

The Contemporary Clown Actor: Draft Documentation October-December 2007

Part 1: Introduction

In this introduction I shall give an overview of the organisation of the project and its first term, as well as discussing some of the issues that have arisen, particularly in relation to the legacy of Lecoq. I then go on to describe the workshops in detail. Lastly, I give a summary of the work that is imminent.

The project got under way unofficially in September through canvassing for participants. In London, this was done partly by sending a short description of the project to course leaders at Central, and partly via my own contacts. I also gave a brief introduction to the project at a staff meeting before the beginning of term. An early meeting of initial participants was held in September to talk through what the project really could be about. A large part of this discussion centred on how the participants' own interests might be incorporated within the framework that I had set out.

Our discussions ranged over a number of areas that had not appeared in the original project description:

- Risk: what clown might teach us about the importance and value of risk
- Cultural difference: the differing interpretations and understandings of clown in different cultures (the early participants were English, Spanish, Greek and Colombian)
- Dyslexia and other normally disadvantageous conditions as potentially advantageous in clowning
- The difficulty of making finished work based on clown.

We began the workshops in October with approximately 12 people, but when I began to give classes on regular CSSD courses, giving students a first hand experience of what clown can be about, interest and attendance at the workshops became overwhelming for a time, then settling down towards the end of the sessions. I decided not to put limits on this ebb and flow of participation, for several reasons. I didn't want to exclude anyone who might have a genuine interest, perhaps a first-time interest born of curiosity after having had a first taste of what clown can be. Participants ranged from first year undergraduates, through M.A. students on a variety of courses, to ex-students and professionals. I was happy to abandon, at least for a time, my habitual preference for a limit of 15 students.

I even considered it a positive experience for the regulars to have that comfort shattered by newcomers invading their safe space. Of course, there is no doubt that regularity and stability can be an aid to learning, but I do have a certain scepticism about an obsession with safety and secure environments, which is particularly

prevalent in much clown teaching, probably due to the inherently challenging nature on a personal level of this kind of performance training. I think this is a particularly British phenomenon, as it contrasts sharply with the Spanish experience, where security in clown training is not a concern. I was led to this conclusion two years ago when I was surveying clown teaching around the world, as part of the process of setting up the Escola de Clown de Barcelona. Looking at how teachers described their courses in the UK it was apparent that safe-environmentalism was a common concern, and memories of my own early training in the UK confirm this. Perhaps we should extend that to the English-speaking world: although I have not been trained there, some Canadian and Australian examples do exhibit similar obsessions. “Nose to Nose” offer workshops described thus:

“This is done with care and respect for each individual and within a framework of rules that ensures a secure and protective environment.”¹

“Even if the work is at times challenging, we are committed to take you through it as gently and conscientiously as we can.”²

“We believe that people grow and learn best in a supportive and positive environment. In our feedback, we point out what is good without being complacent or hiding what we think. This positive regard, we believe, affirms the courage to own our feelings and assert ourselves joyfully in the world – which are all essential ingredients of clowning.”³

I don't remember having seen any such statement within the description of an acting workshop, nor would it ever appear in a Philippe Gaulier workshop, nor in Spain. So why such a cottonwool approach? My guess is that it reflects the fear of revealing emotions in British society. This gives us a clue to another issue in contemporary clowning: its claim to universality (I will discuss this below as well in connection with the red nose). However, from my experience as a performer and teacher, over 12 years in Britain and 14 years in Spain, working with international students and performers, there are quite distinct ways in which different countries have received contemporary clown. In Britain, it has become enmeshed with the autochthonous if you look at John Wright's recent book on humour, which includes much detail on the nature of clowning, there are a number of examples given in order to describe what clown is which, in my opinion, are limited to British culture. This is only normal, obviously! My own examples will also relate to my own experience. However, I think it is interesting to highlight this, so as to open up our minds to the possibilities of cultural clown difference. Wright's culture-shock-horror seems to be going in the opposite direction to my own. Analysing a particular performance in his discussion of pathos and clown, Wright first gives us this anecdote:

Perhaps the concept of pathos as a transient glow of feeling is a casualty of our contact with American culture. The first thing that struck me when working in the United States was the enthusiasm that everyone had for talking about their feelings in public. It was perfectly acceptable to tell everybody how sad or how hurt they were by a particular occasion, and they could talk the entire room into tears.

Alternatively, they'd explain how great they felt, and how marvellous everybody had been, and we'd all be jumping about in delight with each other. It was also perfectly acceptable, and even encouraged, to celebrate intense emotional moments with each other in a way that invariably left me feeling deeply embarrassed. I'm more accustomed to the idea that you have to just 'get on with it', because in the end, 'life goes on'. It's a realisation that puts transient feelings of pathos into a much broader context.⁴

Then, referring to the performer:

Had he played sadness, had he shed a tear or sung a sad song, the scene would have plummeted into sentimentality. Then feelings would have been indulged purely for their own sake, and the scene would have been more about him than about us. Like my colleagues in the United States, he would have been inviting us to share emotions together. For all its poignancy, pathos teaches us that everything passes.⁵

I am not in any way disputing the accuracy of Wright's analysis of this performance. But it allows us one of two possible conclusions: either Americans cannot play clown because they share their emotions, or that clown is understood differently in different countries.

Another example is the following exercise, "The Death by Poisoning Game", which includes this instruction:

The game is to die as credibly as you can whilst never losing your optimism. No matter how badly it hurts, and regardless of how close you might be towards death – it's still going to be all right.⁶

It's a good exercise, but almost impossible to make work in Spain.

Coming back to the safety issue, it seems to me that there is a contradiction within the British acceptance of contemporary clowning. In order to work with the self-revelatory nature of clown, safety measures are put into place to protect the participants from the supposed dangers of others seeing what you feel. This may work well, of course. Or it may make the whole exercise pointless, as the only environment where the clown dares to show itself will be these very artificially created safe houses.

But on the other hand, as Gaulier is very fond of saying, 'Clown was born in England'. The tradition is, supposedly, healthy, with direct ancestors in Grimaldi and Shakespearean clowns. Could it be that the British national clown type is being confused by a French type (Lecoq), which Britons are then struggling to learn, due to their own emotional immaturity? What would happen if clown workshops were to be inspired by the Grimaldi model? What kind of workshops would they be? Is the English clown actually the white face clown? If so, which nationality is the auguste? The authority on clown history, Tristan Rémy has several answers for us. He could be firstly American, English or German, as legend has it that the first clown called auguste was

Tom Belling, supposedly an American, but perhaps an Englishman, and performing in Berlin. Or Cuban, given that Chocolat was the first auguste star, in partnership with Footit. Or Spanish, given that according to Rémy, by 1945 most of the top augustes were of that nationality.⁷

If clown types can be identified with national types, then so much for universality, and we are back in the world of early *commedia dell'arte*, where each character is partly defined by his regional or national origin.

These thoughts may or not prove relevant to this investigation, but then we do not know that yet. But let us note them here, as they may lead forward to some more detailed enquiries. Or they may not. My main intention is to open up the discussion in areas of clowning that have not been discussed of late.

Perhaps I am only being contrary here for the sake of it, but of course that is the nature of clown! Rubbing the establishment up the wrong way is always going to be part of what I do, and more so when the job in hand is supposed to be crossing the frontiers of current knowledge. The actual practice of contrary behaviour by clowns will be looked at in the third term. This contrariness has been popping up regularly during the workshops, as I will discuss later, and has been one of the key tones of my approach this term.

Going back to the points discussed at the initial meeting, the last point is, I think, a very common situation. Many people have trained a lot in clown, but are unequipped for composing performances that work. Yet they feel compelled to make new work, yet lack a firm connection to clowning's past. Nor do they easily make the link between clowning and other forms of theatre. Mostly responsible for this situation I think is the orthodoxy in contemporary clowning that has come down to us over the last half century or so that states that the actor is the author. Lecoq was a prime instigator of this ideology. As Franc Chamberlain puts it, in his introduction to *Jacques Lecoq and the British Theatre*: "the emphasis which Lecoq places on ... the need for each individual to find something to say".⁸ Although he is not, of course, the only one when one considers the broader field of live performance: "the emphasis on the dancer having 'something to say' has been an important part of Pina Bausch's work with the Wuppertal Tanztheater since the 1970s".⁹

But if we consider the case of clowning, I can see nothing inherent in the nature of clown which would lead us necessarily to the idea of the *acteur-auteur*. I think it's time the *acteur-auteur* became an option rather than a dictate, thus leaving room for those (the majority, I think) who feel they are more actors than authors. Indeed, one could argue it has done more harm than good. Simon Murray quotes extensively from comments by former students of Lecoq:

I think the Lecoq set-up breeds the fallacy that everyone has the potential to be a 'writer'.

We worked for about 10 months on a show which brought to light all the problems of working in a Lecoq style. As a group we had a strong resistance to having a director. It was very democratic which I now think is extremely hard – impossible, if everyone has an equal say if nobody has a final veto, and no-one has enough vision to see globally where the whole thing is going.

If you put together three actors from Lecoq it does not mean that a good piece of writing is going to come out of it.¹⁰

My own hypothesis is that clown is in no way defined by the *acteur-auteur* ideology. It is not a necessary ingredient of working with clown to have '*quelque chose à dire*'.

The second point here is that Lecoq's work on clown positioned itself antagonistically in relation to clowning of the recent past (which in the 1960s was the clown of the decadent or nearly dead circus).

Simon Murray, in his introductory guide to Lecoq, has this view on Lecoq's work with clown:

Lecoq introduced the subject in the 1960s when he was considering the relationship between commedia dell'arte and circus clowns. Realising very rapidly the limitations of the genre of circus clowning for theatre, he began - unexpectedly almost - to investigate what lay at the core of this form of humour.¹¹

Murray doesn't elaborate on what those limitations are supposed to be, allowing himself thereby to sweep clown history neatly under the carpet while no one is looking, as in: "Like the circus clown, the pantomime mime has little to offer theatre."¹²

Incidentally, Lecoq's was not the only response to the decay of clowning in the 60s: "To preserve the rapidly dwindling profession, Irvin Feld founded Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College in 1968, providing the first formal training ground for clowns."¹³

Subsequent developments in New Circus in the 70s and 80s pushed clown further to the margins, to the extent where today, the dominant model is Cirque du Soleil, who do not refer to "clowns", but to "characters" instead, especially in the context of auditions for professionals. The American clown, Avner Eisenberg uses the word eccentric instead. Has clown become a dirty word?

Despite all this, Lecoq can be credited with attempting a rapprochement between the clown and the theatre. But that attempt is undermined by at the same time leaving students woefully unprepared to work in the very broad world of theatre. The lack that most commentators usually pick up on is that of ignoring, as Lecoq himself admitted, voice and text. John Wright sees the Lecoq school as:

a unique grounding for a theatre maker but as a pathway for an actor it is incomplete. A highly creative individual with an articulate and responsive body is only part of what is required in an actor. To produce a performer without an equally responsive voice and an imaginative response to language is like training a pianist to only use one hand... Many students still leave his school with poor vocal skills... All great voice teachers like Kristin Linklater and Frankie Armstrong, Cicely Berry or Patsy Rodenburg maintain that the body and the voice are inextricably linked; the observation has become a truism. I can understand the role of silence in renewing the importance of the gesture, but does speech always overshadow the gesture?... In using the mask to teach the making of theatre and in training the body at the expense of the voice Lecoq has deliberately created a dangerous imbalance in our theatre.¹⁴

Clown students therefore find themselves somewhat homeless: ignorant in theatre, estranged from clown history and marginalised in circus. I hope to be attending to some of these gaping holes over the course of this project.

After our initial meeting I came up with a general outline of what I thought we could achieve in the first term. The document follows:

Summary of work to be covered, Year 1, Term 1 (October-December 2007)

Failure:

- Accepting failure, the Flop. How to train in flop-acceptance. Old ideas/Exercises - Lecoq (there's no need to throw the baby out with the bath water!) and Gaulier. New Ideas/Exercises (Jon Davison, Escola de Clown de Barcelona, plus those yet to be discovered in our own investigations).
- Use for orthodox actors/actor training. Differences, conflicts, problems.
- Physical failure, and its acceptance, as a route to clown presence. Using dance, martial arts, circus and other physical activities to seek out and play with our frontiers of physical incapacity. (Draws on the new work begun in Barcelona by Sara Pons with Jon Davison).
- Intellectual/Verbal Failure. New methods in Clown Speech developed in Barcelona. Enjoying brain failure. Dyslexia.
- Some over-arching questions, conclusions, hypotheses, etc. Can we fail 100% of the time, or is some success necessary in order to be able to fail? When we flop, is this some kind of revelation of truth, beneath the veneer of our mask of pretence; or is it simply a theatrical technique or trick, just like in any other genre from melodrama to screen realism? If it is a performer's trick, can we expose it as such while using it on stage? In other words can our flopping flop, and still be good theatre? Can clowning offer a fast-track to attaining presence, as it is defined by failure-as-success, and escapes the trap that the serious actor has historically sometimes fallen into of having to pretend that what he is acting is "really real"? Clown may therefore offer the actor the opportunity to achieve presence via acceptance of the failure to be present.

Background Issues:

These are questions that will probably be present throughout the project.

- Can clown training be a complete actor training method?
- What is the relationship between clown training and actor training?
- Is clowning naturalistic or supernatural, or both?
- What are the limits and lacks of recent clown training? (The last 50 years, via Lecog and Gaulier, etc.)
- How is clown understood in different contexts? Culturally, nationally, etc.

As well as the workshop series, I organised, through my mentor, Amanda Brennan, a number of sessions on regular CSSD courses. These were:

B.A. Drama, Applied Theatre and Education (B.A. DATE)

M.A. Advanced Theatre Practice (M.A. ATP)

M.A. Actor Training and Coaching

M.A. Theatre Studies

On each course (except Theatre Studies) I offered a general practical introduction to clown, but clearly this needed to be couched in different terms for different learning contexts. In one session with DATE students the question remained open as to how clown can be applied. I hope to have the opportunity to look at this further at some point over the three years.

In two sessions with ATP students we were able to go beyond an introduction to clown actor training and look at some structural and formal issues. We centred these on Paul Bouissac's anthropological view that what clowns do is to profane, which he defines thus:

"a tentative and elementary morphology of profanation could include the following:

1. a particular object assigned to a certain place or position is moved to and placed in an inappropriate place or position.
2. an object that should be manipulated in a certain manner (or simply be seen) by a particular person or class of persons, is manipulated in this manner (or is seen) by an unqualified person, or is manipulated in an inappropriate manner.
3. a patterned behaviour that should be performed in the presence of an object or person is performed in the presence of an inappropriate object or person.
4. a patterned behaviour that is prescribed in a specific context is performed in another context or is not performed in the prescribed context.
5. a word or text to which a prescribed interpretation is attached, is interpreted in another manner or, still worse, the consequences of this new interpretation are actually implemented."¹⁵

I would simplify this to:

1. things are in the wrong place.
2. things are used by the wrong people or are used wrongly.
3. doing something for the wrong person.

4. doing something when you shouldn't, or not doing it when you should.
5. misunderstanding words, and maybe acting on the misunderstanding.

Students were able to very quickly produce interesting work based on these principles. In my own workshops I plan to look in detail at this in the third term of the first year. To some extent, this for me fills some of the holes in contemporary clown training. Although it does not question the concept of the actor-author, it does provide tools for devising that are more reliable than “finding one’s clown”, as it draws on a definition of clown that is external and practical rather than experiential and about presence. It was also clear that these clown tools can be modified beyond the reach of clown, to produce other genres of work. I gained some valuable insights into the potential for using this method and how it might bridge the gap between clown and other theatre genres, which we will be following up on later in the project.

For my input into Theatre Studies I was invited to talk about the history of clown in London, but I don't consider myself a specialist in this area. I have, however, been investigating for the last year or so the history of clown between Paris and London. At ECB I have led two seminars on the subject and this was a chance to give it a more expanded treatment. The result was a lecture plus slide show on a history of the clown-aesthetic rivalry between Paris and London during the 19th century, whose consequences were vital for the development of early circus clowning. Much of what we think we know about pre-contemporary clown is rooted in this relatively short history. I shall soon be writing a draft paper on the subject, with a view to submission to conferences in the coming year.

From before the start of the project it had been clear to me that the MA in Actor Training and Coaching would be my home base. After all, my investigation is primarily into actor training. I gave three 3-hour sessions on this course, the third of which was an attempt to approach how clown can combine with other training methods. I will continue to follow the progress of this course, in order to monitor how the knowledge of clown training may influence the reception and study of other training methods. It was clear, for example, that a kind of Clown-Meisner hybrid would be eminently possible. This fed back into my own workshops, in a way that I expect to continue in the future. We also achieved very interesting results with the “step-laugh” exercise with texts (see the discussion below on this exercise).

Our discussions on the relationship between clown and other methods touched on many key points. Contemporary clowning has often sought to ally itself with those practices and ideologies that claim to produce authenticity in performance or behaviour.

Clowning bridges the mundane and the magical with a sense of wonder and innocence. It teaches you to be authentic.¹⁶

It is our belief that by focusing on the individual we are, in fact, going straight to the heart of clowning which is the search for authenticity both in the social or personal dimensions of our lives.¹⁷

By focusing on the individual's experience, we prioritise authenticity in the learning process above the acquisition of external skills. We believe the expression of this inner authenticity is the ground for learning clowning.¹⁸

Clowning is about the freedom that comes from a state of total, unconditional acceptance of our most authentic selves, warts and all.¹⁹

Although I myself have experienced this sensation of wholeness as a performer that clown can give, particularly in my early training, I feel that clown is ultimately just another method, another set of tricks, or truth-effects, that we can learn, just like any other actor training method. The sensation that in clowning we see something authentic, or the real person, comes when we work with the acceptance of failure, I think. The effect of seeing someone accept their own mistakes is that we feel we have witnessed the truth behind the façade, the façade being the front that the person is displaying yet is unable to convince us of. The feeling is mutual, in that the performer himself also has this sensation that he is revealing something truthful about himself. But I suggest it would be more accurate to say that these two states, which we could call the attempt to convince and the failure to convince, are simply two sides of a binary game that we can play.

Erving Goffman, in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, takes a similar view. I shall be writing a fuller account of the implications of Goffman's work for clowning at a later stage. In his description of human behaviour as defined by the playing of roles, which includes the possibility of the discrediting of those roles, he explicitly warns against accepting that the behaviour that discredits our social mask (which we could align with the behaviour that appears in clowning, or the failure to convince the audience) being judged as somehow more authentic:

While we could retain the common-sense notion that fostered appearances can be discredited by a discrepant reality, there is often no reason for claiming that the facts discrepant with the fostered impression are any more the real reality than is the fostered reality they embarrass. A cynical view of everyday performances can be as one-sided as the one that is sponsored by the performer. For many sociological issues it may not even necessary to decide which is the more real, the fostered impression or the one the performer attempts to prevent the audience from receiving. The crucial sociological consideration, for this report at least, is merely that impressions fostered in everyday performances are subject to disruption. We ~will want to know what kind of impression of reality can shatter the fostered impression of reality, and what reality really is can be left to other students. We will want to ask, 'What are the ways in which a given impression can be discredited?' and this is not quite the same as asking, 'What are the ways in which the given impression is false?'²⁰

However, society does attach a moral tag to one these impressions:

Society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in an appropriate way. Connected with this principle is a second, namely that an individual who implicitly or explicitly signifies he has certain social characteristics ought in fact to be what he claims he is.²¹

This is what leads us to the situation where, in order to oppose what they perceive as an authoritarian imposition of normality by society, contemporary clowns take sides and claim that the truth is to be found in the mistake. What they have done however, is simply to reverse the two poles. Good becomes bad and bad becomes good. This kind of May '68 ideology doesn't take us anywhere nearer the truth. David MacMurray Smith, in Alan Clay's *Angels Can Fly*, talks of:

the ability of the Clown to take delight in playing with the dynamics of the psychological argument between the image we held of ourselves and the present, real, self in the moment. I like to call this Clown Consciousness... I think that the skilled Clown can walk the tightrope between Image and Reality with impunity. They consciously play with the confusion between the two for the value to be gained by becoming aware of the trap that our own images of ourselves can become, if we mistake them for our real self.²²

I think he identifies accurately what clowns do with these two modes of behaviour, but his moral judgement on which is more real leads us back into that old trap of seeking a performance method that will transcend all the others, by getting to the truth more accurately. This kind of belief often presupposes that the methods of the previous generation were somehow all along more false, as if either they didn't really care about truth, or they were not clever enough to see that what they were doing was false, but that we do see that now because we're having greater insights.

Take this assessment of Copeau for example:

By 'purifying' French theatre of its tricks and by shedding it of cabotinage - the phoney gimmicks of nineteenth-century performance - Copeau believed he was preparing theatre for a return to its imagined past."²³

As Murray correctly points out, "Copeau remained one of Lecoq's main 'reference points'.²⁴

Ironically, what has struck many uninitiated observers of Lecoq-inspired work has been its technical nature. Michael Billington, on *Theatre de Complicité*, worried "whether the moral content of theatre is being subordinated to a display of technique ... it was sometimes a feeling that technique was actually overlaying content."²⁵

My own view is that I cannot see any such scientific evolutionary progression in actor training, though new methods certainly do represent major shifts in aesthetic ideology. The discrediting of circus clowns by the Lecoq generation represents no advance in technique, just as naturalism's discrediting of melodrama did not either. Or New

Circus's discrediting of traditional circus, or even of clowning. I have heard many New Circus performers say that clown has no place in the circus any more, since "most clowns are not funny". As if there weren't hundreds of dull trapeze acts around these days!

John Wright, and he is by no means alone, is concerned over the rise of a new orthodoxy, that the Lecoq school might be

in danger of creating a culture of correctness ... This is most evident in working with students straight from the school who suddenly find themselves confronted with different processes and new applications of similar ideas; I have been told: 'you can't a mask like that' or 'that's not clowning'. This is not a criticism of Lecoq so much as a fear that like Stanislavski, Lecoq is in danger of falling victim to his own disciples.²⁶

When Lecoq said he was taking the clowns from the circus, he only took one. He could have taken two, or indeed three (ringmaster, white-face and auguste). Wright traces this back to Copeau again:

The final and most important mask in Lecoq's training is the red nose of the clown. Copeau was instinctively drawn to the Fratellini Brothers (a troupe of circus clowns) and invited them to his school, only in the end to feel dissatisfied with the set nature of their routines.²⁷

It is undoubtedly true that by means of the sabotaging of the social roles, clowning can have a truth-effect, like the shock of falling to the ground. But I think it's more useful to maintain the relationship between the two sides as equal and opposite. 19th century clowning knew this much better than we do today. That "image" and "reality" were incarnated two separate and different clowns: the white-face and the auguste. So where has the white-face disappeared to? It seems we only deal with the auguste today. Is late 20th century humanity really so innocent?

Here is Murray on the student interest in clown: "(Lecoq) ascribes this interest as being deeply rooted in a quest for liberation from the 'social masks' we all wear... .. for Lecoq and Gaulier it has at its heart a subversive and radical dimension which chimed with the spirit of 1968"²⁸

The auguste was the anarchist, the white clown was the state. Today, for example, Angela de Castro offers this workshop:

Challenging Authority

1-day workshop for teenagers (14+)

Shakespeare's fools challenge authority – kings and queens, lords and ladies, people in charge – fools are subversive. They turn the accepted order on its head. They speak the truth. Led by the company, this workshop will enable teenagers (GCSE and A Level) to explore how and why fools challenge authority figures. Making links with both the darkness and the humour in only fools, no horses, this workshop will

help participants learn more about clowns and fools and how, throughout history and still today, they have such an essential role to play in theatre and the world. The workshop is about what truth-telling, play, courage and simplicity have to say to young people today.²⁹

The clearest exponent of authority-challenging clowning is the Rebel Clown Army. They have taken the clown into the political arena, with great attention to rigorous detail philosophically and practically. I refer to the founders here, not to the many groups which have sprung up either without a good foundation in clowning or without a full understanding of the non-confrontational nature of this work. At ECB we have hosted courses by Hilary Ramsden, one of those founders. On the last course, the practical street work ended up with the participants under arrest, “fined 1,000€ per red nose ‘for behaviour contrary to public dignity’”³⁰. Jordi Jané, the well-known journalist and historian of circus and clown, though disproportionately comparing the situation to Franco’s regime, does legitimately point out the hypocrisy of the authorities:

Exactly a year ago I was present at the Mayor’s speech when he praised circus as an artistic expression with roots in secular and noble human values. Such paradox disconcerts me.³¹

Anyone who knows the cultural climate in Barcelona would not be surprised at this. The city that practically prohibits street performance often tries to sell itself as liberal, cosmopolitan and international, but of course is as ever, provincial, nationalistic and philistine. After all, it is the capital of Catalonia! The offending behaviour, by the way, consisted in “guarding” a police vehicle.

There are grades of opinion here for all tastes. The participants created a blog on the events and reactions.³² Most of those opinions are of disbelief at the police reaction. Strong support was offered by the Catalan Circus Association, as well as by all political parties who are not presently in power either locally, regionally or nationally, not surprisingly, given the imminence of elections. On the other hand, some street performers feel that this work makes their own job more difficult by creating an expectation in the police that street clowns are going to provoke them, therefore they move them on, politically motivated or not.

The ECB view is that in street clowning, one must learn to play with the public. That means gauging how much someone is willing to play, and if they are not, well, you don’t play either. These are simple rules that often take experience to get right, however, and each performer will also decide if they want to err on the side of provocation, or on the side of safety. My own view is that although it is true that clown allows for a liberation from the codes of conduct, this does not imply some kind of absolute freedom in the sense that ‘I can do whatever I like, whatever the reaction or consequences’. For me, the freedom of clowning consists more in knowing that I can choose freely any line of action, and not be subject to expected modes of behaviour. But that I cannot control the reaction of others. In other words, I can decide to perform naked in the street if I want to, but I cannot decide what shall be the public’s

reaction, hostile or in good humour. Clowns can have cake, but they don't usually eat it.

More than that, I think that the police, in their role as white face to the auguste, form an essential part of the clown's world. Without rules, clowns would have not much reason for existing.

The beautiful dialogue between the white face and the auguste does not set at each others throats the superior and the inferior, the executioner and the victim, the exploiter and the exploited. The two partners are at the same level. They are two equal forces, two principles one as positive as the other. The white face is no more superior to the auguste than thought is to action, or serenity to emotion.³³

I am looking forward to having in my hands the exact wording of what the police formally accuse the clowns of, as I believe that would be a very accurate definition of clowning. Who better to ask, apart from a clown, what clowns are, than the forces of law and order? The nature of authority defines the auguste clown. Curiously, the ECB is situated in a building that was last used as a police archive!

The white clown's contemporary absence has left the auguste alone and inexplicable without his partner. Perhaps another era would have preferred to adopt the white face, an era that needing to identify itself with the controlling urge, the desire for power and the knowledge that allows one to fool the gullible. Richard Findlater, in his biography of Joe Grimaldi, quoting D. L. Murray, suggests that Regency England might have been such an age:

his whole conception of the Clown reflects that period of genteel blackguardism, pugilism and practical jokes. The 'grimacing, filching, irresistible Clown', his white face larded with red like a schoolboy's that has been dipped in a surreptitious jam-pot, is a plebeian successor of the mohocks, a companion of Jerry Hawthorn and Corinthian Tom, whose recreations are breaking windows, tripping up old women and assaulting the constables.³⁴

Although Grimaldi's clown is not identical to the late-19th century white-face clown, it is one of its key ancestors. In any case, it is clear that different cultural moments want different clowns.

Authoritarian, cruel, hierarchical, cerebral. Not qualities that the flower power generation wanted to promote. The auguste represented freedom, authenticity, the underdog, emotion. Of course that's all well and good. But let us not mistake what was a politically and socio-culturally specific choice in a particular place and time for a universal definition of clown. I think clowning is now suffering from this choice, although the panorama is not altogether homogeneous. In Canada and the USA, there is work being done on the white face, inspired by the pioneering work of Richard Pochinko. At The Institute of Canadian Clowning, in the "Joey and Auguste Workshop", one may

explore the sides of your clown - the manipulator, the victim and the intermediary. This workshop is done working in partnership with another performer. Writing, relationship and performing are explored. It completes with a student workshop performance.³⁵

But in Europe the *auguste* rules. No one wants to be the baddie. I have not come across any course advertising itself as helping you to discover your inner cruelty, that side of you that wants to make everyone else look foolish and you clever. Maybe its time will come.

Instead of the white face, the negative side of clowning has been taken up by the *bouffon*. The *bouffon* is indeed a kind of dark or negative clown, but still one that suited the leftist agenda of May 68, aiming its negativity outwards at those in society who are foolish enough to imagine they are not themselves foolish. This neatly deflects any looking at one's own negativity, whilst allowing a playground in which one can delight in dark humour. And since *bouffons* and clowns don't easily mix, I think we are missing out on the cruel side of clown.

There is one place that the white face does appear in contemporary European clowning, however, and that is in the role of the clown teacher, especially the one who follows the *via negativa*, in the tradition of Lecoq and Gaulier. I include myself in this lineage and enjoy very much the role, which the harder you play it, the easier it becomes for the student to take on the *auguste* role.

John Wright, although he excludes himself from those teachers who use the *via negativa*, nevertheless says:

When I teach clown, I become a provocateur. In other words, I assume a role, a sort of 'boss-clown', and my job is to help you keep the games alive and funny ... Being the boss-clown enables me to be completely unreasonable. I can be as rude, cantankerous, illogical, tyrannical and as stupid as I like.³⁶

Wright does, in fact, teach the boss-clown to his students, though my impression is that it is still very much subservient to the *auguste-as-clown* ethos.

I think this fact, that the white face only shows himself in the role of teacher, may indicate just how much clowning has defined itself in terms of the classroom, rather than in terms of rehearsal or of performance. Were it otherwise, then the white face would appear in the rehearsal room, the most obvious incarnation being the director. But, as we have seen, the Lecoq way has led to the director queuing up to cash his dole cheque. And, as already discussed, the whiteface rarely dares to tread the stage.

Lecoq's other major manoeuvre, having extracted the *auguste* from the grip of the past, was to choose the red nose as the only visual element to remain. He could have chosen big feet, or red hair, or baggy costumes. But this wouldn't have slotted into his theatre-as-mask agenda. By using the red nose he neatly seemed to prove that clown is mask.

We see 'Le Flop' in the actor's eyes and the little mask of the nose directs our attention to them. We want to look behind the nose to see who it is that looks so stupid and we find ourselves looking into the actor's eyes. The red nose becomes 'a tiny neutral mask for the clown.'³⁷

However, I see no inherent connection between clown and mask. It is not necessary to use the red nose in order to clown. Using a red nose can be useful at times, though not for everyone. But clown can be reached without it. So the red nose is not identical to clown.

The other abhorrent spin off with this clown-as-mask obsession is that we see many performers taking the stage with a plastic nose on an elastic, as a kind of add-on to the rest of the design of their costume, if they use any. Personally, I love red noses for performing in, I like the way they animalise and focus the expressive parts of the face (eyes and mouth), but I also like that same effect produced by make up. (I like low key intimate clowning as well, but my taste is for the medium sized spaces, e.g. the old circus 13 yard diameter ring.)

This belief in clown-as-red-nose has also led many to the belief in the universality of the red nose, whereas it is culturally specific to Europe and white America. In Spain, the organisation *Payasos sin Fronteras (Clowns without Borders)* has in recent years had a great influence on people's perceptions of what clowns are, what they look like, what they do, and for what reason. At the ECB, we even have people wanting to learn clown, 'so they can go on a PSF expedition'. The clown as jet-setting charity worker is a sad place to end up. Using clown in situations of conflict, or post disaster is perfectly legitimate. But exporting European/American clowns to poor countries to cheer them up is frankly bizarre. I asked Moshe Cohen, an important figure in the organization, why they don't get the local clowns to do the job. He replied that the local clowns would only do it for money. Well, obviously! So the rich clowns go and do the job for free! Why not raise the money they would use on flying out there and send it to the local clowns to go to the hospital and perform for the dying child? Because the rich clown wouldn't feel so good. Exporting red noses to Mozambique is not a task I think anyone should be wasting their time on. At ECB we have started the work of looking for clowns from the third world, in order to bring them to Europe to share their knowledge with us, in a relationship based on mutual professional respect.

My point here is not that Lecoq was wrong – to use the red nose, to encourage devising, to focus on the *auguste*, as all these moves were appropriate and good for the time and place – but that they may not be so useful for us now, in another moment in history. Decisions are made and directions undertaken due to specific cultural and political conditions of the time. By seeing this, we can avoid simply copying the whole picture. We are not obliged to follow all the ideas, and we can see that they are not unavoidably essential to clown work. This will free us to undertake clown work that is relevant to our own times. The equation clown=*auguste*=red-nose=mask may have served the 60s well but it does not necessarily have any use to us now in the 21st century.

I have located the birth of these ideas in the 60s, but we could in fact locate them some 50 years earlier. Mark Evans' study of Copeau states that the "central features of his teaching practice" are "improvisation, mime, animal/nature studies, the development and use of mask work".³⁸ These roughly coincide with those areas I am proposing we question as no longer necessarily relevant: devising, body as more important than text, the truth is to be found in our non-social selves, and red-nose as mask.

But how can we be talking about either the 1960s or the 1910s, as if they were interchangeable? An answer may be the following. When the curtain came down on the old regime of acting styles, which had remained continuous despite evolving since Shakespeare's time, around the 1860s and 70s, and the fourth wall was being built, clown was still about to enter its golden age in European circus. (For a full discussion of the history of acting styles, see: Nicholas Dromgoole (2007) *Performance Style and Gesture in Western Theatre*, London: Oberon. For an account of the rise of Naturalism, see Simon Shepherd and Peter Womack (1996), *English Drama, a Social History*, Oxford: Blackwell.) Clowns were migrating from theatre to circus for a number of complex reasons, which I shall discuss at a later date. That migration kept them free of the naturalising epidemic, as were all those forms of popular theatre that remained at those venues that were not remodelled along the tastes of the new middle class theatre-goers. But the circus remained the circus, whereas the variety, vaudeville and music hall gave themselves over to the cinema, which, after a brief Indian summer of preserving the popular acting styles inherited from melodrama and comedy, succumbed to the dulling down of Naturalism, which turned down of the volume, contrast and, if it hadn't been in black and white, the colour as well I am sure.

Clown could therefore be seen arguably as the only form of theatre that did not naturalise itself to remain. A lucky escape! Now, generally speaking, the actor-training movements of the 20th century were part of that naturalising process or else a response to it. So we can trace much of Lecoq's work back to Copeau, for example. But clown, remaining outside the theatre, remained free of that process at Copeau's time. But by the time we get to Lecoq, clown has all but died in the circus which is on its last legs. Only at that point does it re-enter the family of theatre. And it is at that point that the naturalisation clown begins.

I think we could say that Lecoq's treatment of clowning is to clown what The Method was to drama.

The Method, designed initially to solve what we might call a rhetorical problem – how to produce repeated truth-effects on a stage – comes, in a culture also inhabited by psychoanalysis, to be a method for liberating the truths of the person.³⁹

That sounds suspiciously like that liberating force which is clown in May 68.

This new naturalism in clown wasn't isolated to Lecoq and those that collaborated with him or learned with him, however. Another movement in the same direction was being made around the same time, but for seemingly quite different reasons. In the Soviet Union, the clown Oleg Popov had few good words for the clowns of the past, as here in the chapter 'What is a clown?' of his autobiography, *Russian Clown*:

it must be said that in those days comedy in the circus was not an art as we understand that word today.⁴⁰

For Popov, the new art-clown excluded the old grotesque clown:

At first sight the buffooneries of the clown do not seem to contribute anything at all to the presentation of human qualities, qualities which, if anything, they are more inclined to mock.⁴¹

On the other hand, the new Soviet clown

looked for new, less extravagant means of expression ... The spirit of clownery joined more and more harmoniously with that of the other acts which were trying to create a realistic appearance.⁴²

Popov maintains that this evolution towards the new clown has been constant since the revolution:

So that the reader who does not know Soviet circus history can appreciate the importance and logic towards realism (after the revolution) I would like to say a few words about the best clowns of the last thirty years⁴³

In 1945 Vyatkin went back to work in the circus. But he was no longer the traditional red-haired zany. We saw a man without a wig, wearing a green hat and a quite ordinary suit.⁴⁴

(on the clown, Shliskevich)The spectator does not laugh, he smiles warmly, the smile of one acquiring an insight into someone⁴⁵

When Sereda appears in the ring, the children generally ask: 'But where is the clown?' They can't believe that this artiste, dressed without make-up, dressed in an ordinary suit, is actually the clown who is trying to make the public laugh ... They are, of course, not seeing a conventional clown, but a man like other men, undistinguishable from themselves.⁴⁶

The ancient art of clowning, with its methods and its rules for constructing the entrée and with the working method of the red-haired comic, is dead, above all because the spectator wants to see a real, natural man. The appearance in the ring of degenerates, paralytics, rheumatics, idiots, madmen and maniacs (and it is precisely this which is the basis of the burlesque red-haired comic) does not rouse the interest of spectators⁴⁷

Popov's rewriting of Soviet clown history in order to prove the inevitability of socialist realism is not altogether convincing. For whilst it is true that Stalin in the 1930s had previously already hijacked the circus to the socialist realism cause, the clowns, such as Lazarenko, generally portrayed the baddies, as in *Makhno's Men*, a 1929 circus pantomime vilifying the Ukrainian anarchists. Joel Schechter, historian of popular theatre, analyses thus:

The fact that Lazarenko ceased to leap over three elephants, and began to leap over three automobiles placed side by side ... suggests he was quite capable of acknowledging Soviet industry and its infatuation with machines after the revolution. But his leaps over automobiles hardly embodied the brawny, Stakhanite ideal; that would have required construction of cars at record speed, not a jump over them. In any case, he was hired to portray a villain in *Makhno's Men*, not a pleasing or socially productive character.⁴⁸

Clowns only seem to join the goodies a little later on, along with the move towards realism. But who was it who wanted to see this real, natural man? The 1959 First National Conference on Clown Craft, known popularly as the Congress of Clowns, suggests the answer:

That year an assembly of circus clowns, critics and government officials had been convened by Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev, after he found the circus lacking in satire.⁴⁹

At the 1959 conference, convened by Krushchev to consider the low level of comedy at the circus, clown acts were discussed and performed by a small, private audience which included Nikulin, Oleg Popov ... and circus historian Yuri Dimitriev.⁵⁰

Dimitriev accused contemporary clowns of comparing poorly to earlier clowns, such as Durov:

'what you do now,' Dimitriev told Nikulin and company, 'is trivial by comparison.'

Nikulin asked: 'Why do you offer us the example of Durov? We cannot perform now as was done in Czarist times.'

The speaker asked him why not, and Nikulin replied: 'Who will be the subject of our parody? The government is marvellous.'⁵¹

The result of the congress, coming only three years after the revelation of Stalin's crimes by Krushchev, is that "clowns mocked low-level bureaucracy, as well as idlers and incompetent doctors, with state approval."⁵² In other words, although clowns were given back some of their historical rights to parody, their targets were strictly limited by the Party. This choice of content fits neatly alongside Popov's stylistic overthrowing of the grotesque.

But was the result a raising of clowning to the level of art, as Popov pretended? In the preface to Tristan Rémy's *Les Clowns*, Bernard de Fallois judges against:

At the occasion of one of the first shows in Paris by the Moscow Circus, the clown Popov explained in a press conference that clown comedy in the West expressed the class war. The white clown was capitalism and the auguste the proletariat. For him, the Soviet circus had put an end to this unpleasing opposition, such that laughter no longer came from malice and oppression. Now, it is true that Popov's number, in the great tradition of Russian *augustes de soirées* – talking, whistling, joke telling clowns –, was without malice. He was even of a great kindness. But neither did he make us laugh. He had replaced the laugh with poetry. The clash, the emotion of the art of clown were absent. What Popov had not seen was that the duo of the white face and the auguste had never had the sense which he was ascribing to it.⁵³

Popov not only reflects Lecoq, but is as damning as Copeau on the Fratellini:

Let us move on to the Fratellini. Wonderful artistes, they perform in the age-old manner of buffoons, a thick layer of make-up on their faces. They are perfect connoisseurs of human nature, sharp and intelligent. But they do not try to reflect anything in their performance except such faults as stupidity, clumsiness, absent-mindedness. As a result it is hardly surprising if the most common outcome of their conflicts is a slap in the face. And the spectator hears a positive deluge of slaps. Certainly I understand that the Fratellini are the guardians of an old circus tradition, a tradition respected down the centuries. But the times demand that this tradition should be broken and it is this that accounts for the appearance of the realistic clown, like, for example, the French artiste, Achille Zavatta.

This artiste, whose work I love, has created a human character who is ceaselessly wrestling against the ups and downs of life, continually falling but each time getting up to continue the struggle.⁵⁴

I have hypothesised that clowning, due to being somewhat isolated in the circus, only began to catch up with mainstream 20th century theatre practices some half century later. Perhaps we must leap another 50 years forward in order to find another element of the integration of clowning into the establishment, into that of performing training. According to Mark Evans, Copeau's concepts, including clowning, are now entrenched in the actor's training:

Talk to any student actor at an established drama school and they will tell you about the animal studies they have been doing, the neutral mask work which underpins their movement work, the group and ensemble exercises they do, and perhaps the classes they have had on commedia dell'arte or clowning. These exercises are the backbone of contemporary actor training, deeply informing much of the student actor's development, shaping and building their psycho-physical technique ... Copeau's ideas have become part of the international language of occidental actor training.⁵⁵

And for confirmation of the contemporaneity of clown naturalism, see this blurb for a course by Jos Houben in 2006, reminiscent of Popov's praise of Achille Zavatta:

Every day we get up, we eat, we get dressed, work, go to bed, sleep...so many banal and obvious activities that we repeat day after day and that makes our lives. This daily routine is so private, so close to us that we no longer see it... In this workshop we take some distance, we observe it as if for the first time. By replaying our daily life we will perhaps be able to discover a hidden side, a poetic depth that might nourish our clown universe... To extract, from daily gestures and situations, rituals, music, grand themes such as Solitude, Love, Death... Going from the table to the door: a Melodrama; slicing an apple: a Tragedy; taking off your shoes: Spiritual Ecstasy! To render that which is simple and banal into something surprising and sublime, what a beautiful mission for a Clown!⁵⁶

So, think about it for a moment: could we ditch a whole century of actor training? Are we prepared to forget all we have learned from Copeau or Lecoq or Stanislavsky or Grotowski? Could we stop worrying about searching for the meaning, the truth, the message? I could, if it were beneficial. Of course, we cannot go back. But maybe we can clean out some of the layers of 20th century art theatre and see if it's of any use to us now. I think clown is in a good position to try this.

Indeed, to put my money where my mouth is, at the ECB we are attempting just that. No animal studies, no masks, no ensemble work. No emotional memory, no super-objectives, no as-in-real-life. These are things we have found to be of no use in training students today.

Only then can we ask: what is clown in the 21st century? That is a very big question indeed, and I hope to shed some light on it over the coming three years. And the cleaner the slate we begin with, the better.

Part 2: The Workshops

I have grouped information under six headings. The last five are the forms or principal exercises that emerged as allowing for more development and might prove to generate more complex performances that can be performed to audiences. The first part brings together the rest of the work done in this first term, in the workshops in London and Barcelona, as well as in sessions given as part of regular courses at Central. The account is therefore not chronological but thematic.

Briefly, a word on the relationship between the workshops in London and Barcelona: by the time the London sessions were completed, it was becoming clear to me that I would be modifying my original plan somewhat with regard to the Barcelona sessions. Indeed, I had already shifted my aims a little in London. I felt the need to move on

from issues of pure presence, as planned, and into areas of form and structure, which I had thought to begin in the second year. This separation proved too much to maintain 100%. It became useful to consider how to structure some of the exercises, in order to develop their potential further, and also to be able to present them to an uninitiated audience.

And then it seemed more useful for us to pick up the baton in Barcelona at the point where we left it in London. Although in London we were exploring new terrain, our starting point (the acceptance of failure) is one that is quite familiar to those with clown training. This allowed us to work in more detail in Barcelona, and to move on to finding possible structures to enable performance and presentation.

For Barcelona I had already chosen four exercises from the London workshops, and would add a new one based on the work of Sara Pons, who works with clown and dance. We spent one workshop on each of the forms, approximately, plus two more where we revised and practised our discoveries.

And although it was not planned to present work until next September, I wanted to leave open the possibility of beginning this process in February/March and have begun to look at organising venues to show short pieces of work. (Possibly Chat's Palace in Homerton, and at the ECB in Barcelona.)

i. Playing and Failing

Playing Games

First of all, some kids' playground games. When I can't remember a game from my own childhood, my favourite source is Iona and Peter Opie's *Children's Games in Street and Playground*⁵⁷. It is a vast survey of children's games as described by children, without any moralising filter or judgements on the usefulness of games. It is therefore more valuable than most books on games as applied to theatre, which often contain additional rules which seem to be there for reasons other than enabling play (I will discuss this below).

Ball Tag

So, where do we start? When no one knows each other, or they do but don't know what the hell they're going to be asked to do – the simplest of games: there's one ball and whoever has it throws it at someone else and if that person gets hit by the ball on or below the knees, they're out. Of course, the ball, after hitting or missing someone, gets picked up by another player who gets the chance to chuck it at someone else. The last person left wins the game.

After playing it a few times, you can up the difficulty by banning running, then a bit more by making everyone walk in slow motion, then that you can only move a step at a time, and that step you can only take when the director of the game claps, which

could be in a steady and predictable rhythm, slow or fast, or unpredictable and confusing.

Coming back to our game, at the end we can play it at a standstill. Meaning you can only move from the spot in order to go and fetch the ball if it's gone out of reach, then you stay where you are when you've picked up the ball. And everyone else stops moving when someone's got hold of it. On top of all these variations, let's then add the voice. Two possibilities: either continuous voice, or voice only when you receive or evade the ball. When I say 'voice' I mean just that: open the mouth and make vocal sound. Not words, just sound. Use vowels, not consonants (see below).

This game demands, and gets, total engagement. That's because there's no other way to play it. You have to be quick in reacting. Your decisions and actions become one, not deciding first then acting. That's the meaning of engagement. Thought and action happen at the same time. It's living in the present, because there's no time to think about the future. If you did, you'd lose the game. This game is so simple. Its only element is 'react!' It's a fight or flight situation. The whole body, mind, heart and spirit are on alert. Of course, it's also lots of fun!

Four Chairs

Four chairs are placed to mark the four corners of a square. One person sits on each chair. A fifth person stands in the middle. If you are sitting, you have to change chairs with someone, and if you are standing, you have to find a chair that is momentarily unoccupied and sit down. After a few rounds, we again add voice, and again we use only vowels.

Why vowels? All human speech, in any language, consists of two basic groups of sounds: vowels and consonants. Vowels are made by putting the tongue in a particular shape in a particular position in the mouth, but without touching any other part of the mouth. The air flows through the vocal chords whose vibrations produce sound, which is in turn modified by the tongue-mouth shape to produce a particular vowel sound: 'aaa' or 'eee' or 'iii' or combined sound: 'aaaiii'. So, when we produce vowels, our mouths are open. On the other had, when we produce consonants, our mouths are closed, if only for a moment or partially. A closure followed by a release of the two lips produces 'p'. The same contact between the back of the tongue and the roof of the mouth gives us 'k'. A near closing between the tip of the tongue and just above the upper teeth, 's', and so on. So when we use vowel sounds in movement, in the instinctive play of this game, or any other, it actually opens us, our bodies are less blocked, more willing to respond in the movement, not so self-conscious, not so 'knowing'. If you think of a bunch of 4-year-olds running around playing and screaming, what they're screaming are vowels – "aaaaiiiiiiioooooeeiiiuuuaaii!!!!!!" – not consonants – "ppppcccttbbbbbrrrrzmmmp!!!!!!". Of course, to use our voices to their fullest ability, it's the combination or play of vowels and consonants that we need. But to begin with, better to encourage the open at the expense of the closed. Vowels are more fun.

Barley Break

This is a game for six players, in three couples, each couple holding hands. Two of the pairs stand at each end of the space, and must exchange partners between themselves. The third couple stands in the middle and tries to prevent this happening. The couple in the middle must stay linked, otherwise their interception is not valid. And the exchanging couples are safe once they have linked with a new partner. (For a fuller explanation and contextualisation of this game in the wider context of catching games, and its Tudor origins and appearance in Shakespeare, see Opie.)⁵⁸

Two tactics suggest themselves immediately. You can hang on to your old partner for as long as possible and at the last minute let go and link up with your new partner. This keeps you safe until the moment of change, but restricts your movements as you are physically linked to someone else. Or you can abandon your old partner and risk being caught, but having more mobility have more of a chance of outwitting the interceptors. The safe strategy tends to be boring to watch, and the risky one is exciting to see. Not surprising really.

Name tag

This is a game that could be termed “intelligent”. Philippe Gaulier makes good use of this one in order to create confusion and failure. You have to think and decide and sometimes speak, strictly within the rules, but like in *Ball Tag* there’s no time to plan ahead. Everything is in the moment, or else you lose. One person is on it, they tag someone by touching them, that person has to say the name of another person, not the person they’ve been tagged by, who then touches another person, who says a name, who tags someone, etc. The catch is that you aren’t allowed to wait till after you’re tagged before saying a name. You’ve got to speak the moment you’re tagged, or just before. Any mistakes or delays and you’re out. When two people are left the game’s over.

My favourite tactic is to hang around really close behind someone, waiting till you hear your name and immediately tag the person you’ve been following, not giving them time to think.

Wanting success and accepting failure

This spontaneous intelligence game leads to all sorts of foolish mistakes, such as tagging when you should speak, saying the name of someone who’s already out, or even of someone who isn’t even playing, like your sister or somebody, or the most foolish of all, saying your own name. When you can actually accept and enjoy your own inept foolishness you really start to have fun with this game. Enjoying your own failure in public whilst still trying to succeed is an important fundamental element of clown.

We all like to succeed. At a simple level it defines what drives us forward. It’s our desire to arrive at our perceived objective. When we do not reach the point we are

aiming at, we fail. The experience of that failure is variable, and generally the more public the failure, the more we feel it. Depending on the individual and the context we may feel embarrassed, ashamed, angry, sad, afraid or ridiculous. We then have a choice: we can welcome those feelings or we can try to hide them. The following exercise is designed to practice this acceptance of failure:

Ball Helpers

The game is normal throw and catch, with everyone standing in a circle. As well as the catcher, there's a helper. The helper is one of either of the two players beside the catcher. The helper must make contact with player and/or ball at the same time as the catcher catches it. As there can only be one helper, and the decision to help must be made in the moment, there is great scope for error. Both may react at the same time, in which case one must then retreat. Or perhaps both decide to retreat, then one (who?) must return. Or neither reacts. Mistakes in this exercise are very frequent, which is the point of it, of course.

Having had some practice at failing frequently in public, we then tried to play the game while trying to hide the mistakes. Initially it proved impossible. We then tried to eliminate the mistakes by delaying the response, waiting until you have read the situation fully before moving. We then tried eliminating the mistakes by getting eye contact with the receiver before throwing. In both cases this involves controlling the impulse.

Compare to the original version, with plenty of mistakes, these cleaned-up versions appeared tedious, like watching automatons perform tasks that have little value. This is not surprising, when the aim is not to slip up, not to reveal anything. Who wants to go to the theatre to see actors revealing nothing? Well, not me anyway.

So, what does welcoming and accepting one's failure consist of? This is our main question during the first block of workshops. It is not a question of denying our negative reaction, but of adding a positive reaction as well, on another level. The most common positive reaction to one's own failure is to laugh. Not only that, but we find that if we laugh at our own failure, generally others will laugh too.

So, in all these games so far, you try to win, but if you fail, accept it. The other side of this coin is that you must first have the desire to succeed, to win. Otherwise, not getting to your objective would be no failure. The clown always sets out to do things well. This may be the clowning equivalent of having an objective in other systems of theatre training. The clown applies all his intelligence to the task, physically and intellectually. Don't try to be stupid, or to fail deliberately. That would be crazy. Clowns aren't crazy. They're normal. Try and be clever. Then, when you fail, and you inevitably will, you'll feel and be stupid.

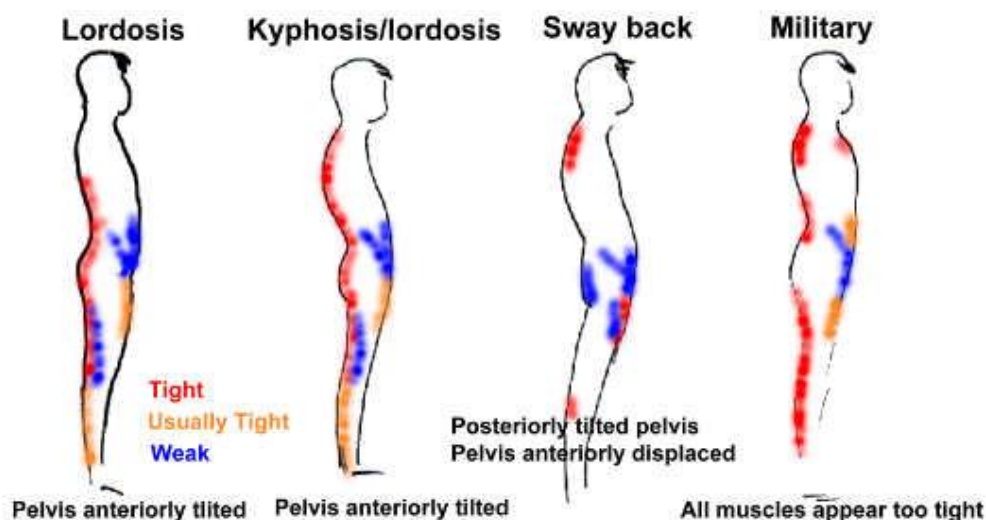
Observations of the failing body

We then attempted to describe, from the outside, what happens to the body in failure. Observing our own and others' bodies for a time, we compared notes, then tried to reproduce the body postures and actions described, but without trying to recreate any kind of situation that might have produced failure. The important thing to do when observing in this way is to limit yourself to empirical observations without interpreting them. Thus we can say, for example, that "she moved his head from side to side", but not "she seemed negative" or she felt embarrassed. This is an area to investigate further, the possibility of an outside-in method of clowning.

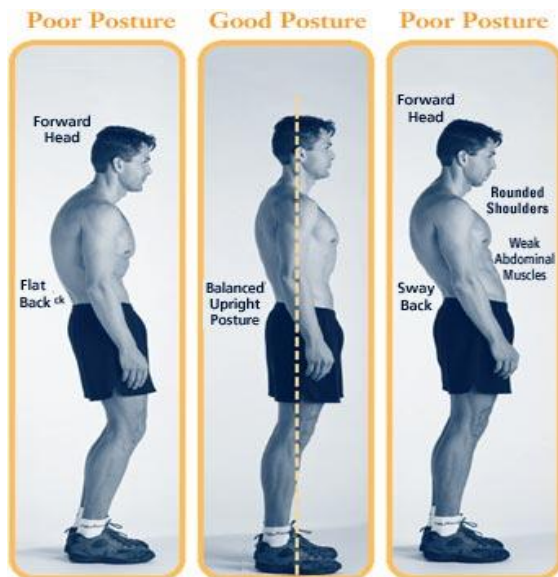
Most work done on the categorisation of expressive states in performing considers a pretty similar range of emotions. Richard Schechner, comparing the work on the expression of the human face by Paul Ekman and the codification in traditional Indian theatre that is the Natyasastra, considers that

Humankind has countless gods, but I would be very surprised if there were not some agreement concerning the "basic emotions". Love, energy, and peace are not on Ekman's list, possibly because he considers them to be "mixed" or composite emotions.⁵⁹

Nor is there much sign of failure in those descriptions of body postures common to studies that identify certain postures with certain psychological states or personalities, usually ones that are deemed to be abnormal, e.g. depressive, arrogant, etc.:⁶⁰



Nor can we find images of failure in the rather more primitive descriptions found in discussions of good and bad posture:⁶¹



Our observations of failure in the body were the following:

- The head tilts back, sometimes in a wave through the spine.
- The knees come up, vertically, one at a time, sometimes repeatedly.
- The stomach draws in.
- The chest collapses.
- The eyes open wider than normal.
- The mouth opens.

Other observed behaviour was:

- Air is expelled.
- We laugh.

The following frame, taken from the video of the Barcelona workshops, shows all these characteristics except the knee-raising:



We then practised these gestures/postures. Generally adopting the body posture provokes your own laughter, we found. The continued knee movements prolonged the laughter, whereas simply freezing the position produced tension and no laughter. The obvious observation to make here is that what we had taken for the posture of failure seemed identical to that of laughter itself. Does this mean that we were mistaken in our observation, and instead of looking at the moment of failure we were looking at the laughter in reaction to that failure? Or does it mean that failure is laughter? The latter equation, if true, would be a remarkable thing, indeed.

So, is it possible to learn clowning by learning the posture of failure? John Wright claims that

Asking 'How do clowns walk?' or 'What do clowns wear?' are inane questions. But to ask 'How do clowns make us laugh?' and, more importantly, 'What physical impulses inspire that comedy?' will take you to a place where you can find a personal ownership of 'clown' as a level of play.⁶²

I don't disagree with the usefulness of this approach at all. But neither do I think it excludes an external approach. There is some interesting evidence of the effectiveness of the outside-in approach. Susana Bloch, Pedro Orthous and Guy Santibañez-H have done a number of studies comparing the outside-in and inside-out methods of expressing emotions in acting. They show no such queasiness when faced with the possibility of using learnt behavior:

What in our opinion is lacking in the curricula of most drama schools are instrumental techniques for learning how to express an emotion. While the gnostic-verbal (literary) and the body-expressive (physical) aspects of acting behavior are quite well covered pedagogically, the emotional-expressive (psychophysiological) aspects are almost entirely left to the intuition, life experience or "emotional memory" of the student actor, with little or no technical support. To become an actor, one must become an ('athlète affectif' as Artaud (1964) puts it - an athlete of emotions (see also Esslin 1976). The question is *how*.

... a psychophysiological approach to acting behaviour has, to our knowledge, not yet been attempted.⁶³

They attempt to show the feasibility of

a method designed to teach acting behaviour (which) should teach the actor to "simulate" an emotion. This means to learn to reproduce at will the respiratory, postural and facial configurations which correspond to "real-life" emotional behaviors.⁶⁴

Emotions are described and learnt in terms of three observable physiological variables: breathing, facial expression and muscle tensions:

The effector pattern of an emotion is a particular configuration of neurovegetative, hormonal and neuromuscular reactions. From this complex physiological ensemble, we chose for the purpose of our training only the respiratory-postural-facial components because these can be started and modulated at will and carry with them most of the other features that are not directly under voluntary control. Accordingly, we are not considering within our training method physiological/parameters such as heart rate, blood pressure, skin resistance, skin temperature and gland secretions which are part of the effector pattern but whose control is not needed for the recognition of an emotion by the observer.⁶⁵

Furthermore, they make the claim that emotions learnt and expressed in this way are just as good as, or indistinguishable from, so-called real emotions:

Over the years, we have systematized a method for training actors to express Emotions (BOS method), based on our findings on the effector patterns of emotions (Bloch et al. 1972; Bloch and Santibañez-H 1972; Santibañez-H 1976). Practice with the method has shown that it is sufficient to produce such patterns correctly in order to evoke a particular emotion either in the actor and in the observer or only in the latter.⁶⁶

When a naive observer, or even one who is acquainted with the techniques, watches the correct execution of an emotional effector pattern, he/she considers the observed emotion as "true" as a spontaneous one.⁶⁷

Not only is it as good, it is in fact better:

This is quite good evidence that in order to appear "natural" or "true" on the stage, actors do not need to "feel" the emotion they are playing but must produce the correct effector-expressive output of the emotional behavior. If anything, in our opinion, subjective involvement and identification with the emotions may hinder the theatrical performance. In fact, it is possible that actors often confuse the unspecific excitation they feel during acting with the belief that they are truly "feeling" the emotion that they portray.⁶⁸

Rules for risk

Keith Johnstone, in *Impro for Storytellers*, devotes a whole chapter to explaining "the methods commonly used to kill stories (i.e. to stop anything untoward from happening)".⁶⁹ He usefully recommends: "Learning to use these techniques for fun gives us insight into our defensive procedures (paradoxical teaching)."⁷⁰ Johnstone's work is mostly in the field of verbal performance, but his principles can easily be transposed to a more physical performance style, or in this case, playing style. One of his strategies he terms "cancelling", for example: "Little Red sees the wolf and runs home – nothing is achieved."⁷¹ In our playground games described above, one common way of cancelling is to retreat from a position you have just taken, in order to avoid losing. Of course, this is a natural way to play the game. But if we want things to

happen we must get used to losing. To make compelling theatre, we must play to win but also enjoy losing. So if we prohibit moving backwards or sideways, this has a similar effect on the consequences of our actions in these games as does learning Johnstone's avoidance strategies. I think we could do a lot more work on how Johnstone's work could be translated into clown improvisation.

If we feel that "something might happen", we are probably taking a risk (of losing the game). So we can create rules that will make this more frequent and teach us how to play with risk. These are different rules to the ones that define the game. The latter are the basic rules which are needed to generate the particular action that occurs in each game. They are the rules that kids will state first when asked to describe a game: "If she had a person when she is he the person she had becomes he."⁷²

So in our games, if you can't go backwards or sideways, then to escape you must turn and move. Moving backwards is one of our most basic actions inspired by fear. Training ourselves to move forwards will train ourselves to say "yes", to commit ourselves and to suffer the consequences of our actions. When we have trained ourselves to go forwards by default, we can of course then choose backwards or sideways when we feel it's appropriate.

Now let's look at another game, with what we have discovered about play in mind. The following was the game where it became most apparent which rules are fundamental to the game action, which rules encourage risk, and which create security or 'save-environmentalism'.

Queenie

First let's look at how the game works. One person, holding a ball, stands out front with their back to the rest of the group, who stand quite close together, a few yards behind the ball holder. Then the holder throws the ball back over their own head/shoulders towards the group. One person catches or retrieves the ball. The thrower has to turn round and guess who has the ball. If they guess right, the two change places. If not, they throw again, until they guess right. The receiver tries to prevent the thrower from guessing he has the ball. These are the rules that generate the actions of the game. I don't think any other rules are necessary.

We can then introduce the following variation, in order to work more directly with the acceptance of failure. Now we have only two people receiving from the thrower, and the rest are audience. The two receivers must look at the audience about half the time. Try looking at critical moments, like when the ball is in the air. Whether you catch it or not, share with us your situation. Let us see your desire, thought and emotion. This variation of the game increases the likelihood of failure, as there are only two players, so it is easier for the thrower to catch them out. Not only that, but the need to maintain contact with the audience makes it even riskier. But the key here is to learn to play *with* each other (as in any game of this kind) and at the same time *for us*, the audience. This *for us* in reality simply means looking at the audience. In this way we gain access to your thoughts, feelings, intentions and impulses. It is enough to

let us see, there is no need to add anything or to try and communicate anything, as it's all out in the open anyway. (If you get good at this game, you can even try it one vs. one. Then the attempt to convince us that you do not have the ball becomes virtually impossible, but you must persevere.)

So, given these game rules, what kind of behaviour occurs? The aim of the game boils down to having to fool the thrower. This is always the case, as when you don't have the ball, if you fool the thrower into thinking that you do have it, they will guess wrong. And if you do have it, you want to fool the thrower into thinking you don't have it. This trying to fool others that something is not as it is is a consequence of the gap that exists between ideal and reality (see Alan Clay, above). The clown attempts to convince us of something that is patently not true. And the greater the gap, the more ridiculous the attempt is. This definition of clown seems to be sufficiently broad to encompass, for example, the old chestnut of comedy occurring when someone pompous takes a fall. High status being lowered is thought to be funny. We can see that high status is that part of us that tries to convince the audience that we are who we maintain we are. In Goffman's terms this is the role we play.

Now let's look at the other kinds of rules that might attach themselves to this game. Instead of first considering some ways of playing the game that might help us take risks and let things happen, let us approach it from the other direction and look at those rules of behaviour that often want to creep in and attach themselves to the game in order to create safety and stagnation. Sometimes these desires remain unspoken, sometimes they are voiced.

With this game, the most common attempt to create a democratic version where no one loses is to say that the thrower has to wait before turning around, in order to give the receivers a chance. Or even sometimes the thrower themselves, after having caught someone, says 'oh, sorry, I turned round too quick, I saw you!' If we were to play it like this, we might as well pack up and go home, because nothing interesting is going to happen.

You must use your intelligence here: if you take too long, the catcher will have lots of time to hide the ball, and you will be reduced to telepathically guessing who has it. (Telepathy is a concept many theatre practitioners try to promote, although they would usually call it 'peripheral vision' or something like that. In clown, we have no problems or shame in looking directly at other performers or the audience, so there is no need for us to pretend that acting techniques also include mind-reading.) If you turn too soon, the potential catcher will not take the ball. If they're using their intelligence, that is. You aren't obliged to catch the ball. If you catch it in full view of the catcher looking at you, then that's your failure. This is a very good example of the kind of reality with which clowning works. When I use the word reality, this is what I am talking about.

What audience would want to watch people not getting caught out? Perhaps here there is a clue that may help us to avoid boring any more audiences to death. The emergence of game playing in theatre over the last decades has led us sometimes to

consider that what is important is for the performer to be in a state of play, of pleasure as Gaulier has it, in order to create that presence that fascinates an audience. So far, so good. But the trap here is to then assume that if I, as a performer, am having a good time, then it must mean it's because I'm playing, which must mean that the audience will like what I'm doing. However, we must be clear about what we mean by play. There are many ways that I can sense that I am enjoying myself. It may be that I enjoy myself when there is a complete absence of risk, when I will not be called on to expose anything of value. In this case, the audience will certainly be snoring away. The mistake, then, in theatre-training through games, can be to focus on the security of the performer at the expense of the enjoyment of the audience. This is a major problem with a lot of devised performance. Some might claim that these kinds of rules serve to maintain the cohesion of the group. They are what Goffman would call team work. But I would say that this is the opposite of what is required in good clowning/acting. Goffman has a very illuminating thing to say on mistakes made within a team:

I would like to add a further general fact about maintaining the line during a performance. When a member of the team makes a mistake in the presence of the audience, the other team-members often must suppress their immediate desire to punish and instruct the offender until, that is, the audience is no longer present. After all, immediate corrective sanctioning would often only disturb the interaction further and, as previously suggested, make the audience privy to a view that ought to be reserved for team-mates.⁷³

Let us turn this upside down and re-phrase thus: 'When a member of the team makes a mistake in the presence of the audience, the other team-members often must reveal their immediate desire to punish and instruct the offender as long as, that is, the audience is longer present. After all, immediate corrective sanctioning would often only disturb the interaction further and, as previously suggested, make the audience privy to a view that ought not to be reserved for team-mates.'

As an audience, what I am looking for are revelations. So if companies think their principle responsibility is to their own well-being and the creation of a polite agreement between colleagues, then they are on a sinking ship. In clown, we depend on this revealing. It is really all we have. The lesson is much clearer here, therefore, than in other genres of performance. But I would say that the same should or could usefully apply across the board of theatre. As Meisner says: 'fuck polite'.

There is a very interesting conclusion that could be drawn here. That we have a problem in that equality/democracy does not produce good theatre. Could it be that we are stuck with the same problem as the Soviet clowns in the 1960s? That our supposedly balanced and safe society does not allow for those imbalances and risks that make exciting theatre? If this is true, then perhaps that is the missing link between the Soviet 1960s and the Paris version.

In the workshops, when we played without these safety nets, the clowning took off. But that is not the end of the story. The urge to govern others, to control outcomes (your own and others') remains present. Furthermore, I would even say that it is vital

for clowning that it remains. It is another instance of the reality-ideal gap. The gap between what we want others to do ('don't turn round yet!') or what we would like to happen ('I'm going to stand close and catch the ball quicker'), and what actually does happen (the thrower turns quickly and the ball hits me in the face as I'm very near) remains in full view. It is my very control urge that leads me into inevitable failure.

So let us not think that these controlling urges are all bad. They are perhaps essential for clowning to exist, just as the police or the white face clown are (see above). It is this very gap that is ridiculous. The gap can be at a personal level or at a relationship level. On a personal level, it is when you go to sit in a chair but misjudge the movement and fall. On a relationship level, it is when you expect your partner to pour the water in your cup, but instead they leave, or take the cup, or throw the water in your face.

There are some other common modes of behaviour in this game that are designed to thwart failure. They can usefully be discouraged by prohibiting them. So, you cannot pass the ball to someone else once you've caught it. Otherwise, as with the demand that the thrower take their time to turn round, it would be more a guessing game than a timing game. I'm interested in the moment the holder turns round, that coincides with the moment the catcher catches. It can also help to demand a metre's space between receivers, or simply no physical contact.

Zip Zap Boing

In the session after this stripping away of rules, this kind of lord of the flies approach to clown, I felt the urge to overload a game with rules. Using Zip Zap Boing, a game many actors are familiar or over familiar with, we played several near impossible versions. Some of these I have done in the past, but I went further: the rules became so complex, so difficult to respond to in the moment, that failure was inevitable. I believe that failure is inevitable anyway, it's just that it is usually cloaked in what we have just been discussing, that veneer of unspoken agreements that keep the team together, and convince us that everything is working just fine.

Using words like 'veneer' and 'cloak' seems to suggest that there is something on top or in front, hiding something beneath or behind. But I wouldn't pay too much attention to which preposition we use, as I don't want to claim that these two worlds have to be in any particular set relationship. It doesn't matter to me whether we think of them as inside and outside, or above and below or whatever. Prepositions are of course the source for much extracting of ideologies from actor training methods, as well as psychology, religion and any system of thought. We have Naturalism's inner world and outer world, for example; or heaven and hell, and so on. At this stage I don't particularly want to align clown with any of these systems. Let's see where we end up, and maybe in the future we can choose our favourite appropriate preposition.

I guess that about 93% of our actions end in failure, but that we endlessly correct them, so as to reach our goals. But if we act on our first impulse, and manifest that in action, and carry that action forward in its original direction, and accept the

consequences of that action, mostly we end up with egg on our face, or our fingers caught in the door, or blurting out some nonsense. I say 93%, not because I have measured this in a laboratory. But as I once read a theory that said that 93% of communication is non-verbal, and I am lost to know how this was measured, I just guessed that it would be the same for failure.

So when we stop masking those failures, we can see them. That is clown. And one way to encourage that unmasking is by creating a great strain on the system of masking. By creating rules or demands that are too difficult to maintain, either because they are beyond our capabilities or because there are too many of them, or because they demand a quick reaction but a lot of thought, and so on. Under such strain, the whole structure (of society) falls apart. It becomes nearly impossible to go on. But we went on!

I won't describe the whole game here, but a word or two on the variations I have habitually used: no voice; no gesture; no lips, only looking; then every time you change from function to function, you change sound/gesture, e.g. if you do a 'zip' (pass to the next person around the circle) after someone who has also done a 'zip', you make the same sound/gesture. If you do a 'zap' (pass to someone not next to you) or a 'boing' (pass back to the person who has just passed to you, after a 'zip', then that's a change and you must change the sound/gesture. This combination of two levels of play makes it pretty difficult to get right, which is what we're looking for, of course.

A new one here was that you change rules (i.e. change the whole system) every time you change function (e.g. after a silent 'zip', you might do a look-only 'boing'). This one had me beaten! The point here is that we never get to acquire expertise. This goes completely against the grain of much physical theatre training, of course. In clown, if I manage to do something well, my instinct is to make it more difficult. So you are always going beyond your limits, just.

A group of five then plays for the audience, standing in a line facing them, so the people at the ends are theoretically next to each other. I hover around waiting to punish any mistakes.

It is possible to observe in detail various things which can happen:

- A delay between the first impulse (which one suspects to be wrong) and the final decision to act.
- The final action, born of the gap between impulse and action, takes on a different quality. It is an action moved by the energy of 'I don't know'. We will look at something similar using laughter as the energy next term.
- Remaining static, freezing, then moving again. This coincides with the impulse-action gap, as before.
- After having failed then paused, making a definite gesture provokes laughter. The amount of commitment and decisiveness is important.
- Sometimes you don't know why it was wrong. That's even funnier.

- The possibility of enjoying being in control. When one person plays being in control, this creates a good contrast with others who are simply failing. We tried with a group of three people being in control, to see if this would be satisfying. The result was unclear, but we could observe two different ways of controlling. One way is to take your time, relax, wait to act, thus avoiding failure. This way, the audience gets to see the person processing the information. You still are present and letting us see it. This works. (But if you don't let us see this process, but are still taking your time in order to control it, then it's boring.) In other words, the gap still remains. This gap between impulse and action seems to be fundamental in our perception of what failure is. It could even form part of an essential definition of failure.

Now we transfer the game to a new situation. Now we are free to move in the space. A chair is placed in the centre, as a fixed point. Now it's not about being in a line. If you do the same gesture as someone, that includes whether you are sitting or standing. How can you play this game in 3D space? The gesture is a gesture in space, or a movement. So your gesture *is* your movement in space. They are not separate things. The game becomes simpler. Either your moves are the same as someone else's or they are different.

Failure

I think we have begun fill in some details of what failure is, how we know what it is, and how accepted failure differs from hidden failure. Trying to succeed, sooner or later we must fail. We can accept this failure in full view of an audience, who will see everything as long as the performer lets them. This creates an effect, for the audience and for the performer, that something usually hidden is being revealed. This revelation convinces us that what we are witnessing is in a sense fuller, more authentic, or more real than what we normally come across. We could call this 'presence'.

In fact, we could see the attempt to succeed and to convince our audience as the attempt by the actor to be present. But although this usually fails (according to my 93% theory), our subsequent acceptance of that failure to be present will in turn convince the audience that we are indeed present. Clowning, in this sense, overcomes one of the most fundamental paradoxes in acting.

If we accept that this is a learnable technique, can we then say that there is something in this technique that remains hidden from the audience? For example, audiences will often believe that stand-up comedians are improvising, 'making it up', whereas the performer knows all too well that he is manipulating his technique in order to create this 'spontaneity effect'. So, would it be possible to also reveal this trick? In clowning that would mean that we would not just 'fail at what we are trying to achieve', but also 'fail at failing'. Is this possible?

ii. Ball-Clap

This is our first “form”, a game which we have developed to the point where it can be performed. It remains a game in the sense that every time you do it you have to play it for real. But there are structures in place that do not change, and that hopefully do the job of allowing the playing to engage an audience which has no previous knowledge of the game.

We now have three types of rules:

1. Rules for Playing the Game: rules that generate action
2. Rules for risk:
 - a. guidelines, in order to encourage risk
 - b. prohibitions, in order to avoid safety
3. Structures for performance

These categories are woven throughout the following account of this game.

The basic game is throw and catch. Standing in a circle, you can throw to anyone. The rule is the ball can't touch the floor. All mistakes are punished by getting hit with a rolled up newspaper. Without this, the playing loses commitment. And it's a lot more fun to be under threat while playing ball. After a while, we increase the difficulty by having to clap hands before catching the ball. We then keep adding complications in order to keep the pleasure level high: a clap and a jump before catching; two claps and a jump; two claps and two jumps; clap and jump plus turn round 360° after catching; plus sit on a chair placed behind you; and you can easily invent more of these. Lastly, there is a free-form version, where you just do anything you want before catching the ball. It doesn't matter if nothing original occurs to you, you've always got the clap and/or jump to fall back on.

In clown there is no need to be original. Keith Johnstone so forcibly makes the point that what works best in improvisation is not originality, but the obvious, that it has led me to think about running an anti-originality workshop, or better still an anti-creativity workshop. But then I thought, that's what I do anyway. Clown is in a sense fundamentally anti-creative, as well as being creative at another level, of course.

What purpose does the upping of the stakes serve? The fundamental one is to avoid boredom. Many theories of play have been proposed (see Csikszentmihalyi,⁷⁴ Huizinga,⁷⁵ Schechner,⁷⁶ etc.), which I will discuss another time in more detail. To me the answer to “what is play for?” is obviously answered with “to not get bored”. You may say that this is an answer which merely restates the question, but it will do for me. So the increase in difficulty maintains the risk of failure, maintains our interest, and therefore maintains our pleasure (I define pleasure as the opposite to boredom). The risk of failure is a basic element in avoiding boredom.

Another way to keep staving off boredom is to use variations. Whilst upping the stakes increases the difficulty, variations merely change the activity without making it more

risky. They therefore don't have so much effect on boredom, though they work for a while.

It's a bit like having ice cream every day for pudding (eventually becomes boring), having different flavours of ice cream every day (variations, limits the boredom), or trying a new kind of pudding every day, or making your own, or having pudding before the main course, or eating the ice cream through a straw, etc. The line between variation and increasing the difficulty is not always clear, as these examples show. Both increasing the difficulty and creating variations are inherent motors not just of play, but of clowning. Not only that, they are recognisable forms in clown compositions.

Much variety and circus performance (as opposed to narrative performance) uses variation and stake-increasing, e.g. juggle 3 balls, then 4 balls, then 6 balls. I think that this is part of what Agnès Pierron is referring to here in reference to circus: "Rather than an art, it is an act."⁷⁷ Upping the stakes, or varying the action does not create a fiction, but instead plays with a reality. However, new circus, embarrassed by its primitive appeal, has tried to jettison this in favour of what it perceives as structures that are more appropriate to its bid for the artistic high ground. "As with 'street arts', 'circus arts' are a ministerial invention, dating from the time when circus changed from being the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture to that of the Ministry of Culture, in 1981."⁷⁸

When we play Ball-Clap, this way of avoiding boredom, introduced by me in the role of teacher, is one of the two principal ways that the game can develop. The other way tends to occur without my prompting, often before we get to the above, but sometimes later on. It consists in making others fail, or making it very difficult for them. As we have seen with our stake-upping method, it's the maintenance of a high level of risk that keeps the game interesting. But in the second case, we are creating risk for the receiver rather than for ourselves. I mean, for example, throwing someone the ball without looking at them, or very low, or to the side, or fast, or when they're not looking. The most extreme might be to just drop the ball, giving them virtually no chance of catching it.

Here I should clarify something. As stated before, if you let the ball touch the ground, you get punished. There is no exception to this. On first encountering this game, many people will demand that the punishment go to the person who has thrown the ball, not the one who didn't catch it. They claim that the thrower threw badly, or unfairly. This kind of system of laws of the game looks a bit like a regular legal system. Punishment, or responsibility, is attached to whoever is judged to be the cause of the failure. If the ball were to be thrown "well", in this system, then the non-catcher would in that case "be responsible". But clown law has it otherwise. It is always the one who receives who is responsible.

This is not some kind of arbitrary cruelty. It seems to me to be (a) easy to understand, (b) closer to how clown works and (c) more fun. Most importantly, it generates good clowning, whereas the liberal-democratic system generates only security. The clown system generates great pleasure as well. Laughter, self-laughter, comes easily under

this system. Let's be clear here, then: the punishment is received by the person who is left with the failure. Probably if you find yourself picking the ball up off the floor, then it's your failure. That is a far clearer definition and one that is not disputable or open to interpretation, unlike the one we are perhaps more accustomed to, the one based on "who was responsible", where "responsible" is a very slippery category. We have devised mountains of laws and precedents in order to judge who is responsible. This is a concept we feel is necessary in order to create a society that works. But in clowning we need not concern ourselves over justice. Nor in theatre. Who wants to watch people behaving justly and making sure everyone gets a turn? No one. Unfortunately, as discussed earlier, due to the infiltration of game playing into theatre practice, there has been a tendency to then think that good theatre can be made by following the rules, but not the rules that make action happen, instead the ones that make it fair. This is a gross error and a misunderstanding of play.

Trying to make others lose seems to me to be an essential part of clown. This takes us back to the discussion of the white face and auguste clowns. In this game, the auguste clown could be identified with the person when they don't catch the ball and get punished. It is he who cannot, and he who gets hit. When we play to make others lose, we are playing the white face clown, the rascally trickster. In this game we can clearly see how they are made for each other. True, the auguste can function alone, making it ever harder for himself, until he fails. Evidently it is possible to fail alone, but not to make others fail alone.

Once we have explored the possibilities of trying to make others lose, and keeping ourselves in pleasure by varying or making things difficult, let us introduce this new rule: if we laugh when you make a mistake, you are pardoned. When I say "we", I mean at least three or four people laughing in a group of 15. One or two is not enough. The laughs must be involuntary, otherwise they will not be true indications to the one who has failed. Trying to suppress your laugh or to force it will not be of any use.

So we have three possibilities: 1. I succeed. 2. I fail and they laugh= I succeed. 3. I fail and they don't laugh = failure. Only the last one will be of no use in clowning. But quickly we see that most of the failures do indeed provoke laughter, and the question is how to control or manipulate it? I ask someone who has just dropped the ball, 'do you want a laugh or a punishment?' This puts the power clearly into their own hands. 'But how?' they might complain. And then we laugh. Then we can try conscious strategies for provoking the laughter that will save us. The most extreme strategy might be to fail deliberately, which is the highest risk of all. Then you are relying on us laughing for you to be saved. Perhaps this is the professional version: a deliberate failure converted into success by the laugh. In fact, even more extreme is going directly to be punished, even when no mistake has been made. This might be called "stocking up on laughs in case you need them later". Another technique is to re-use what worked once. In clown, if it works, do it again. When you fail, remember and repeat something you did when you failed before that made us laugh. It may work again. This kind of logic is common in clown. The repetition will either make us laugh or not. If not, then your belief that the repetition will work will in itself make us laugh.

Harpo Marx reveals his theory of clowning while recounting his experiences in the Soviet Union in 1933 where directors were asking to see his motivation for making 200 knives appear out of his coat pocket:

The English-speaking writer ... lumbered onto the stage. "Your movements are extraordinary," he said. "But please forgive us. We don't know the story. If I may say so, the point eludes us."

"Point?" I said. "There isn't any point. It's nothing but slapstick. You know – pure hokum."

"Yes, yes, of course," he said, like he understood, which he didn't at all. "But may I ask why you were compelled to destroy the letters? Why did you drink the ink, knowing it was ink? What was your motive for stealing the knives that belonged to the hotel?"

I was flabbergasted. I'd done these pieces of business hundreds of times, and this was the first time anybody had ever asked me *why* I did them. "All I know," I said, "is that if something gets a laugh you do it again. That's all the reason you need. Right?"

Now the Russian was puzzled. He said, "No."

I said, "No?"

He said, "Forgive me. Perhaps it is different in your American theatre. Here you must tell a story that answers the audience's questions, or your performance will fail."⁷⁹

Let us move on and introduce something new: more newspapers. I hand out two or three more. All newspaper carriers must punish when required, otherwise they must be punished themselves. Failure to punish someone is thus a punishable offence under clown law. A refinement of the pardon rule then follows: if you punish a failure after we have laughed, then you have erred and will be punished. This last element keeps the whole dynamic virtually self-perpetuating.

We now have a system of relationships that is sufficiently complex for it to be presented to an audience. In groups of three, with two newspapers and one ball we play with each other, and for the audience.

But that is not all. There are some further steps to this exercise. We dispense with the ball, playing with an imaginary ball. It is easy, and failure is now a choice. We then play with no ball, and finally with no newspapers. What is left then of the original game? It seems like nothing, because the rules are based on the ball, and the punishment depends on the newspaper. How can we play without either of these elements? This step has for a long time been of interest to me. To preserve the state that the game puts you in, but to make the leap out of a rule-bound activity. This is not quite the same as using an invisible game to motor a scene, where there are rules but we do not see them. I am proposing that there are no rules, but we continue to play.

Here are some ways to develop the quality of play in this game:

- You cannot hit yourself. That's crazy. It is not founded in reality and necessity. It might happen occasionally, but it's not a basic action that should occur regularly.
- Don't do things for the sake of geometric aesthetic reasons, don't create balanced stage configurations. Instead, be happy with an unbalanced stage.
- The laughter is free floating. It doesn't have to be caused by you in order for you to be pardoned. If it's happening when you are failing, then that's enough. That means that you can get laughs on someone's behalf, or save a friend by making us laugh.
- When you err, don't resist or avoid punishment. Even better, come to the punisher. You will have the time it takes to get there to get a laugh.
- Try and increase the frequency of the laughter. Now it's not just about winning the ball game. Try and live on the brink of failure.
- Don't explain what you are doing, just do it.
- Eliminate all actions that are not those of throwing and catching and hitting. The game is enough in itself. Avoid adding fictional actions, such as looking in your pocket for the ball, or having supposed difficulties with the ball. Clown works when we play with reality. We can do without fiction.
- When you fail, look at the audience.
- Don't make any movements that are unnecessary for the playing of the game.
- Don't point. Pointing is an explicative action and treats the audience as if they were stupid, as if they couldn't understand what you are doing, thinking or feeling. The audience is more than capable of seeing everything. You just have to let them.
- Similarly, drop that awful habit of doing sound effects to mime. Truly abominable and I don't know how it crept into clown.
- Occasionally you can take the newspaper off someone, but sparingly.
- Don't go backwards or sideways, turn round to go in another direction.
- Don't avoid being hit, if you have no time to escape.
- When playing with an imaginary ball, receive the ball however you like, it doesn't matter if someone has thrown it to you in a particular way, there's no need to respect that.
- Don't threaten to do something. Just do it
- Look with your whole body at the person you are going to hit, i.e. don't hit without looking, or looking to the side.
- It's not so much a game of surprising the other, but of revealing your impulses through the medium of newspapers and hitting.
- Don't go back to the place you were after going to hit someone. Instead, stay there and risk the consequences.

Our discussions and work centred on the clearing up and out of bad habits. Play is not doing a bunch of movements, or doing what you like because you have fun. Sure, having fun is essential, and without it you can't expect to interest an audience. But be careful, it is not enough. Playing is about seeing the reality of the situation, the reality of your emotions and the reality of your partner, and the audience. And responding from there.

This is more about letting happen and letting the audience see that, rather than making things happen or communicating them to an audience. It is about being a witness to the moment: yourself, the space, the audience, your partner. And through witnessing, allowing the audience to witness clearly too.

When we play with an imaginary ball, a common mistake is to make everything look difficult. We introduce pretended resistances and difficulties to catch the ball, in order to show that we are playing with a ball. Let's forget all that and leave that to the mimes. Playing with an imaginary ball is actually far easier than with a real ball, as you can decide what you want. It is completely under your control, unlike a real ball. So you can throw it and catch it in the most absurd of ways, but without sweating or stretching or running around too much. Even if someone throws you the ball hard and fast, you can take your time and catch it when and where you like. This ease is a great thing in clowning. And when you know you can't fail, you become an expert. When it's so easy, you can afford to fail by choice.

When we played the no-newspaper version, conscious of not introducing unnecessary rules into the game, we observed that, nevertheless, what happened seemed very organized. What was happening was the familiar "first find the game, then play with it". It became clear what that consists of. It means creating expectations of behaviour, repeating them, then varying them, then surprising. Surprises are in this sense a kind of failure, as they are doing something that another person didn't expect. This fits our definition of social failure. For example, Alex has his hands on the back of a chair, Danny sits in the chair and Alex has his hands stuck between Danny and chair. Later, when Catalina sits in the chair, Alex expects the same, but she instead sits on the edge of the chair. There is a gap between the expected (idea) and the surprise (reality). Alex has failed.

A simple overall structure for this game, in order to present it to an audience, would be a straightforward advance through all the phases:

1. Scene 1: 3 clowns play with a real ball and 2 newspapers
2. Scene 2: the same, or different clowns play with an imaginary ball.
3. Scene 3: they play with no ball.
4. Scene 4: they play with no newspaper.

I also like the idea of foregrounding the auguste and white face relationship. We might have two players, one who can only increase their own difficulty, and one who can only make it difficult for the other.

iii. Semi-Circle

This is a very simple exercise, rather than a game, but one that allows us to explore the complexities of how the clown-audience relationship determines the clown's actions.

The nature of this relationship can explain how one relates to one's own actions on stage (the question of "what" one's actions are is less of a concern here at the moment). In other words, we are investigating here the attitude of the performer to her own performing. Does what I just did work? Shall I do it again? What shall I do next?

All the following stages in this exercise can be usefully performed whilst wearing the red clown nose, and just as usefully without.

1. We all line up with our backs against a wall. Beginning at the end of the line, one person walks out into the space, in a semi-circle, maintaining eye contact with all of us all of the time, while we, the audience, shout out their name continually while pointing at them. The performer keeps their mouth lightly open, and avoids touching their own body or clothes. Touching your own body is another security mechanism. It creates a kind of expressive short-circuit in the body, as if there were an expressive current that when the body is touching itself can only flow around the body, never leaving it. But when we open the body, that expressive current escapes, into the space, reaching a performing partner or the audience. Most commonly, touching oneself involves the hands – a hand on the head, or clasped hands, or hands on hips – but I include here any part of the body touching any other – an elbow against your side, knees together, a foot rubbing against the other shin, the chin against the chest, fingers of the same hand in contact with each, the lips closed, the tongue pressed against the roof of the mouth. When you release these closed points, there is a feeling that something must happen. It is no longer possible to remain still and safe.

Having the mouth open is the easiest way to let go of controlling what comes out of you. The first exit of the body is the mouth, though there are of course others, and therefore reveals most. I find this is far more effective and efficient (i.e. quicker) in finding the clown than wearing a red nose.

When walking the semi-circle, don't go too fast. Take it at a strolling pace, one that allows you to register what's happening, what you are feeling. Go too fast and you will arrive without having been aware of what happened along the way. And whatever you feel along the way, don't hide it from us, let us see it. It isn't necessary to tell us anything, or to try and communicate anything. Don't invent things to do. Just let us see you. If you manage this, you won't feel any need to respond defensively to what's happening.

There is a balance here between loving and accusing. Being the centre of attention is wonderful, people calling your name, you are the star. And it is also being the outsider, the individual separated from the group. Both are valid definitions for the relationship the clown has with the group/audience. And in both cases the right response for the clown is a non-defensive one.

2. We now do the same, but without the shouting and pointing from the audience. If it helps, you can imagine hearing it. The relationship should be the same.
3. Again, but this time pause when you arrive at centre-stage, and breathe out. Breathing is or was a key element in Avner Eisenberg's clown teaching. I came into contact with this work via Danny Schlesinger, who is a pupil of Avner and has taught at the ECB, and is participating in the present workshops. Over the last year I have begun to incorporate and adapt some of the fundamentals of this work into my own exercises. The most astonishing thing for me is that when you enter the stage breathing out, we invariably laugh! One could almost say that breathing out makes us laugh. This is a lot simpler and effective than theories of clown-as-mask! I'm sure we could work out a whole system of theatre based on breathing techniques. I now only use that instruction, breathe out.

For Avner, the out breath happens unconsciously when we have the agreement of the other (or of the audience) to enter their personal space. In the audience's case, that space is the stage. We look out at the audience, see they are there, immediately breathe out and enter. They laugh. It's basically a quick way of making friends. Breathing out leaves you disarmed. In other words, you are not perceived to be playing your role, but to be dropping it for a moment.

On the other hand, when we breathe in, we create security. According to Feldenkrais, when we breathe in we strengthen the thorax and abdomen in the expectation of attack, or in order to be able to use force to move the body or an external object, instead of directing the force along the line of the spine. This locking of the body is about force. It is therefore much more difficult to make the audience laugh when breathing in, although there are clearly numerous exceptions to this.

I see no reason why we couldn't define clown by these means. Clown-as-breath is just as valid as clown-as-mask. I also think that through working with the breath in this way, we can learn about what we have traditionally referred to as the 'flop' or the 'void'. My feeling is that the flop and its acceptance is related to the out breath. We shall be investigating this further in the second term.

4. This time, after arriving centre stage, pausing, and breathing out, you do a simple action, lasting only a couple of seconds. It's easier if this is done without too much tension or force, as I discussed before when talking about playing with an imaginary ball. After completing the action, you pause/breathe out again, then leave.

The action should be defined without being premeditated. By defining the action, I do not mean knowing what it means, or situating it (who, what, where). The alternative to this kind of clear manipulating of gesture is not only a kind of vague uncommittedness. Being too vague and uncommitted in your

gesture will leave us suspended and without a sense that you have an objective. Instead, the gesture must displace you, unbalance you, pull you out of your stable stance. This could be a definition of commitment, whilst avoiding the trap of the school of thought that sees performers as people who 'know what they are going to say and then say it'. So, commitment is simply that which displaces/unbalances you. And when there is displacement, there is movement. Something has changed, and something else must happen.

5. Next, if you laugh at any time, you repeat your action. Try and repeat it as soon as the laugh starts coming, rather than when it has subsided, that way the action is powered by the laugh, which is a very strong energy and produces gestures of a completely different quality .
6. If you repeat the action several times before leaving, try variations. If you did something with one hand now do it with the other. Or backwards, or then in a modified way. This is the beginning of one very important type of clown structure, based on repetition, variation, recapitulation and surprise. When there are no more laughs (we are still only concerned about your own laughs) then you go.
7. A new element in these workshops was the instruction to laugh sometimes. The instructed laugh (when I say to a student, 'Laugh now!') is something I have experimented with in other exercises, and often has the effect of opening up a real laugh. This was to be the first time I had used it in this particular exercise. I had always valued the effect of 'if you laugh at yourself do it again', but have had to admit that it doesn't always work for everybody. However, I have always been convinced that laughing at yourself is fundamental to clowning and that it should be present in some way in the clown performer. By introducing the instructed laugh here, I feel we have solved the problem.

A deliberate laugh can end up in one of three ways. 1. the laugh is real and involuntary. 2. it is false and provokes real laughter, either your own or others. 3. it is false and remains false, provoking no laughter. Only the third option is uninteresting to me. It is that kind of laugh that an actor is able to force out, imitating more or less accurately the rhythms and tones of real laughter. However it is difficult to sustain for any time. It seems it is based on force, I'm not sure where it comes from. I also think this is maybe very characteristic of British acting, where emotions are produced by willpower, but cannot sustain themselves for any time, as they lack the wave of involuntary muscle spasm that is part of the flow of emotion. We shall be keeping an eye on this hypothesis over the coming years.

8. I may give other instructions now, or ask questions.

'Where are you going?' As it is forbidden to point, how can you let us know this? By looking at your objective, which in this case is the end of the semi-circular route.

‘Stop smiling.’ ‘Close your mouth tight.’ Sometimes giving a negative instruction works to put someone on the edge of ridiculous.

9. Now two people enter the space together. They arrive at the centre point more or less at the same time, pause, breathe out, and each does their action. And they maintain complicity by looking at each other occasionally en route. Now if you laugh at your own action you repeat that action, as before. And if you laugh at your partner’s, you repeat their action. If you don’t laugh, but your partner is laughing and repeating actions, you wait for them, as you must both leave together.
10. The same applies for a trio or a larger group. I have more and more avoided groups larger than three in clowning, though sometimes I do use groups of five. The larger group leaves you less room to be different from your partners. This is something I want to seriously address in this project. It seems to me that the problem will be the same as that encountered in any theatre. With a cast of three you have different demands on the writer than with a cast of 15. I have seen a lot of clown teaching and performing using so called choruses. I’m not sure where this came from. Gaulier uses choruses in bouffon work, but that is a whole different world. There is something in the nature of the bouffon that demands that he comes out of and returns to a group. But the clown is an individual, an outcast alone. Traditionally, the clown appears solo, in duo or the trio plus the ringmaster. Groups of clowns, all doing the same thing, seems to me a perverse idea.

There is interesting work to be done with imitation and copying. I do this myself. But there is always a relationship there, perhaps that of big brother-little brother. There the copying becomes ‘I am doing like you because I want to be like you, but I am not you, and therefore fail’. There is again the distance between the ideal and the reality. But if this relationship dissolves, I think we are in one of Keith Johnstone’s strategies for avoiding making things happen: in this case it would be what he calls ‘agreed activities’. “Little Red and the wolf play hide-and-seek and spin-the-turtle; and then they practise ballroom dancing. The characters seem to be working well together, but no one is in trouble, and no one is being altered (except for the turtle).”⁸⁰

Jango Edwards talks about ‘black and white’ when teaching clown. If you are tall, then I am short, if you are clever I am stupid, if you move all the time, I am very still, etc. This gives us a clue as to how can we work with larger casts of clowns. The Russian clown company Litsedei⁸¹ do it with 6 or 7. The now defunct company, Embarquez-les with 5.⁸² Theatre Manjana⁸³ also worked with a large clown cast in their versions of Lorca and Strindberg.

We can see how role definition works in clown easily through the prism of status. I use an exercise which consists very simply in differentiating yourself as much as possible from your partner. Then we add a third person, who must

differentiate himself from both of the other two. This can be achieved by relating to one of them at a time, e.g. playing low to A's high, then high to B's low. Or you can try and do one thing different to A and one the same, and similarly with B. But when there are more people, there is less and less room to do this. I think that once we have more than three performers, then some become protagonists and others secondary. This is a different kind of differentiating, one of levels of importance. This simply following what theatre has always done, whether clown, comedy or whatever. I shall be coming back to these issue of differentiation, and of ensemble and chorus work, which I feel is of little value in clowning, at a later point in the project.

11. We can then play the whole exercise all over again, but this time it's when you or the audience laugh that you repeat your action.

I find this exercise to be eminently performable. The question is whether to include the role of the teacher or not in the performance. We shall certainly be trying both.

iv. Step-Laugh

This is a very simple exercise that I have started to develop over the last year. We now have an opportunity to take it much further and to see whether it can form the foundation for clown performance.

1. One person crosses the room, one step at a time. You can only take a step when we laugh.

Crossing the stage is the basic clown objective. In answer to the question, 'why does the clown enter?' We can answer, 'in order to exit'. Anything that happens in between is a bonus. This is similar to the old exercise of entering sweeping the stage, then finding the audience is there, then playing for them, and exiting. But it is simpler and more literal, I think. You don't need to imagine anything, which for me is great. You just work with the real space and situation here. I am using the term 'real' more and more in the context of clown. What I am referring to is that reality which is the performance event, the part that includes the response of the audience to the actions of the clown, and the response of the clown to that in turn. Perhaps this is a new form of realism, in fact, or something we could call 'real theatre'.

2. Now, if there is no laugh from the audience for 6 seconds, you must take a step back. Of course, this often provokes a laugh, and you step forward once more.

If we have done our homework and learned in other games to take a step forward as a default reaction to most situations of risk, then here we see the step backwards for what it really is: a failure. Or a recognition of failure. That's why it gets a laugh.

3. Two people cross the stage together, with the same rules as before.
4. Two cross the stage, and if you think the laugh is for you, take the next step, but if not, then don't move.

This creates a lot of ambiguity and dispute, which is half the fun. In a sense, it becomes clear that the laughs are not personal but universal, though there remains some ego attachment on the part of the performers.

5. One person crosses the stage, sits in a chair placed half way, stands, and continues. Here there are two 'steps' which are 'sit' and 'stand', but the rules remain the same: each step of the action requires a laugh from the audience.
6. Back to two people, plus one chair. Here only one person sits. Obviously, as there is only one chair! Be careful! This is not a conflict. It is in a sense a 'problem', but there is a simple solution: one sits and one stands. Clowns do not have problems with their problems. They just look for solutions. It is not a race for the chair, though of course you may feel things if you are left behind or if you win the race.
7. Now start from offstage or outside the room. Now your first step, the one that brings you on stage, needs a laugh. You can look onstage, but not place your feet on the performing area.
8. We now change a little what it is we mean by one "step". We have seen that "sitting in the chair" is counted as one step, as is "standing up from the chair". We will also say now that "entering" is one step, as is "exiting", as is "approaching the chair". In other words, a step consists of an action that has a clear objective in space. Each step fulfils its own objective by being completed.

This is akin to saying that the motivation for the action is the doing of the action. For example: I enter the stage in order to be on the stage; or I sit down in order to be sat on the chair. In this way, we eliminate all projections into the future, such as would be: "I enter the stage in order to sit in the chair"; or "I stand up in order to exit". It is relatively simple in clowning to undo these connections. Clowns have no problem with doing each action in the present, for its own end. The motivation dies with the completion of the action. This dying after each action is connected to the "flop", the failure that comes after the attempt to impress or convince us of something. I think it is also connected to the out breath.

I would say that this kind of "one-step-at-a-time" acting is very much applicable to all actors, not just clowns, and that it is a major contribution to acting technique. I think it could also provide a key to just what we perceive "psychological realism" to be, and why: the very opposite of one step at a time. If we choose to go the other way, linking up one action after another, then the

effect is of someone who is projecting their aims into the future, via a sequence of actions in time. If we look at it this way, we can see these two techniques as simply two possible choices. And each choice produces its own “truth-effect”. For me, there is no need to make any claims to authenticity on either side.

So, back to the exercise. Now the performers do complete actions every time the audience laughs. And as there are only a few of those actions now (enter, approach, sit, stand, exit), and they could be performed in almost any order (the only impossible sequences are things like: enter then stand, sit then exit, etc.), let’s leave the sequence open to improvisation. So it doesn’t matter what you do next, as long as it’s done with the permission of the audience (their laughter=permission). All this we can do solo, in pairs, and then in trios.

9. Next, in trios, we prepare the sequences of actions beforehand. This means only that we make a script which consists of “who does what when”, using the available actions, as above. As in the improvs, two or more people may initiate an action at the same time.

First we check to see that the scripts are possible. Then we play them according to the laugh per step rule. Each step in the script needs an audience laugh.

Now we can see that the relationship with the audience (laughter leads to action) is independent of the sequence of actions. It is irrelevant whether the sequence is improvised or scripted. In clowning this is relatively easy to see, since the relationship with the audience is probably the first thing you learn. Again, I would suggest that this lesson can be equally applied to non-clown acting.

10. We then try two pairs, doing two separate scripts, simultaneously. Here you will have to adapt. It creates two levels, two worlds, two societies, potentially at odds with each other but in the same space. This proved to give rise to very rich improvisations. I think you could do two people with two different scripts. Again it’s that gap between what you expect and what you get that is a basic component of drama.
11. To the scripts are added two lines of dialogue per person. At least one must be in their native language. The lines are other actions, prepared in content as well as when they occur in the sequence. So they may happen at the same time as an action, or not. Phrases are actions like any other and need the audience laugh before being said.
12. Now we use an existing text. Any one will do. We have tried Shakespeare, Jarry, Chekhov, Mamet, it doesn’t change how the exercise works. As far as the sequence of actions goes, when we start to use a longer text, we keep the action script the same as before. It is not necessary to devise something that “fits” the text.

13. A note on taking a step backwards. This continues to apply when we work with action scripts and texts. If the penultimate action has been a line of text, and 6 seconds pass without a laugh, then taking a step back means saying that line again.

Going backwards and forwards in the script is more of a potential than something you should be doing a lot of in reality. Otherwise the whole thing becomes too chaotic for my liking. With practice, you can get a laugh whenever you need it. When the laughter is on a roll, you can just keep doing things.

14. In the workshops in Barcelona, we devised a more complex scheme, combining all these possible scripts. This could form the basis for a public presentation.

Here is the scheme:

- A enters SL, crosses stage, exits SR
- B enters SL, crosses stage, exits SR
- A + B enter SR, cross stage, exit SL
- C enters SR, crosses stage, places chair CS, exits SL
- A+B+C enter SL, cross stage, one sits, stands, exit SR
- D+E enter SR, perform their script, exit SR
- F+G enter SL, perform their script which includes lines of text, exit SL
- D+E, F+G perform their scripts simultaneously, each pair enter and exit on own sides
- A+B+C perform script with text from Titus Andronicus, plus later D+E, F+G perform their scripts again, simultaneously. All exit SR
- C enters SL, crosses stage, removes chair, exits SR

15. With the MA Actor Training and Coaching students, we also experimented with the exercise in another way. We did it without looking for the audience laugh. It seems impossible but is actually just a way of allowing your actions to be transparent. There remains a sense of continuing with audience permission, as if the audience were driving the action forward, as if the spoken text came from a necessity on the part of the audience (and not on the part of the actor, which is how we often think about this).

This is something I would like to explore much more, perhaps in conjunction with other training methods. One opportunity to do this I hope to be in conjunction with Lenard Petit at the Michael Chekhov Actors Studio in April 2008.

There are other signs of audience response, of course, apart from laughter. But gasps are not quite as explicit, for example. Perhaps we use applause as a stand-in, a conventional response, necessary where the bodily response is not audible or visible enough for the actor to register it.

v. Anticipation

I originally had had no intention of developing this next area so far. Anticipation is something I have used in different exercises for some years now, and in my own mind belongs to a group of concepts, practices and experiments that in general serve to encourage improvements in improvisation, consciousness and play. The practice of anticipating is easily approached through playing ball. Instead of catching the ball as you do normally, catch it a little beforehand. That is, before you were going to catch it. This is what I mean by anticipating.. What results is that the time between the decision to act and the action itself is shortened or suppressed. It's just a way of fooling ourselves into performing thought and action near-simultaneously.

Maybe it's my habit of being contrary, but whenever I find something I like and that I think works, I instinctively look for its opposite as well. It often occurs that this also works. In the case of anticipation, the opposite I use is delaying, or waiting. Playing ball this way means you catch the ball a little after you were going to. You can wait as long as you like as long as the ball doesn't touch the ground. This sometimes leads to what is known as the 'juggler's bow', the catching of the (last) ball at a point just above the ground, with one knee on the ground.

Having practised anticipating and delaying, you can then choose freely, in the moment, which of these modes to use. Having just two choices has always interested me. I think that in order to improvise, or play, or indeed perform, we need to know that we have choices. But having more than two options does not change the nature of choosing, improvising, playing or performing. The restrictedness of the choice in fact makes the play easier to generate. I don't want to go into detail on this right now, but it is worth noting. For a full and interesting discussion of the role of restrictions in improvisation, see Chris Johnston's *The Improvisation Game*.⁸⁴ Other binaries I habitually use are: closed/open body; up/down; yes/no; etc.

However, here we went on to work exclusively with anticipation. We added the requirement to take a step forward at the same time as catching the ball. This heightens the concurrence of decision ('I'm going to catch the ball'), the action (the movement of the hands, arms, etc. towards the ball) and the consequence of action (the outcome, the way the ball sits in the hands, or runs away, plus the final posture of the body, etc.)

Next, having taken that step when catching the ball, repeat the step, and again and again, enough times to cross the circle. Then throw again. The way the first step turns out is what we call unthinking, or spontaneous, whereas we would normally say that the rest are repetitions, or conscious, or rehearsed. When working on improvisation, this binary of spontaneous/rehearsed interests me a great deal, and I would say that the two poles are equally good at seeming to be predictable or surprising. In other words, they are the same thing. But let us leave such a large subject for another time. Again!

Next in the game, we try and provoke more than one person to respond, either by pretending to throw the ball in one direction, then changing the decision, or by being ambiguous about its destination, etc. Now all those who have (spontaneously) reacted to the ball must give that first step forward, then repeat it and cross the circle. There may be one, two, three or many in action at the same time. The training in anticipation has now led us to respond immediately, manifesting our... now, how shall we phrase this?... 'impulse' (I am convinced we can find a better term to substitute this old chestnut, which is surely on its last legs) as a full action of crossing the space. I call this a full action, meaning that it has an objective which is understood in its very accomplishment.

And now the same, but the ball is invisible. Eventually, we forget about the ball as an external object, and continue to play with sending and receiving impulses and intentions. This then means that whenever you receive eye contact you will move. But of course eye contact works both ways, so both people will move. The "ball" is now two-way, and there are probably already several of them.

Now we transfer these rules to a stage area. We have a screen, behind which is an offstage area, and a chair in the middle of the onstage area. A group of 5 or 3 play the game. You can be on or off stage. Now instead of crossing the circle, you either enter or exit, whenever you get eye contact. Another option if you are on stage is to sit down when you get eye contact. And when you are sitting, your next move must be to stand up. And all those decisions are made with anticipation, i.e. moving before you would normally do so.

Is the object of the game to stay in the chair? No, the object is to play the rules. The desire here is not to stay in the chair, but to do the next action, as and when it presents itself as possible. Also, getting eye contact obliges you to take the next decision. There is no option of staying where you are.

Now we add some more objects and objectives. I like to use these concepts interchangeably. Because having an objective means using an object, for the use it was designed for. And, conversely, an object suggests or is even defined by the potential objective we can have with it.

We place onstage a table, and on it a bottle of water and an empty glass. You must use all objects normally, that is, the bottle is for pouring water into the glass, you can only drink out of the glass, not out of the bottle, and so on. These are what I call primary uses. We all know what they are, though they are problematised, of course, when we cross cultures. Clowning takes place on the one hand in this literal, material world, where things are what they are (a spade is a spade and is used for digging). This is where clowning expresses what we perceive as the reality behind the front, and can debunk, deconstruct and demolish our pretensions to civilised and polite correctness.

On the other hand, clowning may reach flights of the most absurd fancy, where anything is whatever you want it to be (a spade is not a spade and it is used for

sleeping on, for example). This is where clowning invokes its right to step over any boundaries. So, what is the connection between reality and pretence? And how do we travel from one to the other? Again, I must leave these questions for later, specifically for the third term of the project, when we shall be examining profaning.

But for the moment, let us just note that in clowning we can think of object use in at least four different categories:

1. Primary use: using an object for what it was designed for, e.g. using a bucket to carry water.
2. Secondary use: using an object for what it was not designed for, but for which purpose it may easily serve, e.g. standing on an upturned bucket in order to reach a high shelf.
3. Tertiary use: using an object for what it was not designed for, nor for what it might usefully serve, therefore necessitating an imaginative leap, e.g. using a bucket as an astronaut's helmet.
4. Contrary use: using an object in an inappropriate way or at the inappropriate time or in an inappropriate context; contrary use includes both secondary and tertiary uses, but is broader in scope as it includes the whole context, e.g. using a bucket to fill a bath tub when using the taps would be easier.

After a little practice, new elements of play present themselves, such as that of delaying or surprising the eye contact. We also see the possibility of cheating (see below).

Next we add the possibility of receiving our eye-contact-motivation from the audience. First we try it with a solo performer, then with pairs and trios. We can try this in two versions: 1. You can only receive eye-contact-motivation from the audience when you are alone on stage. And 2. Anytime.

As you must have eye contact in order to move, it appears that eye contact motivates the action. Particularly with a solo performer, it seems as though the audience becomes the performer's brain.

A couple of basic consequences show up clearly. If you look at the audience but then don't act, we are frustrated and hate you. But if you don't look for a long time, when you do and then act we are rewarded for our waiting. And of course, once the rule is understood, we can cheat: act without eye contact, or not act with eye contact.

A side effect of these rules is that if you look at the audience or partner all the time, it is difficult to end and start actions. Better to get your eye contact motivation first, then while performing your action, look at your objective: if you are sitting, look at the chair, etc. In fact, this may be the best (or only?) way that we can know what your objective is. This would mean that we can define an objective as that which you are looking at. This gives the effect that when you are looking at your objective, you are engaged in your own world. Could we thus define the 'Inner world', the world of the fiction? And when you look at the audience or partner, you are in the outer world, the social world of reality, the reality of the theatre event.

Whilst watching these experiments and discussing their consequences, it occurred to me that these rules might go some way to analysing and explaining some of the experiences I have had as an audience of clown performance, both good and bad. Could these rules then form part of a critical vocabulary for talking about clown performance? We shall see.

For example: there is eye contact with the audience, but no action comes... and again. This seems very familiar, something I have seen in shows I haven't enjoyed. Conversely, I'm quite happy for you to look at the wall, if you then look at us and do something new.

Lastly, we can cheat: move without eye contact or not move with eye contact. Cheating is a different thing from doing things badly. Cheating is a conscious act, perhaps, a choice. You need to choose the moment to cheat, when it will make it more fun for the audience. We discovered that the scene often develops along nicely for a while, following the rules, then often two performers find themselves looking at each other, unable to act, then there comes an escape, maybe via cheating which leads quickly into the end of the scene.

Let's go back to that question: 'is the object of the exercise to stay in the chair?' Now with the more complex action sequence involving the bottle, glass and water, the question became: 'is the aim to drink the water?' Well, yes and no. In the Barcelona workshops, when practising this exercise, one discussion centred on whether the exercise is about conflicts of desires. My reply was that if you are seeing the work as about who can drink the water first, then you are either looking at it wrong, or playing the scene wrong. As we have seen before, the desire is born with the onset of the action, and dies with its fulfilment. There is no super-objective.

Or is there? In a sense, the existence of these particular objects suggests its own particular objective, fruit of a particular sequence: open the bottle, pour the water into the glass, drink the water. As an audience, we can see that. We are not stupid. So there is no need for the actor to re-state this. Neither is it necessary, nor desirable, to desire the water so much that any other outcome becomes completely undesirable. If we both go to sit in the chair, and one sits and the other doesn't, then fine. There's only one chair, so one can sit and one can stand. Where is the conflict? Surely the objective has been achieved, that of having the chair occupied? Of course, one has just failed in the fulfilment of their aim, and perhaps we have laughed at that failure. But now we move on.

So, two people can achieve an objective without dragging conflict into it or having a problem with the problem. Although we need to have desire in order to achieve an objective, those desires are discrete units of action, not sequences of cause and effect. So, when you are sitting, your only desire can be to stand. Or: you cannot desire to sit when you are off stage, as this is not an available action. Nor can you desire to enter in order to sit. Clown has useful lessons here. The clown decides each objective in the moment, and is fully engaged in each action for itself. If the actor only concerns herself

with the task in hand, the rest will look after itself. But if she tries to carry the weight of a whole series of actions, she will be top heavy. Trust the audience to understand the sequences of actions and to interpret them if they wish to. But do not do their work for them by analysing your own actions. I find this removal of a kind of generalised desire on the part of the actor extremely...desirable. Maybe this is a kind of Buddhist clown, a clown without desire.

The bottle and glass seem to give us endless variations, it may even be that two clowns and two objects are a self-perpetuating system, just as three objects and one clown are (something we will look at elsewhere). The two clowns are like the two hands of the solo performer. We must investigate this further. What would happen with two clowns and three objects?

vi. Dance

This last piece of work is slightly different, in more than one way. Firstly, it is something we didn't do in the London workshops. This was partly due to time, and partly also due to the fact that it was led by Sara Pons, dance and clown teacher at the ECB. I had hoped to get Sara over to London before, but it wasn't possible. I hope to do so in the near future. We have been collaborating over the last year on how dance and clown meet, within the context of dance/clown classes at ECB. I asked Sara to offer selected parts of that work to the workshop, over the course of one three-hour session. This fell into three parts:

1. Preparation
2. Building a vocabulary
3. Improvisations

Preparation

Two or three at a time, move across the space in a straight line, and at each step turn 90°. You travel in the same direction, from one end of the room to the other, but keep changing the direction you are facing in. Next time, the turns are 180°. Then 270°, and finally 360°. Then we use combinations, e.g. first turn 90°, second turn 180°, third turn 270°, last turn 360°.

Each person will encounter their own limits at a particular point. I feel that this work is similar to working on acrobatics, but without the physical danger. Its similarity is in the way the body gets confused in the process of trying to direct itself in new patterns. Of course, you may be already quite expert at this, in which case you will need to complicate the movement even more in order to fail. The limit is defined by failure. Those used to dance may be more practised in using the mind to control the body, the same as a musician has integrated conscious decisions with finger movements, or as we all do when speaking our native language. We need to find out where we are incapable of speaking, playing or moving.

Creating a Vocabulary

The possible ways of moving were:

- Create gaps and go through them. Gaps can be of many kinds: the space between arm and torso, or between legs, or through finger and thumb, etc. Any part of the body can travel through those spaces, large or small. This is done solo, in pairs, and as a group.
- Help other to go to the floor. This is a simple process of aiding another person to travel to the floor, helping and guiding and supporting their body en route, especially the head. First in pairs, then as a group. And then the reverse, you help someone up off the floor, in a similar way.
- One touches the ground, one doesn't. In pairs, one person is touching the floor while the other is not. This position changes constantly. Use this to travel across the space.

Improvisations

In the improvisations, done in pairs, the only options are the three modes outlined above. You cannot use any other way of moving. The idea is to be as much as possible in that frontier zone where your movement may escape your control, as in the preparation exercise. The improvisations are done for the audience, i.e. making eye contact, and sometimes using the red nose.

The first few attempts tended to use a lot of the vocabulary, constantly, and thus appeared mechanical, unmotivated, and dull to watch. They began to work well, however, when it was realised that there is no obligation to be in constant movement, only that when you move, it must be a movement from the vocabulary. But that impulse to move cannot come from the knowledge of having a vocabulary, it must come from somewhere else. This is what differentiates this work from simply being contact improvisation, and takes it into the realm of clowning.

From where does the impulse come, then? For the moment, the best answer to that question is that the movement impulse comes from a sense of failure, of the void. This is an answer within the context of the work we are doing at the moment. It doesn't exclude other answers, but is the most useful hypothesis right now. In this dance work, it became clear that what was just as important as moving was witnessing. Witnessing is about being present, but without the need to do anything. Clowning can very easily reach this state, as it involves a very clear and open contact between performers and the audience.

Let me try to explain with an example from these improvisations. Performer X begins to move, forming a circle with her arm, expecting performer Y to move through it. Y doesn't move, but looks at X, at the audience, and is happy to be where she is. X shows signs of failure, but tries another form, expecting a response from Y. Y remains happy to be still. X sinks further. In this example, X is trying to make things happen, to use the

vocabulary, and Y is happy to wait, and has no need to show anything. This becomes X's failure, and it is Y's looks, between X and the audience, that allow us, the audience, to see what is happening to X. In other words, Y is the witness that allows the audience to know what is happening to X.

In other exercises we have defined quite clearly sometimes how that decision to move may come about. It may be when eye contact is made, or when the ball comes to you, or when someone is going to hit you, or because you are sitting and next you must stand, or because there is a glass of water in your hand, and so on. I think we can put these motivations into two broad categories: the existential and the material. The existential covers those states where one feels failure, the void, the flop, the exposure of what was hidden, etc. The material covers those decisions that are made based on the reality of the space, objects and bodies, understood as having their primary use, at least at first.

In this first stage of the investigation, we have been focusing on the existential side of things, that is rooted in failure as a means to presence. It is a strange kind of presence, because failure is really a kind of absence, the absence of success. But, far from absence being a hindrance to presence, it becomes that which produces that presence. In clowning we see that presence-through-success is impossible, or nearly so, occurring only every now and again. In other words, it is usually impossible to be fully present. But rather than despairing at the impossibility of wholeness and complete presence, in clowning we accept that failure, and then that failure-acceptance leads us to success, or to presence. This is a great conjuring trick that goes right to the heart of the actor's paradox. Clowning may offer a fast-track to finding this presence-in-absence, as it is defined by failure-as-success, and escapes the trap that the serious actor has historically sometimes fallen into of having to pretend that what he is acting is "really real".

This dance-clown work gives us a form in which to produce very simple, but very rich, performance. This performance consists in making decisions in space, whilst conscious of the audience and the reality of what is being revealed in the process. This is a rather tortuous definition, but it is an attempt to sum up just what it is we are looking for. I think that this can be defined as dance, and it can be defined as clown, and, of course, as theatre. I think there is a possibility of understanding and defining theatre (or performance, if you prefer) from the perspective of clowning. That, by understanding how clowning works, we can understand better how theatre in general works. And that this is possible because clowning is, simply, theatre. Or dance.

Part 3: What Next?

All sessions have been recorded on video by Mark Morreau or myself. Mark is a former circus performer and a well-established video maker and website creator, and has worked for numerous circus and other performers. I am now in the process of re-viewing the footage. I have also created a new section on my own website to cover the project. This includes documentation in text, image and video, and a blog where all can discuss the issues.

Other activity underway includes:

Editing of Video and Photos. The process of writing these notes has included looking at the video recordings of the workshops, and along the way I have begun to select sequences that interest me. I will now start producing an edited version, viewable by participants and all interested parties. I have also begun extracting still images from the videos. Photos taken during the Barcelona workshop are being prepared as part of the design of a short publicity booklet intended to present the project as whole.

Establishing other working groups. I hope to give a workshop in April 2008 in New York (at the Michael Chekhov Actors Studio, in collaboration with Lenard Petit) and in May or June in St. Petersburg (in collaboration with Pezo Theatre Company).

Proposals to conferences. Sent or underway to CETT and to the International Festival-Fair "Theatre Methods 08: Between Tradition and Contemporaneity" (July, Latvia).

Contact with professionals. I have started discussions with various professionals, on different means of collaboration with the project. These include: Barry Grantham (eccentric dance), Diana Campbell Jewitt (folk theatre), Bill Beeman (specialist in Iranian popular theatre), and several London-based clown teachers. I am compiling a mailing list of interested academics and practitioners, in order to disseminate updates of the project.

Alumni. I have begun discussions with Caroline Clark at CSSD about how to involve alumni. So far we have talked about how to target alumni that may be interested, and also about finding "big name" alumni to pledge their support, if only in name. This could be a useful avenue to explore, with the aim of bringing the investigation into the public arena.

Arts Council. I have begun discussions with Chenine Bhatena at the Arts Council about the feasibility of funding a parallel performance project. This would enable paid rehearsals at a later stage, to enable professional work to be shown, with the possibility of a permanent company being born out of the whole process.

Teaching at CSSD. I shall be teaching the Classical Acting, Puppetry and Screen Acting students this term, as well as hopefully a session with the MA Writing students.

Participants and Project Partners. A relationship has already begun to emerge between the workshops at CSSD and ECB, as is evidenced in the way work has spilled over from one place to the next. One London participant attended the Barcelona

workshops, and it is hoped that two Barcelona participants will travel to St. Petersburg to take part in the planned workshop in spring 2008. Two other participants from Barcelona also intend attending some of the next London sessions. In both groups the cultural mix is fairly varied. By country of origin, they are:

In London: UK 8, Canada 1, USA 1, Colombia 1, Spain 3, Greece 1.

In Barcelona: Spain 6, Spain/Germany 1, Germany/Russia 1, Greece 1, Brazil 2.

A note on the Barcelona participants: the original project description envisaged that they would all have completed a year's clown training. This was approximately the case, though some have done less and some more. Other criteria that guided my choice (for they were all invited to participate by me) was that I was looking for performers who already had some artistic integrity and personality of their own. A kind of artistic maturity, you could call it. I think this comes partly with experience, but more importantly it is something that some create whilst others do not. Members of this workshop therefore had strong personalities as performers, with wide differences between them. I intuitively felt this would be stimulating and productive for what I want to investigate. After the workshop, I now feel this more clearly, and that it is a pointer towards a way of working with a group of performers that might interest me. That way would be moving away from ensemble work as it has been thought of, or the moulding of a style. At any rate, this is something to keep an eye on as we progress.

We should also consider in this equation the roles of the workshops given on regular courses at CSSD. These are not some kind of separate one-way process. Whilst maintaining their nature as part of clearly programmed courses of study, they are also already proving to be vital laboratories in the context of my own investigation. Different things can be explored in the context of Actor Training students than can be with Classical students. Varying hypotheses are born and tested in these varying contexts. In fact, it would be wise to keep under continual review the whole network of relationships between workshop groups.

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¹ <http://www.nosetonose.info/approach.htm>

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³ ibid

⁴ John Wright (2006), *Why Is That So Funny?: A Practical Exploration of Physical Comedy*, London: Nick Herne Books, p.221.

⁵ Ibid., p.222.

⁶ Ibid., p.227.

⁷ Tristan Rémy (1945), *Les Clowns*, Paris: Grasset.

⁸ Franc Chamberlain and Ralph Yarrow (eds.) (2002) *Jacques Lecoq and the British Theatre*, Oxford: Routledge, p.5.

⁹ Ibid., p.7.

¹⁰ Simon Murray, "Tout bouge: Jacques Lecoq, Modern Mime and the Zero Body", in Franc Chamberlain and Ralph Yarrow (eds.) (2002) *Jacques Lecoq and the British Theatre*, Oxford: Routledge, pp 32 and 37.

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- ²⁶ John Wright, "The Masks of Jacques Lecoq" in Franc Chamberlain and Ralph Yarrow (eds.) (2002) *Jacques Lecoq and the British Theatre*, Oxford: Routledge, p.73.
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- ²⁸ Simon Murray (2003), *Jacques Lecoq*, London: Routledge, p.62.
- ²⁹ <http://www.contemporaryclowningprojects.com/training.htm>
- ³⁰ <http://paper.avui.cat/article/cultura/108163/dotze/pallassos/vexats.html>, my translation.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² www.secondfirstbrigade.blogspot.com
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