Walker) and which consequently becomes grossly infected.

The clown's 'otherness' is also evident on a non-fictional level through the presence and presentation of the performer's physical body. Mcmanus writes that:

> The essential "otherness" of clown accounts for the phenomenon of clowns being freakish or deformed in some way. Their "difference" lends credence to their naive ignorance of the laws of nature and man. When this inherent "difference" is not part of the performer's person he must take on some external sign in order to add it, hence the grotesque make-ups and masks that are associated with clown (McManus, 2003:15).

The previous discussion on historical clown figures (Chapter Four), emphasised the clown figure's "ugliness" across varying examples: the Vidusaka, Zany, Will Kempe, Richard Armin, Tarlton and Wedekind, were all considered 'ugly'. Theorists generally described the clown's unattractive appearance as a tactic to reinstate the clown performer's low status. What is less apparent, however, in some of the discussions is how the performer's display of 'ugliness' is achieved. At times, it is less obvious as to whether the clown performer's ugliness is innate, relating to unalterable physical features, such as Kempe's "squint" or Tarlton's short, "animal-like stature"; or whether the performers rely on an 'illusion of ugliness' through an exaggeration of features or obvious plastic alteration such as the circus clown's make-up or the Auguste's large prosthetic red nose and costume, clearly marking the performer as 'other'. In other words, sometimes the clown performer is disguised as a low-status,

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ordinary man that might be mistaken for an audience member, and at other times the costume clearly signals the clown as a clown performer through obvious ‘otherness’.

Figure 10: Pretina in her 'Vogue Style'. (Photo courtesy of Kayla Roux)

Pretina’s costume is described as a “short-sleeved frock with the high collar disconcertingly contrasting a short hem, together with yellow stockings and platform tekkies” (Kretzman, 2015). The choice of costume recalls those chosen by Gaulier to suggest a role for a performer to play. Pretina’s school-uniform costume was assembled in collaboration with a costume designer. In discussion we spoke about the Auguste clown’s suite typically being ‘too’ long, short, tight, big or small. In *You Suck*, when Pretina is invited to a party, her costume is enhanced with a yellow hat and an oversized jacket, which Pretina describes as ‘Vogue-style’ and is discordant in relation to a casual invitation to gather in the shopping mall parking lot.

Apart from Pretina’s costume, messy pink hair and bright make-up, her otherness is signalled most directly by her self-presentation and roguish behaviour, evident in the way in which she slouches over the table, loudly chews her gum and blows bubbles that pop in her face, but most significantly exemplified through the way she speaks: “Then she speaks. An awfully flat Afrikaans assaults our ears

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[...] the girl whose mother insisted she move to an English high school in Grade 9 so she could learn the language of the world" (Kretzman, 2015).

Figure 11: Pretina de Jager on slouching in her armchair, 2016.

The use and application of language serves two distinct functions: the first being to ground the persona inside of the fictional world; and the second relating to the performance mode. Gaulier expresses the value of accents for clown performers by writing that:

> People who speak with an accent retain an unparalleled mystery. Where do they come from? Have they seen Vladivostok? Shanghai? New Delhi? The cemeteries of Loften? Have they walked in Warsaw? Have they Smoked Opium in Kabul? Have they been loved? Have they cried in the streets of Jerusalem? People who speak with an accent are generally less tiresome than those around us whose intonation gives no hint of anywhere else. (Gaulier, 2012:279-280)

Although I played with the same Afrikaans accent when I performed the persona at Gaulier, the laughter it invited there is very different from the laughter the accent receives in a local context. Rather than indicating a strange charm, the accent in South Africa suggests the clown persona's lack of exposure. In a country where eleven languages have been deemed official, and many more are spoken informally, language is a sensitive and contentious issue that relates to notions of status and belonging.

In the previous anecdotes I described how a break in language or mispronunciation was born from the pull to continue after a breakdown in performance and the struggle to find the words under pressure without scripted lines; in the desire to cope with the collapse, new words or unexpected ideas often arise. The above echoes the assertion by Bailes that there is "but one way to succeed, whilst there are countless ways to fail, some of them utterly predictable but many of them as yet unimaginable" (2011: xx). Although some of the mispronunciations and malapropisms were conceived prior to the performance, most often they were born *in* performance and produced by actual mistakes. Examples of such lines include Pretina's explanation that "Sarah Walker looked at [her] like [she] was talking

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Greece", or "Last night I was having sleepless dreams". Pretina also provides a lesson on Greek Mythology, explaining how "syphilis" always tries to push a big rock up a mountain.

The first time I concocted the story of Sisyphus during performance, I really couldn't remember the name of the Greek hero and on the spur of the moment said 'Syphilis'. The pleasure and laughter it evoked in *myself* threatened the performance and the 'serious lesson' Pretina was trying to share. Pretina, embodying an authoritative 'know-it-all' persona, often plays the game of educator; in this instance, it was clear that the audience recognised that I was improvising the story as I went along, talking myself into a corner whilst trying to suppress my laughter. The clowning arguably developed from my endeavour to perform *multiple actions at the same time* (supressing my laughter, playing the game of strict educator and trying to convince the audience of a myth about which I had very little information). This resembles the game or task set up by Gaulier in which he would ask two 'mock' audience members to stand at the back of a performer and "gently kiss" his/her neck whilst the performer attempted to execute a complicated instruction. The laughter erupts as a result of watching the performer struggle to convince the audience. This demonstrates a central point of exploration in this study regarding the clown performer's skill: finding ways to understand the essence of these spontaneous moments enabling the performer to sustain them in subsequent performances.

The issue of language, therefore, is closely related to the style of delivery or the struggle to act professionally, which refers to the discussion on Brecht in the previous chapter and his interest in the amateur performer as a means of evoking the *Vervremdungseffkt.* In performances of *You Suck*, any disturbance to the flow of scripted or predetermined events would initiate an opportunity for Pretina to shift her attention outside of the fictional world: she would, for example, berate a latecomer, provide a lesson on theatre etiquette at the ringing of a mobile phone, offer blessings when an audience member sneezed, or adjust any prop malfunctions such as a poster falling off the wall. Unlike my experience of prop malfunctions or forgotten cues in the performances discussed in Chapter Three, Pretina would calmly fetch a prop that had been forgotten backstage.

These failures set up a *performative contract* whereby certain patterns indicating the mode of performance are clearly established, inviting the audience to recognize and respond with laughter to the failure, thereby absolving them from the need to sympathise. This *performative contract* strives to disarm the viewer by concealing the authoritarian function, the idea that the play is delivering a message or has 'something to say' (Kermode in Kawitzky, 2015) proposes that it is an observer's natural inclination to search for sequence and logical progression in a narrative; as such, the observer has an expectation that an artwork will be "vetted for conceptual noise and meaninglessness, whose details will naturally relate to some greater message" (Kawitzky, 2015:33). Kermode further suggests that:

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> Authors, indeed, however keenly aware of other possibilities, are often anxious to help readers behave as they wish to; they 'fore-ground' sequence and message. This cannot be done without back-grounding something, and indeed it is not uncommon for large parts of a novel to go virtually unread; the less manifest portions of its text […] remain secret, resisting all but abnormally attentive scrutiny (Kermode in Kawitzky, 2015:33).

You Suck creates the illusion that the script has *not* been "vetted for conceptual noise or meaninglessness" through the laughter-based interaction which assures the viewer that 'everything is going to be okay', continuing the pattern whereby Pretina 'accidentally' manages to avoid serious consequences for her failure. By projecting an attitude of stupidity, optimism and persistence, Pretina *moves through* failure, lulling the audience into a false sense of security until the last scene of the play. A quick, unpredictable turn of events leads to the culmination of a tragedy, a failure from which the clown performer cannot recover, crossing over into the abyss of risk, danger and the unfathomable from which there seems to be no return. Suddenly the audience is faced with a moral question, forced to reflect on the role their laughter played in encouraging the behaviour that would lead to the tragedy. This moment changes the *performative contract*: Pretina no longer responds to laughter becoming engulfed by the fictional world as a character determined to leave the audience behind, a character that seems to be "completely alone, completely wrapped up in himself and unaware of being observed" (Esslin, 1985:22).

This dissertation has emphasised the importance of the *auteur* function in organising the clown performer's frame, providing a context by which the audience can be inducted into a certain performative engagement through creating the illusion that they are co-scripting the performance through their laughter response. I have discussed how the director-auteur takes on the responsibility for 'what is being said', the implicit message around which the work is organised. The director-auteur function may reside outside of the performer, as in the case of Brecht, or inside the performer, as in the case of my own practice and *You Suck*. A critical argument that this dissertation has advanced is that for the clown to function in theatre, the *auteur* function should not threaten the clown performer's freedom to act spontaneously, or at least to display creative agency and spontaneous play. This highlights the significance in this study of 'identifying and exploring clown principles' which are crucial in producing the illusion of clown agency. The clown performer is required to be acutely sensitive to the audience's response; similarly, the auteur is required to imagine the relationship between performer and audience and how this may be navigated through the frame of the text, or other performative tools, to lure the audience into a particular arrangement where the clown can flourish.

It is for this reason that I have taken the liberty (albeit risky), to write an experience of watching *You Suck* from the perspective of an imaginary audience member. In 2017 I received funding to perform

the show at 30 high-schools in and around South Africa to raise awareness of pandemic bullying. As acteur-auteur, I focused my attention on ways of establishing a relationship with high school audiences that could bring forth a specific message. What follows is an extract of performative writing where I imagine myself as an audience member, based on my experiences as the performer in *You Suck*, critically observing the audience's responses over the course of a hundred performances. I acknowledge that it is impossible to 'know' how any one audience member experienced the performance; nor is this imaginary character meant to imply that I perceive audiences as homogenous. This imaginary character is a conglomerate of audience members that I have observed and responded to, high school learners between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, mostly from English government schools who watched the performances in the school halls, during school hours overseen by educators.

This imaginary character also reflects my own experiences as a school-going teenager, and the feedback I received from the learners of the thirty schools I performed to. As a performative writing exercise that draws on my multiple roles as a clown, performer, director, educator and writer – which all rely in varying degrees on skills of acute observation, listening, attentiveness, characterisation, immersion and role-playing – this imaginary exchange is offered as a text from which others may gain further understanding around the authorship function in clowning.

Figure 12: Pretina sitting on stage at High School Adamantia in Kimberly, 2016.

The bell rings to signal the end of break. We are called to the hall for some or other speech about something we aren't supposed to do like drugs or bullying or why we should abstain from sex, so we don't get herpes. I hate those talks - the projector with the images of

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Chlamydia, the prude lady standing there pressing enter on her slide, the eleventh grader boys in the third row always finding a way to make fun of the content only to be pulled from their seats to explain to the rest of the school what exactly it is that they find so amusing.

Music blares loudly from the hall. We walk in to find a girl sitting on stage, she looks about our age and she's wearing what looks like an-almost school uniform. She has pink hair and is wearing too much make-up.

She stares at us, defiantly chewing her gum. Some of us laugh. Jake, in the third row, shouts something at her. She puts down the origami she is folding and turns her attention to him. One of his friends punches him on the back and the group laughs and move to their seats.

Girls in the front row take out their phones to snap pictures of her, she notices and gets up to pose for them before resuming her paper-folding.

She looks calm. As if this is just what she does, sitting in front of eight hundred noisy teenagers chewing gum and folding origami. She suddenly looks up and stares straight at me, as if to ask 'what are <u>you</u> looking at?'. It makes me nervous, I laugh and look down.

Mrs Madgewick walks onto the stage - the girl turns her music down (slightly).

***Mrs Madgwick**: (the usual) Good morning, School.*

We reply (the usual): "G-o-o-d, m-o-r-n-i-n-g M-r-s M-a-d-g-e-w-i-c-k!!!!" I think this might have been the slowest and most unenthusiastically we have ever managed to respond.

***Mrs Madgwick:** Oh, come on now, can we please try a little harder? Good Morning School!*

***School:** G-o-O-D M- (still at the same slow pace, a running joke every morning at assembly).*

***Mrs Madgewick:** Ok, never mind. Today we are honoured to have a special guest to talk to us about Bullying. (The girl on stage looks surprised, she frowns, looking confused.)*

Did she get the memo wrong? We laugh.

Mrs Madgewick, sensing that the girl provoked our laughter, turns around to look at her.

But the girl smiles at her, politely. When Mrs Madgewick turns back she rolls her eyes.

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We laugh. I hear a girl behind me turn to her friend to whisper: Do you think they brought in the wrong show?

Her friend replies: I don't know? This doesn't look much like the bullying talk. Typical Madgewick (laughs).

Mrs Madgewick: *Without further ado, enjoy the show and please be on your best behaviour. Don't let me ask you to put your fingers on your mouth like in 1st grade.*

The girl on stage blows a large bubble and it pops in her face, she attempts to remove it from where it is stuck on her nose, stretching it out in front of her before putting it back into her mouth. She turns the music up louder singing to the chorus of Donna Lewis' 'I love you always forever'. She seems to be in no rush. She stares at the eight hundred of us patiently waiting, before she turns the volume of her radio down and starts speaking in the worst Afrikaans accent I have ever heard:

Origanum is really hard. Do you know what that is?

We laugh and look at each other, what?

She continues to brag about random achievements, giving us tips about where to buy tippex and how to look skinnier and shares graphs she's drawn about getting into the A-group of her school. At one point, while she shares tips on how to use Instagram, she explains to the teachers that they shouldn't bother listening because they are too old to understand what she is talking about.

Mrs Poole turns to Mr Thomas: Is this the bullying talk?

Mr Thomas: I don't think so, doesn't seem like it.

At one point the girl, who we now know as Pretina, presses her radio and Izzy Azalea 212 blares over the speakers. She dances to a version of hip hop and the school goes crazy, students get up laughing and cheering at her madness, the violent lyrics and the ways she pulls her face.

This is definitely not about bullying but it is funny.

She lies back on her couch panting, exhausted from the dancing, going on to explain how she is planning to win over her crush by singing her Eisteddfod song and getting dressed in an

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outfit she describes as very Vogue. It's ridiculous! She practises the song she will sing and again we laugh at her ineptitude and the way she gets all the Katy Perry lyrics wrong, but when she explains she will sing it to 'Jonafan, her crush', the girls around me loudly voice their opinions.

"No, Pretina! Please don't! Please don't do that! Ah, no, this is so embarrassing."

Their loud responses and my feeling of wanting to stop her intrigues me. Why do we care? Why are students shushing each other to hear the next line? Where is this going?

At one point she leaves the stage to go to a party at which 'Jonafan, her crush' will be. When she returns, I can feel there is a change in mood. We know something went wrong, but we still laugh, at the boys who said she looks like a clown, (she does), at the fact that she did not know what B.O.B means (it means bring own booze, duh) or her attempts to smoke 'bubbly hubbly' (which is not how you say it).

Everyone roars with laughter.

Until she describes the song she prepared. She gets up onto a bench to sing the song whilst explaining how she had handed Jonafan the small white mouse she had freed earlier in the play. She starts singing, she explains how Jonathan took out a lighter 'to do that Bon Jovi thing'.

But this time the same singing in this context at the party, in a parking lot, in front of the cool group and Jonathan, seems too awkward, too embarrassing. We don't laugh - Pretina notices the lack of laughter and looks at us desperately, as if to say, but this was fun just now? Why aren't you laughing?

But it is too late. She has sung the song, and Jonathan looks up at her, there's complete silence in the hall and she speaks his lines:

"Why do you have to be such a fucking freak?"

And then she burns the mouse.

There is absolute silence in the hall. One second passes, two, three, four seconds. An eleventh-grader boy notices the strange silence and breaks it with a laugh, as if to say "it's just a show you guys, come on", but his laughter feels foreign, it doesn't stick. Another attempt, a loud solitary laugh to break the silence, but the silence swallows the laugh.

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She stares at us as if she is just as surprised as we are at her story. As if she has nothing else prepared. She seems to be as lost as we are. Defeated.

Eventually she walks to her wall and pulls off a poem, she lights a candle, fetches Sarah Walker's perfectly folded Origami mouse, goes onto her knees and reads the poem - clearly but still in the strong flat accent, still mispronouncing words - except now there is no laughter and she doesn't look at us, she is suddenly distant and alone.

She ends the poem, takes a breath and then reads further: "Max Ehrmann, Desiderata, Copyright 1927". As she says it she looks up, recognizes her mistake. We laugh at her stupidity, is Pretina still there?

She leaves the stage and a few minutes later a different girl appears, wearing a white outfit, her hair tied in a neat bun. She speaks, normally, boringly, like a teacher, introducing herself – Klara, or something like that. She thanks us for watching and tells us that the story is autobiographical, her story. She smiles politely and tells us if we have any questions about the dramatic elements or the story to come speak to her and that she will be waiting at the foot of the stairs.

I don't want to speak to her but I'm drawn to the mystery. Did she really trick us, is she that old? Does she have nothing of Pretina? Is she just a normal person?

I go stand near the group of (mostly girls) surrounding her, bombarding her with questions, but they don't address any of them to her, to…whatever she said her name was. They talk to Pretina.

"What did you do when you went back to school, Pretina? How did you handle it?"

In 2015, after a performance of *You Suck* at the National Arts Festival, I was approached by a principal of a school who watched the show and invited to perform it to high school learners. She explained that earlier that year, they had lost a young learner to suicide and the school was committed to procure new ways to activate conversations around the pandemic of bullying and its devastating effects. She proposed that a showing of *You Suck* to learners and teachers at the school might offer an opening gambit.

I performed the show to eight hundred learners, in a school hall without the use of any sophisticated stage lights and equipment. I adapted the language, erasing foul language and sexual innuendos. The engagement and response from the learners were not dissimilar from that I had observed from

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generally older audiences I had previously performed to: an overall pattern of laughter as an ongoing response to the perpetual failure and inadequacy of Pretina, followed by silence at the end of the performance. Perhaps because of the increased numbers in the audience (I was accustomed to no more than one-hundred spectators), or because of their youthful excitement, the audibility of their responses felt overwhelming, resembling the "contest-like" engagement of the Elizabethan audiences that Preiss describes in Chapter Four. Throughout the performance, the learners laughed loudly, commented, cheered, repeated lines, answered Pretina's questions and voiced their disagreement with some of her choices. Their exuberance was therefore in stark contrast to the moment of silence at the end; and their sudden lack of response was consequently experienced as the 'loudest' (most intense) moment of the play. The post-performance encounters at these school performances significantly piqued my interest as a practitioner seeking to understand the principles of the clown in theatre.

At the end of the performance, I did my usual bow in the curtain call and moved backstage to remove my make-up and costume. However, instead of the learners leaving the hall as an audience would a theatre, they remained seated - awaiting further announcements and instructions from their teachers. The teacher who had introduced me invited me back onto the stage. She asked me to introduce myself and answer any questions learners might have about the performance. Standing at the microphone that had been set up for the occasion, out of costume, I briefly introduced myself and stated simply that the narrative was devised from autobiographical material and that questions were welcome. Unlike the loud and provocative contributions, laughter and spontaneous playful responses, during performance, the learners now seemed hesitant to engage, their questions suddenly calculated and restrained.

Almost a year later, during which I was invited to perform at a few more schools, I received funding from a charity foundation to tour the show to thirty High Schools in and around South Africa to initiate conversations around bullying. I was cognizant of the fact that I had no training or experience in Applied Theatre, and wary of the possible challenges and ethical risks of entering this unknown territory. I was suddenly aware of a *responsibility* to the sponsors and audience members to deliver *a specific message*, raising awareness around bullying and the dangers of social media.

In preparation for the particular needs of the campaign, on 1 September 2016 I organised a performance, with follow up discussions, for a focus group of participant-observers from multiple backgrounds and demographics, which included: drama and life orientation teachers, applied theatre students and lecturers, counsellors, secondary school learners, and an educational psychologist. One of my pertinent concerns was whether the persona of Pretina, as a middle class, white Afrikaans girl,

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would be relatable as a protagonist to the diverse South African government school audiences I intended to perform to.

The group's feedback, based on anonymous written suggestions in response to a few questions I asked in a questionnaire and post-show discussion, offered useful insights around feasibility, the ages most appropriate for such a showing and particular concerns around language and the material that was considered most appropriate/inappropriate for high school audiences. Most significant from their responses and pertaining directly to the hypothesis and research questions of this study, was the consensus expressed around Pretina's context and background (white/middle-class). Most of the group saw this as secondary to her status as an outcast, typified by her 'otherness' and perpetual failure to 'fit in' - a state, they argued, that most high school learners would identify with to some degree.

Failure in *You Suck* can, therefore, be understood to be "inclusive", as Bailes suggests, both as a "trope" (enscripted in narrative) and as a "mode of activity" (a mechanism operating through the 'flop' or scripted gags). It is made particularly evident through the displayed effort of Pretina *trying* to fit in: it is her demonstration of effort towards attaining governing values of beauty, success and victory, as well as the repetitive failure to achieve these efforts, that point directly to the 'exclusive' and 'prohibitive' nature of "success" as a trope. Pretina's inability to be anything other than fiercely individualistic as a result of her incapacity to conform (despite her overwhelming desire to do so) stands as the core characteristic that defines her presence.

One of the issues this dissertation has drawn attention to is the complex notion of the 'personal' or 'inner clown'. In the second chapter on clown training these terms have been shown to describe a rhetoric pertaining to issues of 'honesty', 'truthfulness', 'authenticity' and 'spontaneity', resting on the idea of feelings and a 'person underneath' that can be discovered. Most importantly this prevailing discourse is constructed by being placed in opposition to 'fakeness', 'pretence', 'masking', 'trickery' or 'holding preconceived ideas'.

This dissertation has partly aimed to indicate the dangers inherent in these binaries by illustrating the extent to which the clown performer is dependent, in the process of creation and performance, on the qualities from both sides of the divide; an oversimplified split has concealed the ways in which clown principles may be practically applied, critically observed and repeated.

Davison's research, seminal in exposing the limitations of clown taxonomies and training vocabulary and its overemphasis on the 'personal' and 'inner clown', has also evidenced how the feelings experienced as both performer and audience of "coming in contact with something deep and authentic

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in themselves" when working with clown failure cannot be denied. It is possible to argue therefore that 'truth' and 'authenticity' lie in efficacy, the experience between the performer and audience that is felt and usually indicated by laughter. This view can be linked to Alain Badiou's conception of truth put forward in his text: *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (2001). Badiou expresses that all concerns with truth is dependent on an "encounter", an "experience,'' one which "compels [a] subject to invent a new way of thinking or acting in a situation" (Badiou, 2001:52). Badiou understands truth to be in line with a person's search for that which is unknown, remaining faithful to a process, an encounter that inevitably demands alteration, implying a break between what was and what cannot be again, a transformation of self through perspective which he describes as resting on the willingness to remain faithful to the encounter where change can occur.

> The immortal that I am capable of being cannot be spurred in me by the effects of communicative sociality, it must be *directly* seized by fidelity. This is to say: broken, in its multiple-being, by the course of an immanent [sic] break, and convoked, finally, with or without knowing it, by the evental supplement.To enter into the composition of a subject of truth can only be something that *happens to you* (Badiou, 2001:52).

In line with this view, clowning is understood as the grounds for the encounter, where laughter operates as transaction. Instead of being *about* bullying, *You Suck* sets up the parameters or conditions that bullying relies on, laughing *at* failure and thereby possibly instils the same feelings of superiority that bullying might evoke. A group of individuals may feel united by the primordial connection of laughing at something, in the same way that Gaulier creates the conditions for such relations in the workshop environment. In *You Suck*, I propose that the relationship based on laughter is maintained until, through the narrative of Pretina's story, the audience arrive at a point in the encounter where a decision is demanded of them; they are forced to choose whether or not laughter is still an appropriate response. A break in the proposed patterned encounter encourages them to question: what marks the difference between inclusive, innocent and pleasurable laughter and laughter that aims to reject, humiliate and exclude? An observation made by Kretzman indicates this split as a 'fine line'; at this point, the initial invitation that *You Suck* establishes leaves Kretzman with momentary "resentment at being made complicit in mocking the very character with whom [he] had developed empathy until [he] realised that of course [he] could choose what to laugh at, or whether to laugh at all" (Kretzman, 2015). Laughter, nevertheless, remains the bricks and mortar from which the success or impact of the show is constructed.

There were a few performances where no laughter at all was incited. One of my vivid memories is of performing at a boy's private school where a group of Grade Nine learners watched the show with their soccer coach. They clearly did not want to be there. From the first few moments it was clear that they would win the 'contest' established amongst themselves by *not* laughing, rather talking to each

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other, or laughing at me, but only as a performer - never at the content. In another show, where I had under ten audience members, there was almost no laughter and the performance felt 'awkward' and extremely difficult to perform. The theatre principles in the story and narrative held the show together, despite these performances often only lasting a few minutes, as I would not attempt to improvise without audience response. I include this as a reminder that the point of this chapter has not been to argue or convince the reader that *You Suck* is clown theatre, or that Pretina is a clown and not a character, but rather to share, through observation and analysis, how clown principles were employed in a theatre context,from my experience as acteur-auteur with 'something to say'.

At all of the school performances, I was asked by teachers to answer questions about the process of making the show, or talk about my bullying message, after the show - an opportunity that I later learnt to decline as far as possible, choosing rather to interact with interested students who came forward to meet me at the foot of the stairs, to answer any questions or listen to their stories. In my experience, when I entered the stage after the performance as 'myself', displaying 'non-otherness', collapsing the illusion of character and meeting them in the encounter from a place of authority ('knowing about the subject') alongside their teachers, I felt an impenetrable chasm emerge. The engagement often felt cold and distancing, the exchange based on critical thinking and complex ideas about bullying. Often when I spoke to learners individually, even after introducing myself as Klara or revealing Pretina as a 'lie', they would still refer to me as Pretina, asking her what she did when she went back to school following the incident of bullying. I realised in these engagements that the learners weren't 'suspending their disbelief' but actively choosing to step into a performative encounter where they felt at ease to be honest.

There is no singular definition of affect. Fleishman suggests that "affect arises as a result of encounters between manifold beings the outcome of which cannot be predetermined but emerges through the encounter" (2012:169). Fleishman refers to James Thompson's seminal book *Performance Affects* (2009) which, he proposes, argues for a:

> shift in focus amongst practitioners engaged in work aimed at social transformation, from the effect of performance events and applications to what affects arise and what possibilities such affects afford. A shift to a focus on affect involves a shift away from signs and signification, from what things mean and the processes of interpretation that have always dominated in the Humanities (Fleishman, 2012:169).

This notion relates back to Lecoq's *quelque chose a dire*; the urge, as Murray suggests, to return to an embodied and sensory engagement with theatre rather than a focus on what it might be 'saying', based on content. *You Suck* was about bullying, but it never mentioned the word bullying. This is based on an understanding that affect, as Thompson suggests, is "a form of thinking, often indirect and non-

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reflective...but thinking all the same" (Thompson, in Fleishman, 2012:168). The consequence of such an encounter may surpass the spatio-temporal reality of the event, 'lingering' long after the event is complete (Fleishman, 2012:170).

The Affect of Failure

The final section of this chapter, with this quote included as an introductory statement, has been written in full once before. Two days before the submission deadline for this dissertation, as I was about to attach this section to an email to be sent for final review and proofreading, it disappeared, closing down suddenly, reduced to a grey icon on the desktop of my laptop that I have, as of yet, not been able to open. I began re-writing in frustration and panic, knowing that the ideas had been formulated before, plagued by the imagined template I would strive to replace. I remembered that I had started the chapter with the quote by Bailes, and when I reread it, the synchronicity felt too significant to ignore.

> As a trope or mode of activity, failure is inclusive, permissive even. It can lead to unanticipated effects. One of its most radical properties is that it operates through a principle of difference rather than sameness. *A failed occurrence signals the unpredictable outcome of events where a successful instance might, by comparison, be considered exclusive, prohibitive and militated by mainstream values*. (Bailes, 2011:2, emphasis added)

My failure to save the final fifteen pages of my dissertation in the correct format, arguably the most basic of skills required by students at all levels, signalled the same flop-like quality that has underscored the major tropes in this study. In my practice-led research over the last few years, I have increasingly learnt to trust moments like these – and rather than feeling trapped by the unattainable originally scripted and completed version of this chapter, I have high hopes that the re-writing incited by my failure will lead to "unanticipated effects" or an "unpredictable outcome".

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CONCLUSION

"Only when a human first recognises the limitations, reproductive mechanisms and operations implicit within any ideology and the practices it both fosters and denies, might it become possible to construct lines of escape. It is critical to consider, then, what theatre's role might be in imagining such routes towards a different world, for so much of what we see in the theatre continues to reduce or replicate what already exists in relation to imagination, and the world as we know it, the images we see affirmations of that world."- Bailes

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This dissertation has been a preoccupation with lines, most predominantly the unstable line that separates theatre from clowning and which has come to be represented by a short seemingly stable line, a hyphen in the term 'clown-theatre'. I have considered the lines between actuality and pretence, the shadow line of the curtain that separates performers from observers, the line in the form of large doorways that grant and deny access to the auditorium; also the line the clown dangles from when entering the 'top of the big top', or the 'black, red and white' lines drawn by the performer to indicate the 'face of a clown'.

The quote by Bailes that starts this concluding chapter suggests it is only when exposing the lines, actual or imaginary, that they exist as limitations to indicate "reproductive mechanisms and operations implicit within any ideology and the practices it both fosters and denies" (2011:16), or are perceived as "a border beyond which we are not to go - a containing frame around a territory" (Fleishman, 2012:204) from which it becomes possible to identify or construct new "lines of escape".

In Chapter Three, reflecting on my experiences as a performer and observer in practices that have been identified as 'clown theatre', I suggested that the term clown-theatre, as an oversimplified compounding of two complex practices, conceals the critical tensions that emerge in their intersection; it has been the aim of this study to consider these tensions as valuable in advancing new knowledge of each practice individually, as well as in dialogue.

A primary provocation for my view that the term 'clown-theatre' is, as of yet, unstable and inadequate for representing this complex encounter, was the observed inclination by practitioner-theorists using the term, to express the need to either "transform the normal theatre principles" or "reimagine or redefine the clown". In other words, they propose that for the compound term to be acceptable as a definition of their practice, one of the key practices referred to requires transformation or reconstruction.

Related to this issue was my observation that this tendency would also occur in the reviews of clown theatre in which viewers would justify their use of the term by disassociating what they had seen/experienced from former clowning. A dichotomy has thus been set up between historical or traditional clowning - viewed as 'fake' and 'inauthentic', based on 'laughter' and 'entertainment' – and, the newly proposed clown performance, exemplified as 'existential', 'philosophical' or 'meaningful' clowning. My hypothesis has been that this split emerged as a result of a lack of understanding about the clown's multifarious historical functions, as well as the techniques and principles clown performers conscientiously employ to achieve laughter and entertainment.

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I was 22 years old when I played the role of the moody Chalk Girl in the Epicene Butcher (discussed in detail in the opening to this dissertation) at the Edinburg Fringe Festival (2013). One of my pre-determined tasks was to join the other performer and director, in costume on escapades through the main streets of Edinburgh to help advertise the show. We soon realised that this implied, joining an unruly horde of festivalgoers and perfromers and trying to get an innocent passer-by to take a pamphlet whilst rambling down (almost shouting) the shows various previous successes and trying not to get trodden upon. After about an hour of sensory overload, we turned to each other despondently after watching the newest target rudely reject the pamphlet and another feeling too ashamed not to take it but throwing the expensive print work in the nearest bin."It's not worth it", we simultaneously agreed as we made our way to the Assembly's meeting point, a large food and beer garden where we usually gathered at lunch time. While sitting on the artificial grass waiting for our food, the director suggested, "There must be a better way, we can't waste all those pamphlets! Why don't you hand them out here Klara, where everyone is relaxed?" I reluctantly got up and he suggested, 'And Chalk Girl' I looked around, 'try it in persona.' Feeling exposed to venture out on my own, I walked up to a group of people lounging and drinking beer on the lawn, but before I started my (by now well rehearsed speech), I thought about what chalk girl would do. I put a piece of gum in my mouth, made direct eye contact with one person, and took him a pamphlet, when someone else in the same group asked for one, I refused it, gave a cheeky grin and moved to the next group. Soon, the silent game of handing out pamphlets became a performance and by the end of our lunch slot all our pamhlets were finished. We continued this tactic for the rest of the festival.

From my experience, the clown persona, (as earlier discussed in relation to the circus clown who was often sent into the village green to gather potential spectators), has enormous potential for advertising and engaging with audience members both on and off stage. I have become increasingly interested in utilising the clown's ability to engage with audiences beyond the confines of the stage and developing an off-stage persona to interact and engage with audiences beyond and in support of the theatrical project by developing a persona to interact with audiences in persona in post-show workshops and discussions to further reinforce the message as well as on festival-grounds or social media platforms to advertise the show and develop an ongoing relationship with audience members. I make this point in the conclusive chapter as I believe that one of the greatest challenges standing in the way of further illuminating the potential of the clown in theatre is that the clown figure's popular persona, has been historically patronised and undermined.

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This study has further argued that the expectations of contemporary Western interpretations of theatre in which meaningfulness, coherence and narrative are principal expectations, has also contributed to setting up untenable limitations and boundaries for the clown performer within theatre. I proposed that a deeper and more rigorous enquiry could lead to renewed interest in clowning principles and reveal unexpected knowledge towards understanding the potential of clowning to serve the staged events without compromising the clown's licentious and iconoclastic status.

In Chapter Four I turned my attention to the clown's historical presence on stage to map an overview of the clown's function in the staged events while tracing the principles or characteristics the clown performers employ in order to assist the directives of the event. From these discussions, it became evident that although the clown generally seems to operate from a place of contrast and is often distanced from the central narratives and objectives that the play or event aims to uphold, in reality the clown may be the principal means through which the events' function is relayed.

This discussion illuminated ways in which, by connecting with the audience, or even becoming representative of the connection itself, the clown manages to reinstate or support the central message. This is exemplified through the examples of the Vidusaka providing a different, more human connection of the *Rasa* or religious messages in Sanskrit theatre seemingly undermining the material by pretending to be a Brahmin, the Zany tricking the audience into buying unlicensed merchandise by making fun of the Mountebank's sales pitch, the Elizabethan clown whose initial clown function pacified audience members by establishing a contest where the clown would emerge as champion, or Bertolt Brecht who employs the clown as a cipher, a means to implement his theatrical vision of Epic theatre to encourage political action.

To achieve these functions, it has been argued, that the clown deceives the audience into believing s/he is one of them. The clown achieves this illusion by overstepping the boundaries of the spatial parameters, by projecting a hyper-mimetic persona of 'an ordinary man' with a low-status persona, such as Tarlton and Kempe or by being othered from the rest of the characters through distinct costumes/make-up or a red nose. Most significantly however, the clown's ability to improvise or at least interact spontaneously with the audience to some degree, responding to the unfolding of the performative event, assists the clown in staging unpredictability and "key[ing] audience participation, which destabilize[s] the terms of the theatrical event itself" (Preiss, 2014:179).

In Chapter Six, I offered an analysis the one-person show, *You Suck and Other Inescapable Truth*s, in which I was an acteur-auteur, as a case-study to identify some of the core concerns and challenges raised through this practice-led study regarding the principles of clowning, based on laughter and

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failure as derived from the lineage of Lecoq. Based on my experience as an educator, performer and researcher over the last five years, a key finding is that for clown theatre as a concept to stand a chance the entire ensemble of theatre practitioners, including performers, lighting technicians, designers, but most significantly the director, if there is one – needs to have at least some understanding of clown principles. This will ensure that the impact of the clown – as a free agent with improvisational capacity and transformative potential – can be applied to the training of clowns and the creation of clown shows. This may lead to changes in approach to rehearsal and preparation processes; for example, providing more time to explore relationships and deepening engagements between different facets of the company.

By considering the clown performer as a cipher or agent with the ability to cross lines - by playing on the edges, fumbling over them by accident, forgetting them, tripping over danger tape, or wandering off too far and in so doing expanding the arena of play - I have proposed the clown not only as a specific style or performance mode, but as a cosmology, a lens or "state of mind" (Bu in Amsden, 2015:47), representing "a certain form of life" or thinking patterned by irregularity and chance (Bhaktin, 1984:8).

The study has also pointed out that the clown him/herself, and clowning as a practice, can become so fixed, conventional and habitual that a challenge is required – suggesting that the contemporary clown has moved into theatre seeking not refuge, familiarity and convention but rather challenge and provocation. Contemporary interpretations of theatre have thus become the most recent *place* in which the clown can challenge his/her own assumptions about clowning.

One of the aims of this dissertation has been to generate a more inclusive, flexible writing platform in the hopes that it will create further opportunity for the practice of clowning to be documented and made accessible to other researchers and practitioners. In this way, the clown becomes a "tiller of the soil", preparing the grounds for further innovative practice in the academic field of theatre and performance studies. In stark contrast to the practice of clowning about which I write, so fundamentally dependent on the audience and their responses to enable its continuation and development, at times during this study I experienced the practice of writing as isolated and one-sided, aware that 'my audience' would only come in contact with my actions once it had been concluded.

As an antidote to the perpetual solitude I have experienced, it has been useful to employ the function of the auteur and to imagine the reader-audience as never fully absent, allowing the reader *to* inform and shape the dissertation by their imagined presence. The clown in performance perpetually asks the audience: "do you like this", "is it okay?", "may I continue"? The contributions of a potential audience to this dissertation have become explicit when I have paid attention to the different 'voices' and ways of writing (tonal qualities and registers) that emerge when I ask the question: "Who am I writing for?".

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By paying attention to the tensions and irreconcilability between the different roles I adopt in order to know, remember, conceptualise and imagine when writing about clowning, my understanding of the performative nature of practice has been enriched. It has illuminated the 'voice' that emerges when, as a practitioner I am trying to make a point, reconcile, prove or demonstrate and which is always in relation to a real or imagined 'who', a some-one.

I have become increasingly aware of (and able to critically reflect upon) my often schizophrenic thinking patterns, which are informed by different theories and value systems, and which may be personified as two figures - the 'academic' and the 'clown'. The academic is recognised by her desire and ability to make sense, to apply logic and order. She moves forward swiftly to assimilate, summarise, forge connections, simplify disparate ideas and argue proficiently to draw conclusions. She displays a keen interest in the past and future, guided ultimately by the question: where is this going? Besides the fact that she is at times, admittedly, a massive bore, she is surprisingly also a professional trickster, on the constant lookout for ways to 'wrap things up' and conceal the inevitable intrusion of the clown.

Her (twice-removed) cousin Mary (the class clown) will assuredly appear at any moment - uninvited - with too much to say, speaking out of turn, - too fast, or too slow, an utter inconvenience - so they say - blabbering out of context, far too emotional, awkward and unpolished - CONFUSED - too forward in her approach, repeating NONSense, inappropriate in manner, leaving before we can get a good look at her, but staying just long enough to reveal something that was erased, another tangent - appearing in the cracks - ready to expose, to declare, fragment, existing happily in the immediate presence, uncensored, ready to point out something the professor had missed - drawing attention to that which doesn't seem important, something forgotten, too human, too strange, too impulsive - something repeated AGAIN.

These caricatures embody gross generalisations that consciously render them oppositional; I aimed to employ them deliberately, creatively, to playfully represent, identify and question underlying tensions between different ways of knowing that make writing about clowning difficult. In trying (and failing) to become them, the structure/frame they represent is also exposed and potentially undermined. To make evident the interplay provides an avenue from which to question why they are often posed as binaries, and if they shouldn't rather be reimagined as belonging to the same side. Instead of attempting to remove or consolidate the tensions between the anarchic energy of the clown and the various 'authorities' that have arisen and are implicit in a study of this nature, I have often pursued the pleasure that is to be found in the chase, the pie-throwing and off-balance juggling of ideas - where the clown appears to be most alive in uncertainty and movement, signalling "unfinished thinking".

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Gaulier asks me to stand with my back to the mock-audience and jump around to frighten them with a 'boo' so he can pick a costume. I feel immensely excited at the thought of what he will choose for me: a dentist's wife, Marilyn Monroe, a Hawain dancer, Dracula, a bride?

I spin around and await his impression of me. His face contorts.

A pause.

Gaulier: Ehhhh… Oi.. Ahhhh…. An academic, yes... a professor always trying to be clever, to outsmart us, yes…good...

Klara: (What? Really? No, I thought…!) Gaulier, are you sure?

Everyone bursts out laughing at my question - or maybe at the disappointment so visible on my face.

Gaulier lifts his drumstick to point at the laughing audience, as if to say: Exactly!

Figure 13: Klara van Wyk at Ecole Philippe Gaulier in the costume of academic.

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ADDENDUM A

Review by Steve Kretzman

Skool is krool

Posted on 21st August 2015 by Steve

The worst thing about school is not the lessons or the discipline or exams or the homework or even the early morning peak traffic rat-race. The worst thing is being surrounded by your peers for seven hours a day.

There are the fortunate few who manage to hook into a great group of supportive friends but on the whole, it appears school, high school in particular, is a daily gauntlet of unwritten and continually shifting social rules.

Massing a collection of maladroit adolescents struggling to deal with unfamiliar hormonal commands in a society blaring mixed signals and then placing them under the additional stresses of alternating boredom and performance anxiety with minimal supervision sounds like an situation that wouldn't pass muster under the Geneva Convention for the treatment of prisoners of war. Yet we blithely herd our sons and daughters into this scenario and force them to endure it for years.

But the politics of education is not the subject of *You Suck (and other inescapable truths)*, a play written and acted by Klara van Wyk and designed and directed by Francesco Nassimbeni. Not overtly at any rate. Rather, *You Suck* examines the politics of being a teenage girl, a psychological trauma for which the public

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schooling system is partly to blame. Advertising and marketing (which itself rests on the politics of Capitalism) takes care of the rest.

Klara embodies the passive aggression of the insecure adolescent so well, WTFs and Whatevs vibrate around her like a force field as she slouches over her desk, chewing gum and scowling at us while practising her resting bitch face. Yet her sulky eye contact with latecomers and loud-laughers, combined with eye rolling and eyebrow-raising, draw us in even as she radiates indifference.

Then she speaks. An awfully flat Afrikaans assaults our ears and we begin to fall in love with Klara van Wyk, the girl whose mother insisted she move to an English high school in Grade 9 so she could learn the language of the world.

It might be like throwing your ear wif gravel chipped out of a Hello Kitty quarry but you cannot unselfconsciously speak like that and not be endearing. Even if it is for the wrong reasons.

Dressed by Richard de Jager in a wonderful Afrikaans-green short-sleeved frock with the high collar disconcertingly contrasting a short hem, together with yellow stockings and platform tekkies, our frizzy-haired ponytailed gum-chewing Klara candidly relates her ambition to be accepted into the cool group at school and her bafflement as to what the missing ingredient of cool could be.

She is superb in this role. We are the mirror in her bedroom to which she narrates her story as a means of perhaps making sense of this confusing world from which there is no escape. Yet we are more than her mirror, we are also her confidant on whom she is not afraid to pass the harsh judgement only an adolescent is capable of should we fail the test of cool.

Nassimbeni has done well to allow the space for off-the-cuff remarks to audience reactions, which van Wyk, also a Masters student at UCT, manages adroitly and in so doing reinstates the authenticity of her character.

There were a few minutes about halfway through the second scene, where I was not sure who was being pilloried, whether is was the character of Klara and her desperate desire for acceptance, or the school bullies who refused to see beyond her accent and Afrikaans upbringing. It was a fine line she was treading and I resented being made complicit in mocking the very character with whom I had developed empathy until I realised that of course I could choose what to laugh at, or whether to laugh at all. She places the response in our hands, which made me like her all the more.

Perhaps, despite the flawed schooling system, despite the incessant brand propaganda, despite the disturbing narcissism of a technology obsessed society, Klara, like a mouse small and unnoticed enough to slip through the blades of the thresher, might make it out okay despite being scarred by cruelty.

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ADDENDUM B

Glossary of selected words from Pretina terminology

Fanks	Thanks
Wiff	With
Dat	That
What is	That is
Dis	This
Fret	Threat
Bolla	Hair bun

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