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‘The work of a clown is to make the audience
burst out laughing’
Learning Clown at École Philippe Gaulier

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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This is the first full-length study of clown training at Gaulier's school. I take literally Gaulier's statement, 'The work of a clown is to make the audience burst out laughing' (2007: 289). I interpret this to mean that the relationship with the audience plays a defining part in clown practice. Throughout the thesis I consider clowns to have audiences, and argue that the presence of peers in the classroom is a key feature of the learning.

I take into account the individual nature of learning, by examining my own experiences learning Clown at the school, and comparing this with the experiences of other writers and a selection of practitioners that have given interviews towards this project. What I call a pedagogy of spectatorship focuses students' attention towards their classmates, who are audience to everything that takes place in the Clown classroom. Gaulier's observational skill and charismatic teaching style can enable students to perceive audience laughter and silence as crucial feedback. I demonstrate the audience role in three areas of clown practice: complicit play, the 'flop' and the use of the body as ridiculous. I argue that the École Philippe Gaulier provides lessons on the skills necessary to listen to audiences, so that each student can discover the ways in which she can 'make the audience burst out laughing'.

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Introduction

Did I say 'good afternoon'?

Philippe Gaulier opened each day of his Clown workshop (2009) with the question, 'Did I say "good afternoon"?' It was not quite a greeting, and certainly not a formal introduction to what we would do that day. The repeated question was, in its way, the start of the day's games. The teacher's question to the students disrupts the expected hierarchy of a classroom. It refers to his ageing body, chiming with his weary expression. We came to realise that it was a game, which would be repeated every day, and though our reply would always be the same, it would always bring a smile to our faces. The answer was no, he hadn't said 'good afternoon', apart from in this question, and his failure to behave 'normally' amused us. This renowned clown teacher, like the genre of clown itself, resists linear introduction or explanation - all newcomers have some kind of prior knowledge through reputation, culturally accepted ideas, or lived practice. So the question, which to a reader might be utterly opaque, or might be familiar and already stimulating a rich, complex memory, serves as my opening to a thesis about the Clown workshop at École Philippe Gaulier.

This is the first full-length study of clown training at Gaulier's school. I take literally Gaulier's statement, 'The work of a clown is to make the audience burst out laughing' (Gaulier 2007: 289). I interpret this to mean that the relationship with the audience plays a defining part in clown practice. Throughout the thesis I consider clowns to have audiences, and argue that the presence of peers in the classroom is a key feature of the pedagogy and of the skills that are learnt.

École Philippe Gaulier is made up of a series of courses on different performance genres, which add up to two years, following the pattern of school terms - October to December, January to March and April to June. The first year consists of eight courses, between two and five weeks long. In the academic year 2014-2015, these courses are scheduled to be 'Le Jeu, Masque Neutre and Greek Tragedy, Mask Play and Molière, Mélodrama, Writing and Directing, Shakespeare-Tchekhov [sic], Characters, and Clowns' (Gaulier 2013). The courses can be studied as one continuous curriculum or 'à la carte', where individual courses are taken separately (Gaulier 2013). Students pay €2300 per term if they choose

the former option, or the fees for each separate course are between €900 and €1800. There is also a schedule of more advanced courses, aimed at more experienced practitioners, which are commonly considered to be a second year of the curriculum. This second year consists of three term-long courses, in 2014-15, Clowns, Vaudeville and Bouffons, costing €2300 each. The three advanced courses conclude with a public show at the school. Gaulier offers beginner-level workshops in Clown and Bouffon at his school during the summer, which last four weeks and cost €1300 and €1400 respectively.¹ He also travels the world teaching shorter workshops, usually lasting one week (he lists on his website groups in Singapore, Germany, UK, Spain and Ireland, but has also taught in Canada, USA and Australia).

École Philippe Gaulier had its premises in London between 1991 and 2000, then moved back to France, since which time the teaching language has been English. From 2000 the school was located in Montreuil, from 2005 in Sceaux, and in 2011 it relocated to its own larger premises in the village of Étampes, 55 minutes by RER train to the south of Paris. The curriculum has never been fixed, but always fluctuated and changed.²

A day in the life

I was a student of *Le Jeu* in 2008, and of the summer Clown course in 2009. I stayed with friends, a large family who live in the east of the city. The Clown course ran for three hours each weekday afternoon, which gave me a reasonable amount of time for tourism and socialising. I travelled by RER into the city centre, and then by another RER to Sceaux. There was a Bouffon course running in the morning of each day, and several students were taking this as well as Clown. I arrived at the school building, an old telephone exchange, and usually met other students at the door. We climbed three flights of stairs and headed into the small dressing room, triangular because of its position in the eaves of the building. 30 students from around the world, aged between 18 and 60, but

¹ On his website, the curriculum of the school is divided into 'courses' but the separate summer offerings are referred to in 'workshops'. I have adopted this terminology, but according to other writers discussing Gaulier, and my interviewees, it seems more common to refer to all the courses, irrespective of their length, as 'workshops'. See Matthews 2012 for discussion of this

² For example, in 2008, Neutral Mask and Greek Tragedy were separated into two courses, and there was no Clown course in the first year.

mostly in their 20s and 30s, dressed in costumes assigned to each student. Gaulier gives loose instructions for costume on the first day of the workshop (for example, 'P.E. teacher', 'gangster', or 'concierge') and students purchased items in the second-hand shops and fancy-dress shops advertised on the pin board in the corridor. At the start of each class, after Gaulier's greeting, we played *Balthazar Says*, a version of the children's game elsewhere called 'Simon says', with (elaborate, embarrassing, slightly painful but funny) forfeits for players who made a mistake.³ When 'Balthazar says the game is over', a different game would begin.

There were two common structures that took up the remaining duration of the class. Many days a small group or an individual student would stand in the centre of the room, taking turns to perform according to Gaulier's instructions while the others watched from benches along the far end. Alternatively, the whole group would play another children's game that led to mistakes. Again, we would take it in turns to perform according to instructions; our turn would come when we made a mistake in the game. In this structure, we performed with the incentive that if we were funny, we would 'save our life' and gain another chance in the game. The performance instructions varied from day to day: grimacing, saying rude words 'in order to be complimented on how grown up you are', dancing 'to show you know all about rock and roll', singing along to music and continuing the song when the track is turned off, and more obscure tasks such as, 'The normal clown is off sick. You are invited on stage for ten minutes to perform. Your train is arriving in 10 minutes. Also you are cooking a chicken in the wings, but pretending it's normal' (2009: 26). Gaulier sat, watching, clutching a large frame drum. After each attempt comes the moment that students had heard about before attending the school: he hit the drum as soon as the student on stage was not funny. This was often - painfully frequently - immediately after their attempt began. He dismissed them from the stage, with a wave of his drumstick, an incisive and witty comment about what was bad about the attempt, or a short rebuke, such as 'we kill you' or 'thank you for this horrible moment'. In the ten-minute comfort break, and after the day's class, when the students would fill the nearby café we would discuss the game, the

³ See Kendrick (2010: 154) for a comprehensive description of the game. Incidentally, Kendrick refers to the game as being called 'Samuel says', Samuel and Balthazar being the names of Gaulier's adult sons, both of whom have studied with their father.

performances, what Gaulier had said, while getting to know one another over beer, coffee and croque-monsieurs. Gradually, students would drift away to our various lodgings across the city.⁴

I enjoyed my time studying Clown at École Philippe Gaulier, laughed a lot, made friends and was absorbed in the lessons of the school. I was a terrible clown. I found it very difficult to face not getting laughs for my attempts at the games, and eventually decided that I was happiest when discussing, thinking and writing in my journal. I did not leave the school feeling able to (call myself a) clown, but nonetheless I remained interested in what I had learnt there, what I might have missed, and how students who did go on to make clown performance did so, and was glad to channel this personal interest into the current research project, and cast my performance aspirations aside.

Research Questions

The thesis seeks to answer the following questions:

How do students of École Philippe Gaulier learn clowning?

How can we understand clown practices of physicality, play and flop?

How might the lessons of the Clown course be used in performance?

Methods

My methods in answering the above questions are multiple. I have used written literature, including published books and articles, some recent PhD theses, blogs and websites. Following the model of previous writers, I have also drawn on my own practical experience of Gaulier's classroom, which consists of a total nine weeks. In order to expand upon my own experience, I also conducted interviews with nine individuals who have all trained with Gaulier.

⁴ Étampes being further from Paris than Sceaux, and a cheaper area, a higher proportion of students live close to the school. The school now has its own building, with its door onto a village square and more prominent signage, and advertises for the end-of-term shows in the window.

Practical experience

I kept a journal during both courses, initially out of a habit fostered in my drama degree, to write reflexive journals of practical work, but increasingly I used it to help me think through the day's activities. In my journals, I regularly quote or paraphrase Gaulier's voice and write as though addressing an imaginary student, or my future self, such as, 'You only do anything if you are trying to be funny [...] you have to do something to be funny' (2009: 2-3). The notes I took in the class mostly consist of scribbled thoughts and phrases, whereas notes after the class are in longer sentences and paragraphs, as when writing them I was thinking through ideas of what had happened, and what I could try the next day. The notes often contradict each other. Some notes would make no sense to any other reader, but evoke very strong memories. For example during the last week, I wrote 'Leave before the end, so the audience thinks "oh no, the clown has gone". Always' (2009: 45). This advice was directed specifically at me, as part of an exercise in which I had initially made people laugh loudly, but the laughs had petered out. I tried to keep the joke going, and I was dismissed and given this note. The following day, I wrote my experience longhand, but it does not evoke the memory as powerfully as the short command to 'leave before the end'.

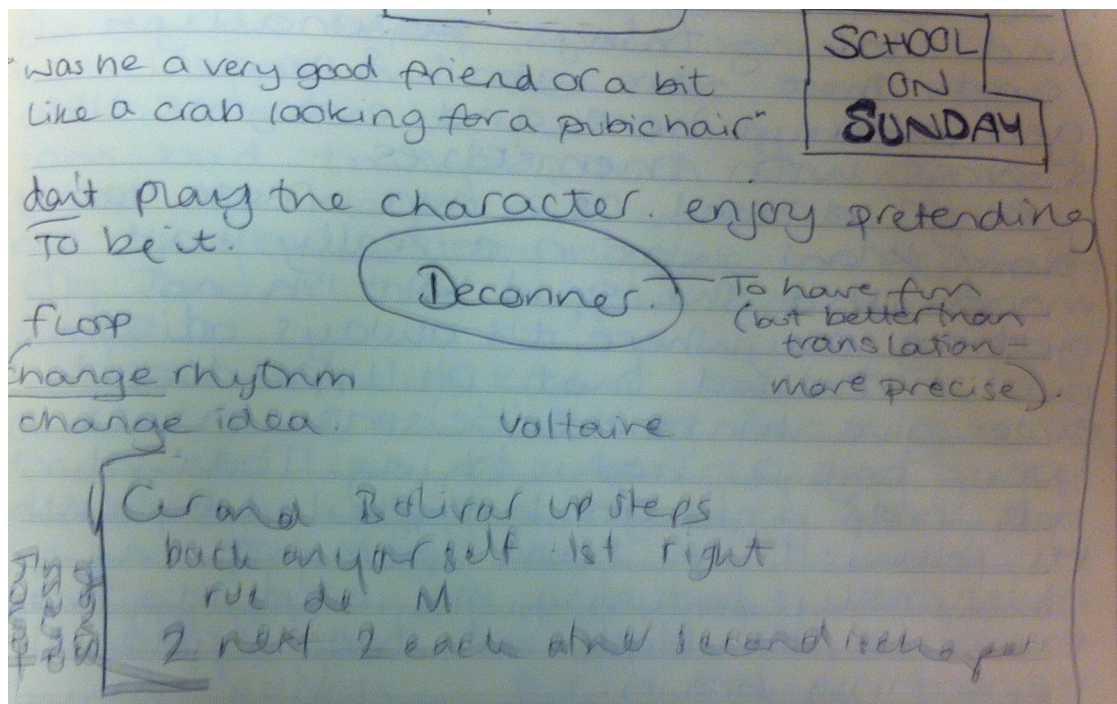


Figure 1: A page from my journal (2009)

In the above excerpt from my journal, a line of Gaulier's critique that I had found funny sits alongside practical notes, of how to find a costume shop and to remember to attend school on Sunday; the words 'Deconner' and 'flop'; an instruction to myself, 'don't play the character...', and the name of the French writer Voltaire (I don't remember why). The simultaneity of these on the page certainly captures the way my thoughts felt at the time.

I find that I remember moments that I did not dwell on at the time, whereas my personal experience (of new friendships, of the welcoming home of the friends I stayed with, of missing my normal life) was constantly part of how I reflected on the class. In my journal on the Clown course, I write about my excitement at meeting a fellow researcher, Maggie Irving, who at the time was in the first year of her PhD. I note that I enjoy thinking and writing more than 'failing' and being 'stupid', but it is clear that I was proud and happy on the few occasions that I made my peers laugh. Reading this journal, I remember that I had a lot of fun and laughed a lot during the course, laugh at lines such as the one about crabs pictured in Figure 1, and I feel happy that I was able to continue with the postgraduate study I was so excited to begin. During the course of writing this thesis, I have mostly used the journals for cheering myself up when the thinking and writing has been challenging. Although this use of the journal in the process of writing might seem irrelevant to the completed thesis, I believe that the fact I have sought and been able to find pleasure in writing is wholly appropriate to my subject, because Gaulier seeks to give his students space to learn how they can each find pleasure in what they do. If visible pleasure in a clown performer can be detected and enjoyed by an audience, perhaps my enthusiasm for the subject will work in a similar way, to make the thesis more enjoyable to read.

Since beginning my research, I have encountered Gaulier twice - I participated in a one-week workshop he taught on Bouffon, organised by Clown Lab, Manchester in August 2012, and I visited the school in Étampes, where I watched two performances of the Clown Show presented at the end of the second year (December, 2013). I watched these shows as an informed spectator, sat among other current and past students, and following the show, wrote detailed notes of the scenes, techniques and appearance of what I had seen. The second night, I also reflected on the changes between the two performances.

My own practical experience as a student, performer and spectator has influenced this study, and provided me with some parallel practical knowledge that supports the theoretical argument presented for assessment. This is not a practice-as-research PhD, but my work does draw on what Robin Nelson calls an embodied knowledge, or 'knowing-in-doing'. Nelson cites philosopher David Pears to explain the difference:

I know how to ride a bicycle, but I cannot say how I balance because I have no method. I may know that certain muscles are involved, but that factual knowledge comes later, if at all, and it could hardly be used in instruction (Pears 1971:26-27, cited in Nelson 2013: 9).

Nelson understands that 'To know how to ride a bike is to ride it' (Nelson 2013: 9) and that this physical, practical knowledge cannot be demonstrated through writing. Despite my practical experience of the Clown course, my quest can best be compared to the researcher of anatomy and balance, who wants to produce a written and researched study of how human bodies ride bikes. The project won't make them or their reader a better cyclist, necessarily, though it might. The researcher doesn't necessarily need to be able to ride a bike to do this study, but perhaps the experience of cycling, or watching cycling, is what got them interested in the topic in the first place. The theoretical knowledge is in some ways different to the practical. I have experimented with making audiences laugh during my research process: at conferences, in a lecture on my subject, at an outreach event called *Bright Club*, where university researchers present in a comedy club. This practical experience with audiences has allowed me to develop a practice of clowning despite my intention to move away from practice after my experience at the school. During these performances, there were moments that surprised me but in fact correlated with what I have argued. I hope that any readers with practical knowledge of clowning will be able to find interesting theoretical insight that might even be applicable to their practice.

Interviews

In the hope of gaining a wider perspective of clown training and its application, I interviewed people who had studied at the school for longer than two months, some of whom have gone on to make clown work since leaving. I sought to broaden my insights into the embodied knowledge gained by participants in the

longer Clown courses, and also to discover how these have been consciously applied in performance. Participants were given the following information on the interview:

The interviews will be held with a semi-structured format, I will ask you questions about your training, particularly your progress through the Clown workshop, the role of the other students in the class and which lessons have stuck with you. I am also interested to hear anything that you would like to tell me about your experience of training and of making clown pieces, even if it falls outside of the questions. I am hoping that this process will open new avenues for me to explore, and to do this I will be paying particular attention to the way you describe and remember your training, and the aspects of this training that you feel have been particularly significant in your practice.⁵

This semi-structured approach was used to avoid leading the participants' responses, and giving this information beforehand (in most cases) meant that interviewees could arrive with an idea of what they thought might be useful insights.

The selection process was a case of finding opportunities to speak to people with this practical experience. The first one came out of a chance encounter; I was introduced to Phil Burgers after seeing his two shows, *Befrdfgth* and *Dr Brown Brown Brown Brown and his Singing Tiger*, at the Edinburgh fringe (August 23, 2012; August 22, 2012). Burgers has had critical and box-office success with these and two other shows, and his press material describes him as a Gaulier-trained clown. He studied at the school between 2005 and 2007. I was not fully prepared for this interview, so we spoke in an unstructured manner, but the conversation provided me with a recent first-person perspective of devising clown material after leaving the school. This assured me that interviews would be a productive way to widen the perspective from which I write. I then drew up a list of potential interviewees, and contacted people by email, arranging meetings where people were available and reachable within the constraints of time and money that a PhD demands. I conducted the rest of the interviews in a variety of convenient locations - I spoke to Amy Gibbons at a café during the Bouffon workshop in Manchester (27th September 2012). Gibbons was at the time half way through her course of study, having started in 2011 but taken the

⁵ See Appendices for the full participant information form, and edited transcripts of all interviews.

courses 'à la carte' - choosing to take the first and second year together. She was also participating in the short Bouffon workshop. I interviewed Alan Fairbairn in the Theatre Studies department at the University of Glasgow, after I had participated in his weekend Clown workshop organised by Simon Murray (10th November 2012). Fairbairn trained at the Lecoq school from 1985-87, taking *Le Jeu* with Gaulier in 1983 and Clown with him in the early 1990s. As well as teaching, he performs as a clown in France, and I was able to see his acts at a discussion event on Jacques Lecoq at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS). Unfortunately a technical problem left me unable to use the second half of our conversation, but the chance to speak to Fairbairn and to participate in a two-day Clown workshop taught by him gave me a valuable insight into the differences between approaches to clown held by Gaulier and Lecoq. Alongside Fairbairn, Joyce Deans and Mark Saunders spoke about their respective training at the Lecoq school, she 1978-80, and he 1977-79, when Gaulier 'taught one of four improvisation classes' (Deans and Saunders 2012). I arranged to meet them in their office at the RCS (4th December 2012) to discuss their experience of this interesting moment of Gaulier's history. The conversations with Fairbairn, Deans and Saunders offered me an impression of how Gaulier's teaching makes a lasting impression, and in the case of the RCS teachers, how it is being used in mainstream actor training in the UK.

Having found clown company Spymonkey to be a rich case study for my MPhil dissertation, I contacted them to ask for an interview. Before their show *Cooped* I met two (of four) members of the company, Toby Park and Aitor Basauri, in the foyer of the Royal and Derngate Northampton (January 16, 2013). I had believed that the company had met at the school, but discovered that this was not the case. Park, Basauri and their colleagues Stephan Kreiss and Petra Massey all spent some time at the school between 1988 and 2000, but no two at the same time. This information shows the strength of networks among Gaulier-trained performers - mutual friends from courses, short workshops or working together, the connections that probably take place all over the theatre industry, are felt to be connected to the school - Basauri and Park were introduced by a mutual colleague and friend, but Park describes this meeting as 'kind of through Gaulier' (Park 2013). With Basauri and Park I was able to discuss specific moments from their shows in relation to the teaching.

Later that week, I met clown and meditation teacher Jaya Harlten at a conference at Central School of Speech and Drama, and conducted an interview in a practice room there. Harlten trained in clowning with Mick Barnfather and Giovanni Fusetti, but not with Gaulier, so I hoped her input would be a useful comparator to the other participants. Since this interview took place, my enquiry has focused more specifically on Gaulier's school, and so Harlten's interview participation is only discussed briefly in Chapter 2. Returning to Glasgow, I met with Mark Saunders again, because I wanted to discover more about his clown practice after completing training. Following a recommendation from Park and Basauri, I contacted director Cal McCrystal whom I met at his house in London. McCrystal, who trained with Gaulier 'on and off' between 1988 and 1993, has the highest profile of my interviewees, and also provided me with an account of being directed by Gaulier in a Fringe show, *The End of the Tunnel*, which I discuss in Chapter 5. McCrystal has worked as a director with Spymonkey and also at the National Theatre and Cirque du Soleil. This discussion offered a valuable insight into the use of clown practices in more mainstream theatre. Finally, I met with a friend, Mark Jarmuz, with whom I had studied *Le Jeu* in 2008, who had since taken the rest of the curriculum, finishing in 2013. We met at my hotel in Étampes, before watching the Clown Show at the school (December, 2013). Jarmuz and I discussed our shared knowledge of *Le Jeu*, and he told me about his experiences since.

This selection method has its flaws - and would not be at all satisfactory if I were seeking quantitative data about the school. However, I feel that the sample is varied in a number of ways, creating some breadth of qualitative insight. The participants studied at the school between 1977 and 2013, but three of them were at the school in the last five years. Six have made clown(esque) performances, and five of them teach Acting or Clown. Two, Basauri and Jarmuz, write blogs about their practice, which I have also consulted. These practitioners were all working in the UK (Fairbairn is usually in France, Basauri is from Spain but working in UK with Spymonkey, Burgers from the USA but at Edinburgh Fringe) so this has influenced my sample - the students at the school are from many countries around the world. Of my interviewees, all but three are white and male with no visible disability. A weakness is that I did not speak to any women who are making clown performance. Of the three women I spoke to

(also white with no visible disability) Harlten trained with other practitioners, Deans felt little affinity with clown, and Gibbons was still in training but felt more interested in bouffon than clown. Perhaps it is an accident of sampling, or perhaps it is indicative of who goes on to make clown work. The most disheartening interpretation of this small sample suggests that these white English-speaking men have had the most access to opportunities to perform, direct, and teach - or the most opportunities for success in the school. However, this was not a quantitative survey and the small sample size should warn against such conclusions being drawn. A future study could seek out a wider sample, including people who did not enjoy studying Clown, people who were studying in their second language, or it could have targeted individuals from specific demographics for participation. It might be interesting to examine quantitative questions, such as the number of people who performed as clowns after completing the course within particular timeframes. Nonetheless, speaking to ten people with different subjective experiences allowed me to move beyond offering a single perspective on the Clown course, and I hope that speaking about practice with these people brings in to the academic discussion the voices of practitioners as well as analysts, without giving more authoritative status to either.

I recorded the interviews and transcribed them in full before analysing them. I identified the ways in which participants discussed the audience and teacher, paying attention to the vocabulary and anecdotes offered. I noticed a trend for participants to address me as already sharing certain knowledge, using the discourse marker, 'you know'. This familiarity was made more explicit by the fact that we referred to Gaulier by his first name. I had made it clear to participants that I had had a little experience at the school, but that I considered their embodied experience to be greater than my own. Furthermore, having seen and enjoyed the performances by Fairbairn, Burgers and Spymonkey, and those directed by McCrystal, I had expected these participants to be able to express or explain their (high level) clown skills. I had been imagining them as 'better students' than me, perhaps with a clearer insight into the teaching. The way in which all the interviewees considered us to have a shared experience changed my view on this, as our subjective experiences all seemed to share an ambivalence between clarity about what had been funny and what Gaulier had

said, and a tentative attempt at interpreting what that might mean and how it might be applied.

Chapter structure

Each of my chapters interrogates Gaulier's school through a trope that has been used to discuss clowns in general and Gaulier's clowns more specifically. The titles of the chapters are each followed by an epigrammatic quote from either the Clown workshop or Gaulier's book. I do this in order to locate my analysis in a way that that is recognisable to a reader with the embodied knowledge acquired through participation in Gaulier's Clown course. I interrogate the vocabulary, not to flatten it, but to demystify the potential layers of meaning that the words contain - this mirrors an approach I hope I have applied throughout the thesis, to examine but not to explain the ambiguities, contradictions and other comic aspects of Gaulier's clown training.

Chapter 1, 'Gaulier in Context: *What people imagine about clown is extremely irritating*', reviews the field of literature on which this thesis is based. The tongue-in-cheek title reflects Gaulier's distrust of academic writing and popular perception of the clown figure. The chapter introduces texts that I have used throughout, and also surveys some related literatures that have been less directly used, to define the parameters of the thesis. Each chapter branches into relevant fields of research within and outwith Theatre Studies.

Though Gaulier has performed and directed, it is for his workshop classrooms that he is most widely known. Chapter 2, 'Pedagogy of Spectatorship: *Listen to the laughter because it helps you discover your clown*', develops analyses of Gaulier's classroom and makes comparison with education models in the UK and France, and specifically theatre schools. In this chapter I also draw on literature by and about Jacques Rancière (2010), by Mark Evans (2009) and Charles Garoian (1999). I argue that the structures of interaction in the classroom emphasise the audience of fellow students, teaching clown students to prioritise the reactions of their audiences.

The latter three chapters of my thesis examine clown practices; complicit play, flop and physicality, and place these into wider contexts and traditions. Play has

been the most thoroughly investigated aspect of Gaulier's teaching, and the playful (or *Le Jeu*) is seen as a defining feature of Gaulier's teaching. Chapter 3, 'Complicit Play: *The game and the imagination are thick as thieves*', places alongside play another key term and evasive performance skill, *complicité*. I argue that the complicit play sought by clown students includes other performers, the teacher and the audience. I find the ambiguities, multiplicities and simultaneities of the term 'play' to be descriptive of what clown students do. Multiple interpretations, players and levels of play create an engaged distance between the performer and the clown practice they learn. I draw on a variety of theories of play, including those put forward by cognitive scientists Luk Ciompi and Jaak Panksepp (2005), theatre scholars interested in this field, such as Bruce McConachie (2008) and Rick Kemp (2012), and play theorists Pat Kane (2004), Sutton-Smith (1997), Roger Caillois (2001) and James Carse (2012).

Gaulier's use of failure and flop are also recognised aspects of his teaching, emphasised by both Jon Davison (2013) and Daniel Bye (2008). Chapter 4, 'Failure and the Flop: *Thank you, Monsieur Flop, for your help. Now, I save the show*', looks at failure as a trend in contemporary theatre, and as a central feature of comedy theories. Relevant here are recent texts by Sara Jane Bailes (2011) and Judith Halberstam (2011). I suggest that for clown students, Gaulier's use of the term 'flop' allows failure to be considered as flexible and temporary, since it is judged by the audience's reaction, it can become success through acknowledgement that creates laughter. I consider comic theories of William Desmond (1988) and Peter Martenson, (2006; 2010) which support my argument that comic failure, or flop, is central to making audiences laugh.

Chapter 5, 'The clown body and concepts of self: *It is the hidden twin, ridiculous, comic, vulnerable and stupid*', examines the historical traditions of physical comedy that have influenced Gaulier's clown teaching, including comic bodies in circus and mime traditions. I use literature on circus from Helen Stoddart (2000) and Peta Tait (2005), and on mime from Peter Bu (1983), Mira Felner (1985) and Thomas Leabhart (1989). The clown body has been explored in terms of mask and self, especially by Laura Purcell Gates (2011). I examine the functions of mask and costume in relationship to the real bodies in the classroom, and find the ridiculous clown body of each individual to be (potentially) identified by the laughing classmates. The word 'ridiculous' is

derived from the Latin *ridiculus*, meaning 'that which excites laughter'. It suggests something that provokes an embodied reaction, but does not describe the action that achieves this. I use the term 'ridiculous' throughout the thesis but examine its use in the final chapter.

My argument throughout these chapters is that the audience, made up of fellow students, take a critical role in the learning process. The teaching focuses students' attention to their audience, and it means that student clowns learn to interact directly with this audience. The peers in the classroom, and later the public, define the flop and the ridiculous body. Clowns aim for complicit play with each new audience. The Conclusion, '*Thank you for this horrible moment*' is named after a comment I heard very often during the Clown workshop. It considers three things that have arisen in each of the chapters, firstly the inescapable discussion of authenticity, self and vulnerability in clowning, secondly Gaulier's own clown performance in the workshop, and lastly, and most significantly, my thesis that the audience offers the most important lesson of the course - the clown student finds out how she can make them 'burst out laughing'.

Chapter 1: Gaulier in Context

‘What people imagine about the clown is extremely irritating’ (2007: 289).

In this chapter I survey the field within theatre studies that has informed my research on Clown and the École Philippe Gaulier. I begin with Gaulier’s association to the tradition of mime that emerged in 20th century France, particularly to the practice of Jacques Lecoq, an influential figure in Gaulier’s professional biography. A significant subsection of the existing literature consists of recent PhD research, and particular attention will be paid to the features of these doctoral theses that I have consciously emulated, as well as how Gaulier has been contextualised by these writers. After considering the existing texts that cover Gaulier, all of which associate him closely with clown, I introduce Gaulier’s own publication history. I then survey the wider literature on clowning, in order to document current scholarly interest and to define Gaulier’s practices of teaching amidst a wider understanding of the genre, outwith the mime tradition. I briefly note connections to some other contemporary clown practices. The potential differences and similarities to another popular laughter-oriented performance practice, stand-up comedy, help me to explain why I do not use semantic theories of jokes. I close the chapter with a working definition of the clowning taught at École Philippe Gaulier.

Clown in the French Mime Tradition

A significant practitioner of influence to mime in the 20th century was Jacques Copeau.⁶ Copeau drew on a variety of popular forms (Pitches 2007: 49) and was interested in the use of physicality and gesture in the popular comic genre of Commedia dell’arte, noting the performers’ collaboration and versatility. He proposed a revival of the company structure in the Commedia troupes:

the great revolution or rather the grand and majestic return to the oldest tradition. A brotherhood of farceurs always playing and improvising together - authors, actors, singers, musicians and acrobats (only clowns today are a survival of this form) (Copeau 1916, Letter to Louis Jovet, cited in Kurtz 1999: 42).

⁶ Copeau’s influence on Lecoq has been traced by Murray (2003: 28-33) Evans (2009: 60-63) and Felner (1985).

Copeau's aside, in informal correspondence, suggests an awareness of clowning as connected to the ancient traditions of mime, and thus as potentially useful in the 'grand and majestic return' of the form towards which he aspired. Davison (2013) examines Copeau's admiration of the circus clown trio, The Fratellini. In the period following the Great War 1914-1918, the circus in Europe, previously known for display of skilled human and animal bodies, suffered the loss of its equestrians, acrobats and horses, many of whom had served and died as cavalry. In response to this loss, Cirque Médrano heavily publicised a different aspect of its programme, the Fratellini clowns (Davison 2013: 88). Copeau wrote a preface to Pierre Mariel's 1923 biography of the trio. Davison translates:

What I call your "purity of style" is that technical perfection and especially the muscular perfection at the service of a spontaneous and sincere feeling. And I call "kindness" everything that you do with the smile of your true natures (Copeau 1923, cited by Davison 2013: 196).

For Davison, this interpretation of the Fratellini's kindness was a misunderstanding of the clowns' method. He tells us, without providing a reference, that Copeau 'grew disillusioned when he saw that the Fratellini's rehearsal and performance techniques were not based on some kind of innocent playfulness but in large part on set routines' (2013: 196). In the year that Copeau wrote this foreword, Paul and Francois Fratellini taught sessions on 'Acrobatics, games of strength and skill' at Copeau's school, and students undertook work 'in the ring at the Medrano Circus' (Copeau 1990: 43-44). This would suggest a deep engagement with the skills of the circus clowns, and could be seen as proof that Copeau believed the skills of the Fratellini were relevant to his acting students.

Gaulier's school bears traces of Copeau's experiments with clown. A view of clown as 'pure', honest and 'free', perhaps nostalgic or reductive of circus clowning, penetrated the mime training of the twentieth century. Copeau's theories on acting were developed in a variety of directions by twentieth century theatre practitioners, and mime was one of these strands. Etienne Decroux elaborated on Copeau's use of mask. Copeau had explored mask alongside acrobatics, circus skills and Hébertisme.⁷ Copeau's biographer,

⁷ George Hébert, physical education specialist who taught at Copeau's school, taught according to the theory of the 'noble savage', believing that a human body in a natural environment would

Maurice Kurtz, explains the teacher's belief that the mask 'commanded' the actor, covering the face, but also altering the body and voice 'irresistibly' (Kurtz 1999: 40). Decroux covered the heads of his students in fabric, creating a neutral mask. This mask has been developed and altered by both Lecoq and Gaulier, as explored by Purcell Gates. Decroux's mime was more theoretical, abstracted and serious than the previous incarnations of the form, and did not include any focus on laughter and popular entertainment, as Decroux 'care[d] little for the entertainment value of what he did' (Felner 1985: 52). As a result, clown or comic bodies do not make any appearance in Decroux's writing on mime. Nonetheless, the relationship between mime and clown is complex and at times mutually supportive. The successful performer Marcel Marceau, student of Decroux, became the popular image of mime, using mimetic illusion to create comic sketches and routines. Lecoq's students studied Neutral Mask as well as Commedia dell'Arte and clown. Mira Felner (1985) traces a link between major mime practitioners since Copeau, summarising the work of Decroux, Marceau, Jean-Louis Barrault and Lecoq. The association of mime with corporeal comedy is upheld by Felner, who identifies as mime the practices of Italian and French Commedia dell'Arte, pantomime in nineteenth century France and England, as well as film performers Chaplin and Keaton. Felner draws attention to the fact that in French and English dictionaries, the word 'mime' refers to the action, performer and the art form, thereby tying these three aspects of any performance together, inexorably. As such, the performer and his body are an essential part of the art form and its performance. In a similar way, the word 'clown' refers to the type of performance, the performer and a popular image, so we could argue that the individual clown's body is likely to be bound up in the performance she makes.

Purcell Gates (2011b) conducted a practice-based study of a rehearsal process and Gaulier's Clown and Neutral Mask courses, linking these to a historical analysis of French mime practice in the 20th century. She identifies a concept of 'neutrality' connected with a longer mime tradition, going back to the 19th century, that privileges the white male body as 'natural', as signified by straight lines and small controlled gestures. One chapter of Purcell Gates' thesis, from

move with a non-stylized, efficient and precise beauty (Felner 1985: 40). See also Murray (2003: 29-30) and Rudlin (2010: 54)

which an article has been published in *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* (2011a) focuses on how selfhood and authenticity figure in Gaulier's classroom, as an example of Lecoq-based practice. This classroom analysis identifies themes of 'the "natural" versus the "mechanical" body and concurrent themes of emotion and the "authentic" self' (2011b: 4). Her methods are clearly laid out:

I determined how the students made "meaning" through their own descriptions of their experience, their questions and comments in class, as well as close observation of their bodies in the classroom, particularly as their language about the body and their movements shifted based on pedagogical interventions (2011b: 10).

Purcell Gates' thesis proposes that Gaulier uses a 'pedagogy of disorientation', which creates a 'moment-to-moment awareness of the body unencumbered by habits of thought and movement' (2011b: 6). She interrogates the problems of reading and writing about an embodied practice. Her methods include 'brief, informal' open-ended interviews or discussions with Gaulier and students in breaks in the workshop, and semi-structured interviews the week following. She also observed, photographed and video recorded the classroom. This enables her to remain fairly detached from the observations, while still having a broad range of sources. One workshop example stood out in Purcell Gates' text, when she describes an exercise performing 'water' in the neutral mask. She vividly describes her own intentions and feelings, during the exercise and when receiving feedback: 'I removed my mask and waited for the inevitable praise. It never came' (Purcell Gates 2011b: 169). This writing describes a subjective experience, but the way in which it embraces that subjectivity allows me to picture myself as a student in the course, and to imaginatively experience the lesson. I have tried to emulate this writing style in my use of examples from the workshop. Purcell Gates is by no means alone in situating Gaulier alongside Lecoq, the teacher with whom he studied and had his first teaching experience.

Jacques Lecoq – Play and Popular Performance

The website of the École Philippe Gaulier mentions Jacques Lecoq, providing the following contextualising information:

Philippe Gaulier founded his school in 1980. In June of the same year, he told Jacques Lecoq (whose assistant he had been from 1971) that

he was leaving his school for ever. Travel shapes young people. As does freedom.

The theories on the theatre of J. Lecoq focussed [sic] on the idea of movement, the thoughts of the young rebel P. Gaulier were based around Le Jeu: the games which nature, animals and humans organise (ecolephilippegaulier.com: 'beginnings').

Describing himself as having been a 'young rebel', Gaulier acknowledges his connection to Lecoq but also claims his own space as a separate teacher, making clear to prospective students that though Gaulier is often discussed alongside the better-known Lecoq, this school is separate from that of his predecessor. Nonetheless, Gaulier's curriculum and approach to theatre teaching shares much territory with that of Lecoq, as has been demonstrated by Simon Murray (2007, 2010, 2013a).

As part of the Routledge Performance Practitioner series, Murray published an introductory guide, *Jacques Lecoq*, in 2003. Unlike the other volumes in the series, this was not an introductory guide to a large existing literature but was in fact the only monograph to date on Lecoq. References to Gaulier are tantalisingly brief in this text; he is evoked as working similarly to Lecoq in three particular arenas. Firstly, for sharing a pedagogical method Murray calls *via negativa* (2003: 50), which is related to the second, a commitment to play (2003: 65-71), and thirdly, distrust for the received understanding of mime (2003: 84). Murray observes that Lecoq's exploration of clowns was almost 'unexpected' and abided in the pedagogy due to the level of interest from students (Murray 2003: 61). The book does not dwell on clowns, but explores influences on Lecoq (from his life and other practitioners), Lecoq's texts, traces of the teaching in some companies that acknowledge his influence, and finally offers practical exercises for the reader to try. I refer to Murray's introduction to Lecoq's teaching practice throughout the thesis, since it has formed a stable base for academic understanding of this influential school. The first chapter, which explores Lecoq's influences from Copeau and Artaud, concludes that 'it is ultimately unhelpful to search for a definitive legacy inherited from earlier theatre practitioners' (2003: 41). Instead, Murray suggests that the reader should consider Lecoq's own observations and performance experiments with bodies and movement, which held his 'defining and abiding curiosity' (ibid). This has had a subtle impact on my own consideration of Gaulier's teaching. Lecoq's 'legacy' is directly inherited by Gaulier, as is evident in the younger man being

mentioned frequently alongside the elder in academic writing, not to mention the inclusion of the same performance genres and masks on both syllabuses, and the references to Lecoq on Gaulier's website. It is not unhelpful to pay attention to observations on Lecoq's pedagogy, but it is nonetheless important that I focus my attention on the particular practices of Gaulier's classroom, and to search for where his 'defining and abiding curiosity' as a teacher lies.

Lecoq himself wrote two books: *Le Theatre du Geste* was published in French in 1987, and *The Moving Body* in 1997, two years before his death. Despite his wide influence in the field of clowning, Lecoq wrote little about clowns, and did so abstractly rather than with precision. His work on clown was not necessarily intended for students seeking to perform in this genre, rather he used it as a pedagogical tool 'necessary for the freedom of actors' (Lecoq 2006: 115). In his translator's preface to *Theatre of Movement and Gesture* (2006), David Bradby offers a description of Lecoq's writing that might explain how these short paragraphs on clown have been interpreted and discussed in a variety of ways. Bradby suggests:

his hallmark is the flash of imaginative insight. He enjoys raising a wealth of interesting ideas, and rather than exhausting any one of them, he leaves his readers to pursue them at will (2006: x).

In his later book, *The Moving Body*, Lecoq is more descriptive of pedagogy, and more certain of what a clown is. He describes the search for 'one's own clown' as being a 'fundamental principle of the training' (Lecoq 2002: 154), and this principle has in some ways spread into Gaulier's training as well. It has also led to a certain vocabulary which surrounds clown training:

I ask them to be themselves, as profoundly as they possibly can, and to observe the effect they have on the world, that is to say their audience. This gives them the experience of freedom and authenticity in front of an audience (Lecoq 2002: 159).

Lecoq's ideas about mask, flop and play, and particularly his concepts of 'freedom and authenticity', pervade Gaulier's classroom and writings in this field, and will be part of the discussion throughout, especially Chapters 4 and 5.

Gaulier began to appear in scholarly texts along with Lecoq before either teacher published their own writing, in the 1990s. Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow, in *Improvisation in Drama*, (1990) perceive Lecoq's training as part of a wider trend than the French mime tradition - a 20th century interest in improvisation in various theatre practices. They consider Lecoq alongside other practitioners not only in 'alternative theatre', such as Dario Fo, but also in what they categorise as Traditional Drama and 'Paratheatre' - in which they discuss Grotowski and the applied practices of Boal and psychodrama. Although the writers acknowledge differing aims and terminology in this varied set of theatre genres, they identify a similar trajectory of working practice, which they summarise in the second edition of the book, 'from freeing up the individual for performance through working together and on to collaborative production' (2007: 9). A section entitled 'Jacques Lecoq and the semiotics of clowning' is necessarily brief due to the survey nature of the book, and mentions Gaulier only in a footnote, 'much of Lecoq's clown work has been developed in practice by some of his early graduates who returned to teach at the school; in particular Philippe Gaulier' (1990: 189, note 30).⁸ Having outlined Lecoq's use of play, they identify 'movement' and 'improvisation' as the methods by which play is sought. They explain that each day of study at his school consists of one hour movement, one and a half hours improvisation and one and a half hours *autocours*, in which students work without teachers, developing a piece to present to the teacher and peers each Friday. Frost and Yarrow reason that the improvisation and movement classes must be useful towards developing the outcome of *autocours*, 'the play of performance' (1990: 64). They consider Lecoq's use of improvisation to be based in physical and emotional alertness, which:

as the basis of performance can produce inventive and delightful play. Lecoq uses the Clown to illustrate this. (The Clown is the 'esprit de jeu' par excellence [...]) (Frost and Yarrow 1990: 67).

⁸ A second edition of this book (2007) is expanded to include a wealth of writing on improvisation and practitioners who use improvisation, and also to include a greater historical and geographical scope, adding a chapter on the subject of 'Improvisation in Non-Western Drama'. It includes a summary of Murray's 2003 book, but focuses more on physical improvisation than clowning. They emphasise Murray's observations of improvisation functioning as a tool to build 'the body's potential for engendering, registering and remembering experience at subtle and profound levels' (Frost and Yarrow 2007: 86).

The connection between *Le Jeu* and Clown is a significant one that is consistently made by writers on Gaulier, and will be explored in depth in Chapter 3, particularly with reference to Lynne Kendrick (2010).

Kendrick situates Gaulier as a central case study in her consideration of ‘the ludic’, or play, in performer training. She uses a thorough theoretical analysis to:

explore the dualities of play theory to identify a theory that can tackle Gaulier’s [...] dialectical approach to the ludic, principally the use of rules to produce play and, in particular, to instigate the pleasure of playing (Kendrick 2010: 13).

The thesis describes the École Philippe Gaulier as offering a ‘post-Lecoquian’ training, under which banner she also includes teachers John Wright and Jon Davison, whose writing will be discussed later in this chapter. She argues that this training has created a trend for performance to be understood as ‘actuality’ rather than ‘acting’, wherein the performer plays herself, rather than a role. Although Kendrick seeks to examine the wider application of the ludic to performance and training, in Section 2 of her thesis she does concentrate on Clown:

[T]he clown is the ultimate player and arguably an entirely ludic construct. [...] More significantly, clown is considered by Gaulier and Wright as, in essence, what performing is (Kendrick 2010: 113).

This statement conflates play, clown and performance, and analysis of clown training is treated as synecdoche for ludic performer training. Kendrick attended the school in London in 1993, but draws mostly on her participation and observation of a one-week Clown course in Barcelona, 2008. In an appendix, Kendrick includes transcriptions of 36 moments recorded on video camera in the Clown workshop, and refers to these in the body of her text, as a document of the course. She also describes ‘common’ games from *Le Jeu* without reference, which suggests she is drawing on memory of her own experience (2010: 128). Kendrick examines Gaulier’s instructions to other participants, their responses and the level of ‘success’ they had in making the audience laugh, but chooses not to explore her own moments on stage. Occasionally, Kendrick risks

projecting her own experience onto other participants,⁹ but otherwise this approach does work well, especially because she has the filmed document to consult, and can describe accurately what participants did on the day. A section of the thesis, from the chapter on Gaulier's ludic clown teaching, was published as an article for the journal *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* (Kendrick 2011).

In an edited collection on *Jacques Lecoq and the British Theatre* (2000) Gaulier's teaching appears several times, notably in a chapter written by Murray, and in a personal reflection on Gaulier's training by Victoria Worsley. The collection seeks to assess Lecoq's influence in British theatre, and opens with a personal story, in which Chamberlain remembers the first time he heard about Lecoq's approach to teaching. He states the necessity for the project to:

take into account experiences like my own - people who have worked with Lecoq graduates, knowingly or unknowingly, incorporated the exercises, methods and aesthetics into their own work and passed them on to others (2000: 2).

As we have seen, Gaulier is a significant Lecoq graduate and he has been included alongside his teacher in a variety of texts. There are now many people who have worked with Gaulier 'graduates', and his influence has also been pervasive through these connections. In line with Chamberlain's stated intentions, he and the other contributors all mention Gaulier, either as a conduit through whom Lecoq can be better understood, or as a graduate who developed Lecoq's ideas in his own direction.

In the first essay of Chamberlain and Yarrow's collection, Murray collates a picture of Lecoq's pedagogy from his own training with Gaulier and Monika Pagneux, from seeing shows by Lecoq graduates, texts by Felner (1985) and Leabhart (1989) and interviews with three performers, approximately six years after their training with Lecoq. Murray does not cover clown in this chapter, but focuses on the neutral mask, *autocours* and play. Murray cites Alan Fairbairn's realisation that 'performing every week in front of people is what you do in theatre life' (Interview cited by Murray 2002: 30). This logic describes the

⁹ For example, she suggests that 'The way that the participants of the Taller Clown played [Name tag] was utterly instinctual, because the speed and variant patterns of the game left little to no room for cognitive rationale' (2010: 129-130).

experience of the Lecoq student as appropriate training for ‘theatre life’, an idea that I have expanded upon to consider how a performer might treat ‘theatre life’ in the same way as the clown classroom. Murray begins to explore play as having multiple, elusive functions at Lecoq’s school, and introduces another key term:

Complicité - the English equivalent (complicity) fails to capture the spirit of the French - suggests an alive, vibrant and engaged rapport between performers, and performers and audience. It is, in a sense, an *outcome of play* (Murray 2002: 33).

Murray has since further explored *complicité* and play, a compelling and elusive line of enquiry that I continue to follow in Chapter 3. Murray identifies a contemporary interest in play that is not limited to Lecoq’s practice but also found in practices as ‘far removed’ as that of experimental performance company Forced Entertainment (2002: 34). Lastly, he tentatively describes two linked phenomena created by the school, neither of which are explicitly stated by Lecoq - a ‘politics of the imagination’ and a ‘spirit of individualism’ (2002: 39). These nascent ideas develop through Murray’s later writing and are considered in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

In 2007, Murray and Keefe took an analytical look at the ways in which students learn practical acting skills at Gaulier’s school. *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction* brings together perspectives on late 20th century teachers, directors and practitioners who have been influential in the British trend of ‘physical theatres’. It considers how training and preparation differ in their delivery and in the ways the understanding of the body, performance and creativity are evident in these choices. Finding common concerns and interests among different practices that have been named ‘physical theatres’, Murray and Keefe explore the shared legacies of interweaving traditions and political approaches. The chapter ‘Preparation and Training’ (2007: 117-158) includes a sub-section on Gaulier as a distinct but not isolated part of a wider cultural movement.¹⁰ Like Frost and Yarrow before them, these authors consider Gaulier

¹⁰ The authors describe a training model of short workshops, where working performers or interested students continually expand their skills. Gaulier’s month-long courses that make up a two-year program is not defined within this trend. However, Murray and Keefe suggest that the short workshops described are dominated by practices originated by Decroux, Lecoq and Gaulier.

as part of a wider 20th century group with interest in the body. Gaulier is included in a model of training, ‘director/practitioner as teacher’, amongst Lev Dodin, Eugenio Barba, Ann Bogart, Lecoq, Pagneux, Joan Littlewood and Etienne Decroux. Murray and Keefe assert that the teaching of Gaulier, Pagneux and the practice of Simon McBurney with theatre company Complicite, are ‘deeply associated’ though distinct from Lecoq’s teaching. This book emphasises Lecoq’s use of neutral masks, and play and *complicité* along with ‘*disponibilité*’, the state of being ready for play and open to other performers. The marker of Gaulier’s difference to these associated teachers is that his ‘teaching remains anchored in humour, the grotesque and the absurd’, its complexity being disguised by his ‘mercilessly incisive, usually hilarious and always provocative teaching style’ (Murray and Keefe 2007: 149-150). The oblique as a strategy of Gaulier’s is highlighted in this text, ‘solutions are to be found the less directly, urgently and forcefully you look for them’ (Murray and Keefe 2007: 151). To that end, the authors examine a simple game played in Gaulier’s classroom, where two students throw a ball to each other, and then outline the many principles concurrently taught in this indirect manner. A similar approach is taken with the book’s companion volume, *Physical Theatres: A Reader* (Keefe and Murray 2007). Here five original essays introduce a collection of texts by historians, practitioners and theorists on the hybrid, inter-linked and various practices of physical theatres.

The indirect and un-forceful qualities of Gaulier’s teaching are what Murray most highly prizes. In 2010, Murray contributed to the second edition of Alison Hodge’s *Actor Training* a chapter entitled ‘Jacques Lecoq, Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier; training for Play, Lightness and Disobedience’. It tells us that when Gaulier left Lecoq’s school in 1980, he established a new school with Pagneux. In his website and journals, Gaulier refers to founding his school on this date, however, he does not mention his fellow Lecoq school teacher, a movement specialist who had been a dancer in Mary Wigman’s company, worked with Moshe Feldenkreis and with Cirque Knie in Switzerland before coming to the Lecoq school in 1963.¹¹ Murray explains:

¹¹ He does mention Madeline Milhaud and Francoise Dolto, who ‘lent the remaining funds that were required (missing, needed)’ (<http://www.ecolephilippegaulier.com/benfactors.html>).

In 1980 she and Philippe Gaulier left Lecoq to establish their own 'École de Formation Théâtrale' in a basement studio in the smart 17th arrondissement behind the Champs Elysees on the rue Alfred de Vigny (Murray 2010a: 219).

The school 'offered an integrated programme of four- or five-week courses' until 1987, on similar genres to those now at Gaulier's school, 'play, clowns, bouffons, melodrama, neutral and character mask, tragedy, directing and pedagogy' (Murray 2010a: 219-221). Pagneux's classes emphasised chorus movement, 'the collaborative delight of twenty bodies working attentively and musically together' (Murray 2010a: 228). Her practice has been analysed in less detail than that of Lecoq or Gaulier. Murray draws on his own memory of training at École de Formation Théâtrale, and interviews Annabel Arden, founder member of Complicite, who he describes as a 'confidante' of Pagneux, the teacher having worked as movement director with the theatre company. Drawing on these two memories, Murray is able to include Pagneux in a history from which she was otherwise hidden. In 2012, Pagneux released what resembles a scrapbook, with design by Robert Golden. It is difficult for an outsider to tell how the images in this book represent Pagneux's practice. An introduction by Arden explains the use of non-linguistic documentation, and emphasises the personal nature of the creative practice the work explores:

It is difficult to find words to describe Monika's work, which is why the combination of photographs, references to other artists and fragments of texts are so appropriate; the meanings are in the juxtapositions.

[...]

Monika has a remarkable gift for revealing the hidden qualities in every person. This is essential to the art and craft of theatre; the surprise, the individuality, the mystery of the actor (Arden in Pagneux 2012).

This, however, still represents a barrier to any reader with no embodied experience of the workshop. Arden understands Pagneux's practice, like Gaulier's, to be personal rather than a formula given by the teacher and applicable to all students.

Returning to Murray's chapter, the practices of Lecoq, Gaulier and Pagneux are presented as distinct, but he underlines that 'paradoxically, one of the principles which unites [the three] is their common rejection of a *method*'

(2010a: 215). Murray also raises their commonly held commitment to internationalism and dissention, which I explore in Chapter 2, and offers perceptive insights into play, which I depend upon in Chapter 3. I have had the opportunity to hear papers delivered by Murray on a developing interest that is first raised in this chapter, namely, 'lightness'. Murray speaks on this subject with a form that matches its content, circling and playful, but with an understanding of its power as a cultural and political rhetoric. Murray, who remembers 'regularly being told by Gaulier that [he] was "trying too hard" and that [his] actions were too forced (*trop fort, trop volontaire*)' (2010b: 1) seems to have applied this performance critique to his writing, and adopted some qualities of lightness and play in his critical stance. He offers comparisons with children's literature, other theatre practices and Calvino (Murray 2013a). The confines and expectations of a PhD have meant that I have often had to be more direct and less playful in my analysis, however I have tried to adopt my own playful academic voice where both possible and appropriate.

Gaulier in practice and research

Worsley's essay in Chamberlain and Yarrow's collection on Lecoq directly examines Gaulier's influence on her practice as a actor, director and writer. With the enviable title, 'Amusez-vous, merde!'¹² Worsley remembers the different iterations of 'having fun' that she discovered at the school, and how these have been beneficial to her work in the 'more conventional acting career' she has since followed (Worsley 2002: 86). Pleasure and fun will be explored in more depth in Chapter 3, but significant here is the individual nature of the pleasure that Worsley identifies. The titular injunction, she writes, was 'often accompanied by a general (and to me terrifying) reminder that accountancy was a better profession for someone who couldn't have fun on stage' (Worsley 2002: 86). I find it interesting that this seems to be interpreted as a threat, and wonder if there is some subtlety to this remark, beyond the idea that a 'boring' career is a terrifying prospect. Personally, after attending the school I do not intend to follow the profession of performance, partly because I do not find the pleasure of being on stage as satisfying or dependable as the more protracted pleasures of writing and teaching. Gaulier's 'reminder' could be interpreted as

¹² Worsley translates this as 'Enjoy yourself, for shit's sake' (2002: 98), although it could be more literally, 'Enjoy yourself, shit!'. The verb *s'amuser* will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

advice to his students to, where possible, do the thing that gives them pleasure. Evident in Worsley's text is that she does find pleasure from creating performance in games, and she considers that her pleasure in performing is contagious and affective on stage because it is genuine. To that end, she devises scenes with the group Tattycoram based on the performers 'confessing the strange things we most wanted to do on stage' and finding a way to include them in the piece (Worsley 2002: 88). Worsley's personal approach seems to have been influential in writing about learning with Gaulier, or is perhaps an appropriate voice in which to write about the experience.

Richard Cuming (2011) - whose thesis is a reflexive analysis of his own clown practice in two different periods, with two different clown trios - only briefly refers to moments from Gaulier's classroom, and does so somewhat dismissively, such as this statement which seems to mock the way students savour the teacher's aphoristic insights:

when I undertook the renowned teacher Philippe Gaulier's "stage" on clown in 1992, there were two things I will never forget him saying. The first was, "No psychology, please," and... and... unfortunately, I can't remember the other one, but I am sure it was very insightful (Cuming 2011: 70).¹³

Cuming presents a chapter on training, describing a network of influences and practical explorations with a variety of collaborators. Cuming defines the audience as a significant collaborator in his work, which aligns his practice with my findings on Gaulier's workshop. Cuming sporadically uses a 'clown voice' in his thesis, telling stories, joking, and even arguing with himself. He discusses a line from the Frost and Yarrow text described above, which argues that the clown 'cannot know these realities [of the performance conditions] in advance, for so much of it depends upon us, the audience, that it cannot be preplanned' (Frost and Yarrow 2007: 90, cited in Cuming 2011: 58). He interrogates this idea, asserting that much of his own clown practice is pre-planned, however Cuming ignores Frost and Yarrow's own qualification of their argument, 'Of course, the clown always has "an act" up his sleeve [...] But in good clowning he may never

¹³ The inclusion of the idea as one that he will 'never forget' but nonetheless 'can't remember', and the way he performs this forgetting in the writing, 'and...and...', suggest that this is a joke, not too far from one that Gaulier himself might make. Cuming does not, however, analyse his experience with Gaulier in any more detail than this comment.

have to use them' (Frost and Yarrow 2007: 90). This balance between prepared material and the improvisation will be explored in Chapter 4.

Maggie Irving (2012) conducted a practice-based search for a female clown practice, which picks up on Purcell Gates' argument about the status of the teacher, and understands it to have created a barrier for her as a woman 'to be open and vulnerable in hierarchical male-oriented clown workshops' (Irving 2012b: 110). She seeks to 'reconceive Jacques Lecoq's clown theories in order to open up the genre of clowning to accommodate the lived experience of women' (Irving 2012b: 27). The practice explored is a theorised one, which originates in research questions, including 'how might I find ways to clown that embrace both Lecoq's clowning pedagogy and feminist theories?' and, 'What strategies exist for women to clown?' (Irving 2012b: 25). However, she also reflects upon training (some of which we shared, since we participated in the same Clown course in 2009). Irving's practice-led research takes the form of 'examining theoretical and practical knowledge in academic clown discourse and testing various concepts practically' (Irving 2012b: 32). Irving's examination of knowledges is more applicable to my study than her documentation and analysis of theorised practice.

Daniel Bye (2008) draws on his own participation in Clown workshops with Wright and Gaulier to present a description of clown practice, before using this experience to apply clowning to performance of Brechtian theatre. Writing at a time when there was a paucity of material analysing clown, he highlights the value of this primary research, and uses description of the classrooms to define clowning in contemporary theatre:

By looking at what and how they teach, we can learn a considerable amount about clowning, as not only can we observe the characteristic processes of clowning in operation, but we can also learn something about the means by which they are produced by the performer (Bye 2008: 13).

Bye privileges the embodied knowledge gleaned from participation, considering it to offer a greater 'depth of analysis' than observation (Bye 2008: 35). His first chapter consists of description of games from the workshop with brief statements by the teachers, which he would not have had access to at the time

of writing without first-hand experience.¹⁴ Combining this observation with texts on Shakespearean clown by David Wiles, Bye creates a picture of a seemingly unified practice in Europe lasting five centuries. This chapter is divided into defining features of clown, or ‘key characteristics by which we may tend to recognise clown’ (Bye 2008: 11). The characteristics are: Bafflement, Gameplay, Debunking and Improvisation, The Flop, Vulnerability and the Joy of Being Present, Earnestness and Optimism, the Drop, Finding One’s Clown and Costume, Status and Boss-Clown, and Pathetic clowns and Tragic clowns (2008: 36-63). Bye considers Wright and Gaulier to have similar goals in their teaching, despite some pedagogical differences. As Bye is consciously searching for elements of clown that may be applied to Brechtian theatre, he gives most attention to debunking, flop and drop. He interprets gameplay as a form of Gestus, and considers clown status to be directly analogous to class consciousness. In his latter chapters, Bye analysis his practice-as-research projects in which he explored practically how the clown techniques learnt on these workshops could be applied to Brechtian theatre.

Like Bye, Danzig analyses her own practice, which is influenced by her time at Gaulier’s school. However, in her case, the practice occurred separately from the research questions. She articulates her concerns about this approach:

Firstly, I was reluctant to theorize my artistic practice, nervous of deadening it through analysis. Secondly, I was insecure about the validity of the topic. I was confident that clown theater [sic] warranted investigation and analysis, but feared that approaching it through personal practice was indulgent and not rigorous enough for an academic readership (Danzig 2008: 12).

This tension was felt in two directions, as Danzig explains that while fearing a lack of academic rigour, ‘[i]n the company of clown teachers and performers, [she] would actually feel ashamed at being so analytical, serious and intellectual about clowning’ (2008: 12). Danzig considers ‘not knowing’ to be a characteristic of clowning, and so the process of constructing knowledge about not knowing caused her mind to do ‘somersaults’ (Danzig 2008: 14). However, her own position in this tension allowed her to resolve the problem ‘...as much as I admire those clown teachers who opt to stay away from words, I, as a student, have

¹⁴ Bye submitted his PhD in 2008, but we must assume he completed it before the publication of Gaulier’s own book in 2007.

always thrived on the synthesis of analysis and practice' (Danzig 2008: 14). Danzig, also a clown director and university teacher, describes taking some of the vocabulary from her research into the rehearsal room and classroom. While she recognises that Gaulier's teaching has 'eschewed analysis', she hopes her analysis of clown theatre can 'productively co-exist, even if not always seeing eye to eye' with it (Danzig 2008: 16-17). This justification for the research project chimes with my own experience. Examples of practice by 500 Clown, a theatre company of which Danzig is a member, are to be found throughout her thesis - most notably when she describes general and specific audience reactions to moments of action, and the interactions these generate. Danzig considers clown theatre to provoke a particular mode of spectatorship, in which the audience are invited to play with the clowns.

Researcher-practitioners Irving, Danzig, Bye, Cuming and Purcell Gates have all analysed their own Gaulier-influenced practice. As yet, no individuals without first-hand experience have written on Gaulier's training. There were sometimes guests allowed to watch class, but these were always individuals who had previously studied at the school. This suggests that Gaulier places embodied experience above observation - and the writers above all follow that to some extent. At present it might be difficult to write about Gaulier based only on the literature available, and first-hand experience enriches all of the above theses; even those which take a theoretical approach include an element of reflection on practice. However, I suggest the paucity of written material is not the only reason for the trend in writing from a reflexive viewpoint. I argue the personal nature of the classroom experience is a significant part of Gaulier's teaching style. A stated intention of the school is to allow students to make personal 'discoveries' about themselves and the performances they would like to make. As this thesis will show, learning clown at the École Philippe Gaulier depends on each student learning to respond to the reactions of the people she seeks to amuse. A detailed analytical description of learning from an individual viewpoint gives a rich insight into the practice. I wonder if the emergent wealth of writing based on practical experience and first-hand observation might eventually mean scholars without direct experience could begin to discuss Gaulier among other theatre teachers. This approach was not available to me at the start of my project because I had already experienced Gaulier's training. Like the writers

above, I have considered my own (fairly recent and relatively short) experience with the teacher as a valuable and worthwhile primary resource for analysis. However, I have also depended on Gaulier's own writing on clown and *Le Jeu*.

Gaulier's Texts

Gaulier published his thoughts on theatre in 2007, in a book called *The Tormentor: Le Jeu - Light - Theatre*. The book is written in French and English, with the second half being a translation into English by Ewen MacLachlan. It has a preface by one of Gaulier's most high-profile students, Sacha Baron Cohen, who praises and endorses the work of the school, but does not tell the reader anything about the text ahead:

Philippe Gaulier is the greatest living teacher of clown and modern theater [sic]. He is also the funniest man I have ever met [...] I owe my career and the discovery of my own inner idiot to Philippe Gaulier (Baron Cohen 2007: 163).

Baron Cohen prioritises Gaulier's work on clown, and the fact that this famous comedian was chosen to be an advocate for the school indicates Gaulier's acceptance of being associated primarily with this genre. The choice of vocabulary in this preface - describing his characters Ali G and Borat as 'idiots', and referring to his own 'inner idiot' - adopts a word used by Gaulier, who later in the book states 'the clown is a marvellous idiot' (2007: 289).

Five of 19 chapters focus on clown: in these, Gaulier tells an origin story of clowns, outlines clown exercises, and illustrates some clown practice with the help of two allegorical characters, Monsieur Marcel and Monsieur Flop. M. Marcel is a revered figure whom performers approach for ideas for their clown shows, despite the fact his

reputation as a master of shows is related to the fact that one of his acquaintances has a cousin who knows someone whose uncle is the impresario at the Watermill Supper Room (Gaulier 2007: 280).

In other words, M. Marcel has no expertise, but is trusted ardently.¹⁵ Gaulier tell us that, 'in the category "road accidents - all types" Monsieur Flop was

¹⁵ Characteristically, Gaulier does not reference the 'Watermill Supper Room', although it might refer to a theatre in Berkshire that opened in 1967 (<https://www.watermill.org.uk/history>).

undoubtedly supreme champion' (2007: 283). This character, who loves speed and danger and thus gets into many accidents, is given the following job by M. Marcel:

Every time a show hits trouble, you jump in your car, go to the theatre and warn the performers to do something fast [...] Sensitive actors will love you and thank you. Idiots will call you a bird of misfortune (Gaulier 2007: 286).

M. Flop's role will be explored in detail in Chapter 4, but these personified clown practices are found throughout Gaulier's writing and in his teaching. Meandering, entertaining stories complicate the reading of the shorter, direct statements, making the book difficult to quote from. The longer stories seem unwieldy, and demand a lot of explanation if cut, but without the context they impart, the shorter, snappier ideas can be somewhat misleading. There are so many meanders and aphorisms, scattered through the text, that they have a cumulative effect and inform one another. The definitive line I have chosen to focus on, 'The work of a clown is to make the audience burst out laughing' (2007: 289), is nestled amongst other ideas, including, 'what people imagine about the clown is extremely irritating' (2007: 289), which I have used as the title for this chapter, to acknowledge Gaulier's distrust or disinterest in academic writing. Visual and historical concepts of clown are dismissed in favour of blunt statements privileging laughter, creating an overall impression that the relationship with the audience is more relevant to the clown performer than the historical and visual tropes of the genre. Some sections of the text describe exercises, and the students who play them, while others are framed as an interview or dialogue with an 'interrogator,' or 'tormentor', who stands in for the students. This character, in italic type, mostly asks ill-informed questions and is corrected by the teacher. For example, after Flop and Marcel are introduced, the interrogator asks, 'Did it really happen? For real? For pretend?' (Gaulier 2007: 286). Gaulier does not answer. The variation and complexity of the text mirrors the way Gaulier speaks in class, as do his interactions with the interrogator. I believe the reader most equipped to read his book would be one who has already met, or studied with, Gaulier, and would recognise his performance in the text. I will be using this text throughout the thesis, and offer a closer analysis of Gaulier's own text on clown than has previously been undertaken.

The book is published through Gaulier's own publishing house, Éditions FILMIKO. On a video clip on its website, Gaulier explains that he wanted to publish books after enjoying teaching so much when he was young:

when you start to be older, you think “mm, it could be good to carry on, to carry on the words, to carry on the language, to carry on something. It would be good” [...] I would like to print what I say for after, for after, to try to give the same freedom [...] perhaps an illusion, but, to carry on an illusion... is the best
(www.filmichiko.com).

Éditions Filmiko has published two glossy booklets, published and distributed by the school on the occasion of its 25th and 30th ‘birthdays’. The 2005 booklet contains images from the school, descriptions of the courses offered at that time and longer texts, versions of which can be found in *The Tormentor* (Gaulier 2007). The 2010 version is a glossy brochure with the pages from the website. The publishing house has three other books (no dates), which do not focus on clown, but do provide interesting contextual information about the teacher. The first is a collection of plays for the performance genre of bouffon, in French and English (Gaulier n.d *Bouffon Plays*), excerpts from which also appear in *The Tormentor*. These plays are dense with metaphors, wordplay, and literary references, mostly referring to biblical figures in grotesque or everyday language. In the first play, *No Son of Mine*, the cast list stipulates three women, but the text reveals that the women play ‘The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit’ (*Bouffon Plays*: 57), also referred to as ‘Daddy, Sonny and the Joker’ (*Bouffon Plays*: 60). Gaulier describes the book as ‘devastatingly blasphemous’ and the bouffons as:

those outcasts expelled from somewhere by bastards. They take refuge in ghettos, on the outskirts. They play at who can best parody those who chased them out. And do they laugh! (*Bouffon Plays*: back cover)

Bouffon is a comic genre, but one with a very complicated politics rooted in a rejection of authority held by bigots, fascists and, more generally, ‘bastards’. Though I took a week-long Bouffon course with Gaulier in 2012, and found it shed light on his pedagogy, I have excluded the study of Bouffon from the present study. It invokes a complex politics and historical background that would demand expansive study in its own right, with fieldwork since there exists no

literature on the subject. It would be interesting to compare the two practices, especially since bouffons seem, in my limited experience, to seek a different and much more layered relationship with the audience compared to clowns. However, I seek a detailed and in-depth study of Clown, and a full exploration of Bouffon has not been possible here.

The second undated book is a novel in French, entitled *Le Gauche ou le Droit*, which according to Éditions Filmiko, he ‘believes that this is the most beautiful thing he has ever written and thought’ (www.filmichiko.com). The website describes it as being ‘about twins’, but its narrative describes the life of a Philippe Dumas, a character tormented by his relationship with his father, and perpetually postponing an appointment with a psychologist. A photo of a young boy appears on the back cover, captioned ‘Philippe Dumas’. The same image also appears in the school journals, in which context it appears to be Gaulier himself (2005: 29). Imagery of twins and ‘doppelgangers’ appear in this text, and two sections tell very similar stories to apparently autobiographical sections from *The Tormentor*. The first of these describes his father as a fascist and Nazi collaborator who is aroused by ‘hatred, racism, xenophobia, chauvinism, nationalism, rejection, banishment, segregation, distinction, and more’ (Translated by Maclachlan 2007: 233). The second describes cruel treatment by a teacher (see Chapter 2, under the heading Pedagogy and Politics). Towards its ending *Le Gauche ou le Droit*, its title the punchline to a story in the final chapter, departs from the autobiographical and brings in an array of subjects and, perhaps, metaphors.

Lastly, Éditions Filmiko has published an A4 book of image plates, *Lettre ou pas lettre*, which consists in large part of playful graphic depictions of words relevant to Gaulier’s teaching: ‘Theatre’, ‘Scene’, ‘Actor, spotlight’, ‘spectator, curtain’ (*Lettre ou pas Lettre*: 20-23). It also contains short texts about acting and a page which could be interpreted as an allegory relevant to my current project, ‘The verb says to the word: Come on. We’re going to stretch our pins. Watch out. If you lose momentum, you’ll die fossilised, turned to stone, stupid, academic’ (*Lettre ou pas Lettre*: 7, translation on a separate leaf). Later, under an image of a mushroom cloud, the text reads ‘On the 22nd April 1950, elevated wastrels ordained that [...] pupils would use ball-point pens’ (*Lettre ou pas Lettre*: 12). Apparently typed on official government paper, an endorsement of

the ball-point pen, which ‘goes straight to the point. It illuminates the meaning of the writing because it removes the flourishes’ (*Lettre ou pas Lettre*: 14). The contrast of these pages with attractive and fun images of words written graphically in calligraphy pen suggest sarcasm - we can infer that Gaulier feels increased legibility leads to a loss of something more individually nuanced, and thus valuable.¹⁶ This inference has influenced my reading of Gaulier’s text and speech, where ‘flourishes’ seem to be held in as much, if not more, esteem as meaning.

The school has a website (ecolephilippegaulier.com) most recently updated in 2013. Its front page contains an animation of a cockerel crowing, which moves aside to reveal a surreal photo montage of the school building in Étampes, several dogs (one with blinking red eyes), and windows flying off to reveal Gaulier and his wife Michiko Miyazaki, who is the administrator of the school. The website includes some description of the courses, history of the school, timetables and fees, frequently asked questions, and video clips of Gaulier speaking and slideshows of his photographs, with narration.

Kendrick describes Gaulier’s writing on *Le Jeu* as follows:

rudimentary descriptions of games from the repertoire of this seminal course are framed by expressions of the ways in which these are played and punctuated by tenets of why. Gaulier’s chosen means of documenting this course are characteristically expressive; he has a predilection for story, metaphor and the joke, rather than analysis (Kendrick 2010: 126).

I find this to be an accurate description of all of Gaulier’s writing. However, it is possible to read some of the jokes and stories as elliptical analysis of performance moments, Gaulier’s ‘predilection’ being to avoid direct or fixed statements, as he hopes students will avoid fixity in their performance, ‘An actor or even a writer or director who does not feel his work was nourished by its uncertain place in the universe would be a disaster’ (Gaulier 2007: 165).¹⁷

¹⁶ Halberstam suggests that a resistance to legibility might enable authors to escape ‘political manipulation’ of university disciplines and institutions (2011: 10). Gaulier writes for his own private publisher, and thus escapes any demands of conformity.

¹⁷ See Murray (2010b: 225) and Purcell Gates (Purcell Gates 2011b: 221).

Clown

Within theatre and comedy studies, there is an increasing scholarly interest in clown practice and its ‘uncertain position in the universe’.¹⁸ The least formal groupings exist for enthusiasts, practitioners and researchers to discuss clowning, such as discussion groups ‘clown power’ and ‘clown theory’ on social media site, facebook. Conference networks are growing in related fields in the UK: The London Comedy Network and the Popular Performance Working Group at the Theatre and Performance Research Association (TaPRA) include panels on clown, facilitating interaction between the writers above and specialists on stand-up comedy, television comedy, pantomime, circus and animal performance. The Global Institute for Circus Studies (GICS) has a mailing list for introducing individuals, sharing funding opportunities and sharing publications. A journal, *Comedy Studies*, and two monographs on clown have been published by Intellect in the last five years, along with manuals on clowning written by practitioners (Simon 2012; Dream 2014).¹⁹

John Wright’s *Why is that so Funny?* (2006) briefly evokes Gaulier in chapters on ‘Simple Clown’ and ‘Bouffon’. Wright’s book is written in a familiar tone, describing anecdotes to illustrate particular performance techniques, and suggesting games for practical exploration of the skills. His first mention of Gaulier opens a chapter called ‘Simple Clown’. Wright paraphrases an origin story of clowning, explaining that ‘Philippe Gaulier told us this story, with a wicked glint in his eye, at the beginning of his workshop, “Le Clown”, in the early eighties’ (2006a: 179). Wright assumes prior knowledge on the part of the reader regarding Gaulier’s identity. He then goes on to outline his own beliefs on clowning and comedy, to describe workshops and rehearsals that he found to be exemplar of physical comedy.

¹⁸ It seems as well that there is an increasing public profile of clowning practice. For example, a New York Festival of clowns has been held annually since 2006, and small-scale and fringe companies include the word ‘clown’ in their self-definition (some of which I discuss in this thesis). However, I am aware that this might be a perception bias, where I see increasing instances of a word because it is at the front of my mind.

¹⁹ Dream’s book *The Clown in You* was published as I finished this thesis. It offers an autobiographical perspective on clown teaching, observations, reassurances, exercises to try and case studies describing people doing these exercises. It quotes a number of professional clowns and alludes to differences between clown teachers while championing Dreams’ own approach, which she has practiced since 1998 in Europe, South America and the USA.

Serious Play by Louise Peacock (2009) concentrates on applied clown practices, examining anthropological functions of play to consider clowning's possible functions in an abstract sense. Peacock suggests that clown makes play 'shine as a means of communicating, readily and viscerally, serious messages about the nature of human existence' (2009: 17). This existential approach to analysing the reception of clown means that Peacock chooses not to focus her examination on performance or training, preferring the position of an informed spectator. More relevant to this study was a paper presented by Peacock more recently (2013), in which she examined the practical and institutional differences faced when teaching clown in university modules compared to in workshops like those run by Gaulier. This will be explored in Chapter 2.²⁰

In 2013, Jon Davison published a comprehensive text on clown, which provides a wide-ranging and detailed history of clowning in Europe and America from the 15th century to the present. Davison opens his book with a summary of the numerous ways in which clowns have been understood:

Clowns have been seen as revolutionary, reactionary, avant-garde, universal, marginal, irrelevant, fundamental, dangerous, harmless, melancholic or as fulfilling any number of social, artistic, cultural or political functions as can be imagined (Davison 2013: 2).

Despite this variety, Davison draws a history of clowning, albeit in a 'complex network' of connections, rather than a single chronology. He surveys evidence of clown practice in different periods of Euro-American history, and identifies trends and the individual performers that influenced them. This approach offers a broad field for comparison across the genre, particularly since Davison shares Gaulier's conviction that a laughing audience is the most important identifier of a clown. Davison dedicates a chapter to what he suggests is 'the dominant manifestation of clown theory, if not clown practice, over the last half-century: clown training and teaching' (2013: 195). Davison considers Gaulier to have 'developed some of the most influential elements of clown training today, centred on the acceptance of failure and the flop' (2013: 195). *Clown* astutely explores the relationship between failure, play and presence in Gaulier's training, which my study seeks to expand. Davison's study is unique for locating

²⁰ Unfortunately, the timing of publication has meant I have been unable to use Peacock's new book, *Slapstick and Comic Performance: Comedy and Pain* 2014 (Palgrave Macmillan).

Gaulier in a popular entertainment history, suggesting connections between the school in a longer history of circus clown, which will be explored in Chapters 2 and 5.

In 2004, Steele compiled what is mostly a picture book with some explanatory pages of text, *1000 Clowns More or Less: A Visual History of the American Clown*. The book includes photos (both snapshots of performances and posed publicity images), paintings and graphic representations of clowns (in advertising and promotional circus material). In the opening paragraph, Steele speculates on why readers might be interested in the clown or clown figure:

Those with curious minds seek to decipher the soul that inhabits the body of the clown behind the façade of grotesque make-up and colorfully outlandish costume. In equal parts comedy and tragedy, joy and pathos, practical joker and devilish prankster, the clown has long been a fixture, both embraced and feared, in American entertainment (Steele 2004: 8).

Ambiguity is for many writers, as Steele suggests, part of the interest in clown figures. Swortzell points to the difficulty of defining clown as a genre, which has been addressed by Davison, who changed the question from ‘what is a clown’ to ‘what do clowns do?’ (Davison 2013). This focus on the activity and agency of a clown performer helps us to consider the practice of real individuals rather than a cultural symbol, or ‘clown figure’. Familiar clown signifiers - specific to the cultural location in which they are found - are used to communicate this intention.

Several writers refer to an out-of-print book by John H. Towsen (1976), which surveys and describes clown practices in a variety of contexts. Towsen avoids defining clown, because to do so would ‘needlessly limit our enjoyment of a phenomenon as variegated as the patches of a Harlequin costume’ (1976: xi). In a broad survey of clown roles in cultural practice, social functions of jesters and clowning in theatre history, Towsen notes the relationship of clowns and their audiences, pointing out their ability to improvise and to cross boundaries drawn by convention. The following observation considers the terminology describing clown roles in Europe and Russia in the ‘Middle Ages’:

The different titles given to the entertainers alone are as numerous as they are confusing [...] The terminology generally reflects an attempt to classify them according to their social position rather than by what they actually did on stage (Towsen 1976: 44).

Towsen's history of circus clowns informs both Davison and circus historian Helen Stoddart (2000), and I draw on its observations on the physical comedy of clown performers in Chapter 5. His history covers 300 years, the most recent example being the practice of clowns in American 3-ring circus. In a chapter on the conflation of mime and clown, Towsen describes Lecoq as an 'influential French mime', but does not discuss the teacher's exploration of clown.²¹ Towsen continues to write prolifically on a blog called *All Fall Down, The Craft and Art of Physical Comedy* (Towsen 2012).

Though clowning is a widespread phenomenon, it is not a monolithic one. Depending on the contexts in which clowning is found, it has been understood as a variety of symbols or behaviours with a range of functions. After Towsen, lists have been used to define clown as an amalgam of its variant types, having a lack of fixity and a significant overlap with other performance forms. Following a conference on the subject in 2003, David Robb's collection of essays places clown among an 'extended family of fools, jesters, picares and tricksters' (2007: 1), that are all in some way comic figures, belonging to popular traditions. The writers in this collection examine representations of these figures in 'theatre, fiction and film'. This context provides an interesting lens on clown tradition, because the clowns therein are not performers - they are instead either fictional characters or signifiers of some perceived interpretation of clown, manipulated by the writer/artist. Where clowns served this metaphorical function, ideas of duality and mask were prominent. Faye Ran explains this function of the clown symbol, claiming that 'the very word "mask" is derived from the Arabic, Maskharat, meaning clown' (Ran 2007: 29). As such, the word clown can be taken to imply disguise. Other arguments in Robb's collection also see clown as a signifier of disguise. Maxim Wientraub suggests that images of clowns are used by installation artist Bruce Nauman as a signifier for the failure of signifiers in a piece of art, because with their painted faces they are 'ungraspable [...] like

²¹ Towsen notes a 'remarkable upsurge in this ancient form of entertainment' in the 1970s, referring to the popularity of clown courses run by circuses, universities and community colleges (1976: inside cover).

personifications of a pun' (2007: 79). For Weintraub, clowns represent the lack, or failure of signification. Failure is connected to clowns where they appear in parallel art, theatre and performance contexts in the late 20th century, as explored in Chapter 4. Nauman was influenced by the plays of Samuel Beckett (2007: 85, note 27), whose interest in failure and clown signifiers I will discuss in the same chapter. In this thesis I will draw occasionally on analysis of clown characters in fiction, but I prioritise the enacted skills and practice of performers, as it is only in this moment, of a performer with an audience, that the clown skills of complicit play, flop and ridiculousness can exist. Ran suggests that one defining aspect of a clown is the 'function as target and source of humour and laughter' (Ran 2007: 34). Though a clown figure might be a symbol of disguise, duality or failure of signification, a clown performer actively invites laughter.²²

In an edition of *Mime Journal* dedicated to contemporary mime in Europe, Peter Bu also places clown closely alongside mime, in a way that does not distinguish clearly between the two. He attempts to define and delineate emerging traditions of mime and clowning in 1980s Europe, setting out an 'ABC' so that there can be shared discourse between practitioners and critics. Bu does not offer any distinctions with which we can separate mime from clown, but implicitly suggests that they are not the same art form, calling them 'close relatives' (Bu 1983: 44) who have appeared together in festivals and critical discourse because of their position 'on the edge of art' (1983: 43). By framing the discussion in this way, Bu suggests that both clowning and mime are liminal theatre forms, similarly outside of the mainstream. He declares that clowning is an evolving and unfixed art with 'fundamental traits of behaviour', which are vaguely delineated:

The clown is a state of mind, a particular way of interpreting man...usually identified by his fresh look, a certain naiveté and sincerity, and a communicative warmth. He seems vulnerable, and that is not astonishing: all his qualities are those we associate with children. But, in fact, the clown is a virtuoso, and gets out of all kinds of difficulties by himself (Bu 1983: 44-45).

²² One article in Robb's collection (Lewis 2007) compared a 1900 victim of a lynch mob to a clown, because of his marginal status, and the carnival atmosphere in which lynchings took place. This victim of violence had been killed and then made up to look like a minstrel by his killers. This comparison is ineffective because the dead body had no agency in being the figure of laughter.

The traits described here are imprecise, and they are also impressions of the clown's behaviour from the audience's perspective. Placing these findings on the topic of clowning so closely alongside an analysis of mime theatre, without offering clear points of distinction, suggests the assumption that an engaged body is a principle mode of expression in clowning, as it is in mime. Bu lays the emphasis on the individuality of the clown performer, whose work is personal, sincere and virtuosic.

Several non-western performance styles have been described as 'clown' by Anglophone anthropological writers, including the Merolico, a Mexican street performer who insults his audiences (Haviland 2011), the Sri Lankan Hatabambura, described by Cheesmond (2007) as a grotesque old-man routine recognisable to Westerners familiar with Commedia dell'Arte, Native *heyoka* described by Coburn and Morrison (2013), and Balinese masked clowns for whom Jenkins (1979; 2007) does not provide a local term. A collection of anthropological essays examines ritual and informal clowning practiced by women in Papua New Guinea (Mitchell 1992). For these writers, it is the reaction of laughter in the audience and the transgression of certain boundaries and taboos that identify these performance styles as clown.

Bakhtinian carnival theory elucidates the view of clowning as politically transgressive, where clown and comedy can defy censorship (Ritchie 2010; Robb 2007). The Bakhtinian theory of carnival freedom equates grotesque physicality with transgression, rebellion and inversion of structures of power. Bakhtin refers to clowning at religious ceremonies as creating 'degradation...the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body...' (Bakhtin 1984: 20). The degradation to the body allows power to be transferred to those who do not have cultural, institutional or religious power, but who do have a corporeal existence. It also enables 'rebirth' or regrowth to occur. In my MPhil I argued that Gaulier's language and imagery made use of 'degradation to the material level' (Amsden 2011: 36), but I have found the literal use of bodily functions evoked in carnival theory too blunt for use here. The significance of the clown's work being both physical and embodied will be explored in Chapter 5, but Bakhtinian carnival theory will not be used since I identify a subtler and more individual use of ambiguity in Gaulier's clown practice. The grotesque and taboo are central to the idea of

clown in carnival theory, but would not be popular in another arena of clown practice, Christian 'clown ministry'.²³ In his manual on clowning for amateurs, written from experience staging clown shows with a YMCA, McVicar maintains that 'Clowns should not try to be silly, for clowning is a dignified art and profession. Clowns should omit anything off-colour or offensive' (1987: 6). The potential for this level of disagreement about the function of clowns make it very difficult to determine what a clown 'is'.

Introducing *Clowns, Fools and Picaros*, Robb calls clowns 'the embodiment of contradiction itself' (Robb 2007: 2). I find this applicable to the many ambiguities held in clown performance and Gaulier's teaching. Contradiction, ambiguity and tension allow clown teaching and practice to be read in sometimes totally contrasting ways. It also brings some potentially comic lines into the study of clowning - the title of Peacock's book *Serious Play* suggests a potential (but not necessarily always accurate) oxymoron, and Davison promises that his book will find a way to provide 'something [...] that will make you think you might be wrong about clown, which would be no bad thing, since clowns inevitably end up being wrong' (Davison 2013: 3). Here, Davison compares a common source for clown material - contradicting the environment in which they are found - and the breadth of possible interpretations of the genre. One particularly relevant ambiguity in the genre of clown is between tradition and spontaneity or authenticity. Swartzell captures this by considering clowns as:

unique and universal; the art of clowning involves at once spontaneous acts of creation, many years devoted to the expression of an individual comic identity, and many centuries of tradition, imitation and unbroken cultural identity (Swartzell 1978: 4).

It also means that each clown becomes a representation of 'clowns' - bringing with them cultural baggage, preconceptions that affect interpretation. This is not a phenomenon exclusive to clown, rather, what Marvin Carlson calls 'ghosting' has been an 'obsession' of a wide range of theatre genres, perhaps even of all theatre (Carlson 2001: 15). Particularly relevant here is Carlson's section on the 16th century comic genre of Commedia dell'Arte, where he discusses shifting trends in the genre that happened when a particular actor

²³ See (Litherland 1993; Shaffer and Sewall 1984)

became associated with a role, then adapted the mask or the gestures they used with it. Each new depiction of the role would then be ‘ghosted’ by the previous performances that audiences had seen, but simultaneously marked by each performers ‘individual use of the stock type’ (Carlson 2001: 59-62). Familiar clown signifiers, rather than being used to identify or define clowns, could be said to ‘ghost’ the performance with memories of actual performances, cultural meanings of clown (such as laughter, wholesomeness, or horror stories), celebrity clowns, and oral histories of ‘classic’ clown scenes.

Clown ‘ghosts’ are frequently male, and so clowning has been assumed to be a male performance genre. For example, Peacock notes as an aside: ‘...it can be possible to recognize the clown by his (clowns are predominantly male) appearance’ (Peacock 2009: 14). W.K. Little, referring to the circus tradition, also observes ‘For the most part, entrée clowns are men’ (1986: 63), but neither examines the potential implications of the trend. Kalvodová (1965) and Ran (2007) make a move to examine female clowning but dwell on female stock character types in traditional comedies. As mentioned above, Irving identifies Gaulier’s style of clown teaching as being particularly male, and documents her own search for an inherently female clown practice. Davison devotes a chapter to a history of women clowns in the Euro-American tradition, and suggests that the apparent lack of women in clowning is due to a lack of recordings, and a gender imbalance in the wider history of employment. Many of the students on the clown course I took part in, and the end-of-term show, were female, and the activities did not differentiate according to the gender of the student on stage.²⁴ As a female student, myself, and to contribute to a less gender-specific representation of clowns, I refer to ‘the’ (abstract) clown student with female pronouns throughout.

Laughter

In this thesis, I pay particular attention to Gaulier’s insistence on the centrality of audience laughter to define the act of clowning. However, this has not been

²⁴ However, the feedback from Gaulier would include how the student performed gender, if this was relevant because it made people laugh. For example, one young female student was given the costume of Minnie Mouse, which drew attention to her girlish face, and made people laugh when she acted aggressively, hitting people with her handbag. Gender expectations were used on this occasion to form a comic contrast.

ubiquitous in defining clowns. Tobias indicates the contradictory nature of clowning by pointing out that laughter is ‘commonly presumed to be an axiomatic and defining feature [but] even this basic assumption is not entirely indisputable’ (Tobias 2007: 37). Tobias seems to reject the centrality of laughter on the basis of Little’s observation that in late 20th century clowning, ‘it is the individual poetic object that counts, and that does not necessarily need to be funny’ (1986: 55). Little, however, is not advocating this style of clowns, rather he is criticising clown performers not originating from the circus. He describes what circus clowns ‘disparagingly call [...] “school” or “private” clowns’ (Little 1986: 55), who are influenced by mime, have learned in schools such as Lecoq’s and who are not embedded in the entrée tradition. He criticises the lack of laughter, saying that entrée clowns, more rooted in the circus tradition, know that ‘their job is to make people laugh’ (1986: 56). However, the supposed rejection of laughter in Lecoq trained clowns is a misunderstanding, the teacher having been fully aware that ‘clowns make you laugh’ (Lecoq 2006: 14). Little is not accurately representing the ‘new’ clowns’ intentions, but regaling the feeling towards them from the perspective of circus clowns, thus creating a straw man of Lecoq’s training. To argue that Little defines clowning as not necessarily funny is to miss the article’s purpose, and I believe that, especially in the context of Gaulier, what Tobias considers a ‘basic assumption’ about clowning should still stand.

However, there are clowns who believe that laughter is only a part of clowning, and who seek more than this audible reaction. Oleg Popov, who trained at the Moscow National circus school and became an international star representing Russian circus, writes in 1970 that his ‘naturalist’ type of clowning can ‘provoke admiration and joy. Joy, an extremely rich emotion, may produce laughter or it may not’ (1970: 96). Popov considers that his predecessors, the burlesque clowns, limit their intention to creating laughter, and criticises this:

the aim of the gag is not to force laughter from the audience [...] The thought that the object of a comic performance is just to make people laugh is the same as the belief that the only radiation sent out by an electric lightbulb is light (Popov 1970: 95).

This strange analogy suggests that laughter, the primary ‘object’ of a comic performance should be considered alongside secondary effects (like the ‘heat’ of

a lightbulb). However, when initially working in circuses, it seems that the ability to make audiences laugh was a key measure of his ability to clown: ‘I found my style and my act became steadily funnier’ (1970: 19). Popov’s own practice, which is located in a different geo-political time from Gaulier’s, is richly documented in this autobiographical resource.

A recent publication by Veronica Coburn and Sue Morrison, *Clown through Mask*, (2013) offers an interesting perspective on the idea that clown should provoke ‘more than’ laughter. The book documents the eponymous approach to clown (and clown teaching), developed by Richard Pochinko and practiced, since his death, by Morrison. This approach takes aspects of American and European clown practice (Pochinko trained with Lecoq, and Morrison with Gaulier) but views them ‘through the profundity of Amerindian ways of clowning’ (Pochinko 1987, cited in Coburn and Morrison 2013: 18). Coburn and Morrison elucidate the spiritual clown practices of Native American and First Nation people, whom they collectively refer to with the term ‘Native’. Morrison, while apprenticed to Pochinko, also had pleasure and success in Gaulier’s classes, and uses some of his techniques of teaching, and sometimes her words resemble his (Coburn and Morrison 2013: 42). The book documents, interprets and also attempts to teach *Clown through Mask*, creating a text that is pedagogical, and even evangelical. Coburn, like the practitioners she represents, believes that a clarity of purpose will make for better clowning in theatre, which she considers a ‘secular church’, enabling audiences and societies to ‘survive’ their ‘individual and collective fears and demons’ through laughter (2013: 17). The ‘profundity’ of Native clowning considers laughter to be part of a spiritual practice, intrinsically connected to all aspects of being, including the sacred and the shameful. Coburn and Morrison critique the insistence on laughter that they ascribe to the ‘European method’, considering *Clown through Mask* to be a more holistic approach. The writers understand that being funny is what audiences often expect of clowns, and reason that laughter is often the outcome of clown performance; but argue that ‘[t]he clown is not required to be funny. The clown is only asked to be truthful but laughter is a common result’ (Coburn and Morrison 2013: 399). This sentiment is complicated by what the authors see as the social function of laughter:

The clown's function, to ensure our survival, is most serious. The concept of Native wholeness would have us believe that laughter is the natural companion of seriousness. Therefore, the clown, in executing a most serious task does so to most complete effect when utilising its opposite, laughter (Coburn and Morrison 2013: 13-14).

Meanwhile, the student is most likely to 'discover her own way of being idiosyncratically hilarious' in her 'seriousness' (2013: 14). According to this logic, it would be very difficult for a clown to achieve 'just' laughter. Even if a clown aimed only to make audiences laugh, surely this would not prevent the serious function of this laughter from being fulfilled.

Coburn describes a key feature of Clown through Mask not used by Gaulier - an explicit quest of self-discovery. Nonetheless, questions of the personal self and even a sense of spirituality do surface in Gaulier's classroom. While the discussion on the purpose of clowning exists amongst practitioners of clown around the world, and also among Gaulier students past and present, this is not a question I seek to address here. I focus on the skills and actions learned by clowns in one specific context, where the sole objective, to create laughter, is clearly stated. However, Gaulier's focus on helping people learn 'how' to be funny, without engaging in 'why', has its own political implication. Before teaching, Gaulier created and performed acclaimed clown acts with Pierre Byland, the best known being *Les Assietes*. He is enigmatic in his description of this show, describing it only as 'a clown routine with a friend of mine' (Gaulier 2007: 279-280). Though it is tempting to examine this production as an original source of 'Gaulier's clown style', I believe this opacity implies a deliberate distancing of his teaching from his own practice. On the cover of his book, Gaulier insists that his students are 'originals! Not facsimilies! Not copies! They are authentic' (Gaulier 2007: back cover). Listing former students who have gained recognition for their performance skills, he proudly asserts their lack of similarity:

they are all dissimilar and marvellous in their art. No steamroller has squashed them down. No teacher has fobbed them off with a style [...] A teacher gives freedom. Nothing more.
And the style?
It flourishes in the poetry of each individual (Gaulier 2007: back cover).

This thesis will examine how this ‘freedom’ might be ‘given’ to each individual student, and the relationships that allow this to be a goal of the teaching. As a result I have not undertaken any archival research into Gaulier’s own performance, although I do examine what he describes of the flops in *Les Assiettes* as part of Chapter 4. The listed names on Gaulier’s book cover and website are actors in various genres and media, only some of whose work might be described as clown. We will see that individual ‘styles’ of clowning emerge according to the students’ individual bodies, the things they find pleasurable or fun, and their reactions to flop. The ambivalence of Gaulier’s own position between traditions, and between highbrow or fringe theatre, and lowbrow or mainstream film and comedy and circus, and his insistence on the variety of practices that will come out of his school - as varied as the students that study there - is not strange in the already ambivalent field of clowning. Gaulier teaches people to be funny, but does not encourage them to use this humour in any specific function or politics. As I argue in Chapter 2, despite playing the ‘tyrannical’ role in class, Gaulier avoids imposing any beliefs about the world on to his students. I believe Gaulier’s concentration on clowns being funny allows space for students to find their own reason for clowning - it does not preach the function that Coburn and Morrison describe, but nor does it disallow it.

In writing on clown, a common defining trait is the presence of inherent contradiction and liminality, whether in the play between seeming opposites, partnerships or meanings.²⁵ These aspects of clowning can override the significance of laughter in defining clown practice (Peacock 2009: 14). However, ideas of transgression, breaking with tradition, incongruity, and contradiction also appear in humour studies. If a clown makes people laugh, clown practice can be explored alongside humour theory, and whatever is found in the latter should be possible in the former. Humour, laughter and comedy have been studied in a variety of disciplines, including theatre, film and performance studies, psychology, anthropology, cognitive science, and linguistics. Selected texts from these fields are used to explore the practice of laughter-making.

²⁵ The liminal refers to a state of being between two states, and simultaneously outside of both. See Garoian 1999.

Stand-up comedians share the imperative of clowns, to make audiences laugh. A commercial success and popular phenomenon, stand-up comedy is defined by Oliver Double as ‘a single performer standing in front of an audience, talking to them with the specific intention of making them laugh’ (1997: 4). Double highlights the challenges created by the individual nature and the ‘specific intention’ of the stand-up comedian, the latter creating a way to measure the success or failure of each performance event. Laughter outweighs any other judgement that may be placed on the stand-up comedian - ‘you may have been inventive, imaginative, intelligent, but if they didn’t laugh, you’re a failure’ (Double 1997: 5). These three attributes seem to be held in high esteem in stand-up, however in Gaulier’s teaching, clowns are ‘stupid’ rather than ‘inventive, imaginative, intelligent’. This definition also provides a potential distinction to be drawn between stand-up comedians and clowns - the tool with which the stand-up makes audiences laugh is ‘talking to them’. Clowns are of course able to talk to audiences, but they also use other means of communication in their laughter-making. McCrystal raised this topic in our interview, saying that although clown students were not explicitly taught to create physical comedy, the nature of the improvisations did not lead to the use spoken language. The courses and workshops in France are attended by an international group of students, and taught in English.²⁶ Furthermore, ‘because of the range of different nationalities in any course, language will not necessarily - will probably not - be your first way of expressing yourself’ (McCrystal 2013). Students cannot rely on linguistic skills to make the international audience laugh. This might imply that the native English speakers might be better positioned to use language for their comedy. However, McCrystal offers another factor that may allow us to further distinguish between stand-up comedy and clown - the status of the performer - ‘Many people, many very good clowns who are silent can’t be funny when they speak. Because they lose their stupidity when they speak’ (2013a). McCrystal went on to explain that his own voice and accent, as a trained British actor, did not make him ‘sound stupid’, therefore he had found it ‘easier to be stupid without speaking, initially’ (2013a). McCrystal’s experience may in fact be shared by other native English speakers, meaning that clowns are less likely to rely on talking than stand-ups would be.

²⁶ Gaulier also speaks French and Spanish, and Miyazaki speaks Japanese.

One result of the value given to language in comedy is that writing on stand-up tends to rely on textual analysis rather than performance. I do not draw heavily on linguistic theories of humour, despite there existing a strong body of literature (Raskin 1985; Attardo 2001; Ritchie 2010). While there is some practical similarity between stand-ups and clowns, analysis of verbal humour has been carried out separately from study of interpersonal, facial and physical humour, and does not easily translate to a study of clowning. The detail of how one sentence can have two opposite meanings is not applicable to this study, although clowning can also use proximity of, or ambiguity between, opposites. Chapters 3 to 5 explore skills and interactions that are more productively used by clowns to produce laughter - for example, if a clown were to tell a joke, it would be likely to be a bad one, and the following acknowledgement of the flop could make the audience laugh.²⁷ Chiaro argues that the 'verbal duplicity' on which jokes rely is particularly prevalent in the English language, perhaps causing an increased opportunity for linguistic joking in Anglophone cultures, and the UK in particular (1992: 122). Double's history of stand-up and Variety Theatre is purposefully British, and draws on a national tradition of joke-writing (Double 2012). Chiaro's argument helps us understand why 'jokes' are less prolific in clown: the international group of students in the Clown classroom cannot be expected to share cultural and linguistic knowledge that enables successful (funny) joke-telling (Chiaro 1992: 6).

Analysis of verbal humour can use taxonomies to discuss jokes by content. Categories of verbal jokes include sex, the absurd, politics and 'underdog' minority (often ethnic) types who provide the comic object of jokes in different places. These rely heavily on stereotype and a lot of the jokes provided as examples (for example in Raskin 1985: 148-237) when read in 2014 strike me as unfamiliar and offensive. It is possible that these jokes were once more socially accepted than they are now, and so would have been more familiar to audiences and presumably funny to people outside of the group being laughed at. Clown performance bypasses this problem in two ways - being responsive to the intended laughter, a clown student can choose material that she feels the

²⁷ In a contemporary rewriting of a farce, *Feydeau's Every Last Trick* (May 3, 2014), Gaulier-trained Adrien Gygax came front of curtain before the second act, telling the audience he had a joke. He began, and broke off to apologise that the joke was in French. The audience laughed at the apology. He continued, finished and looked at the silent audience. He left the stage, flouncing as though annoyed, and we laughed at this reaction to the flop. See Chapter 3.

audience will understand, will recognise, and this can change at any time. Further, because clowns invite laughter at themselves, they do not pinpoint any particular group as the comic object. This is, however, undercut by the teacher who does draw on national and other stereotypes, embracing the bad taste and potentially offensive things that often do make the audience laugh. There is no censorship of the performances at the school, provided the acts make the audience laugh. Some of it is difficult to describe without seeming crude, but the responsibility is always shared between the clown and audience.²⁸

Linguists Aarons (2012) and Goatly (2012) repurpose verbal and written jokes in order to explain linguistics, using jokes to reveal the tacit knowledge of linguistic formation held by the teller and laughing recipient of the joke. Physical comedy, which demands only that spectators understand the physical realities of having a human body, is less restricted. However, despite these differently weighted skills and potential differences in status, there is not a clear distinction between stand-up comics and clowns. Double names several variety comics whose physicality and exaggerated onstage appearance were part of their toolkit to make audiences laugh. The Fosters Edinburgh Comedy Award (run by Nica Burns at the Edinburgh Fringe) does not mention clown in its criteria for prizewinners:

For both the Edinburgh Best Comedy and Best Newcomer award, the show must be stand-up, character comedy, sketch/revue, comedy musical or cabaret. The material must be unique to the performer / show. Comedy plays are not eligible (<http://www.comedyawards.co.uk/judging.asp>).

Nonetheless, 2012 winner Dr Brown (*Befrdfgth*,) and 1985 winner, then called Theatre De Complicité (*More Bigger Snacks Now*) both self-identify as clown and have trained with Gaulier. The overlaps between these two genres of comic performance suggest that self-identification might be the clearest way to distinguish between clown and stand-up comedy. Nonetheless, in order to write a thesis about clown training, it is necessary to create a working definition of 'clown'.

²⁸ Offensiveness is more directly explored in Bouffon, where the performers play with ambivalences between who is laughing at whom. An example from popular culture would be Baron Cohen's early character Ali G, see Lockyer and Pickering (2005: 196).

A Working Definition

Like the genre of clowning as a whole, Gaulier's clowning thrives on a lack of fixity and valuing of individuality, but the workshop would not exist if there were not some skills and practices to be taught. Having identified trends rather than any concrete differences that separate the clown and stand-up comedian, my definition will be based on Double's definition of stand-up, with relevant details changed to indicate greater variability among clowns. I propose that the clown being explored at École Philippe Gaulier can be defined as '*A performer playing with the specific intention of making spectators laugh*'. This definition uses some of Gaulier's vocabulary to create an impression of the experience of clown performance and spectatorship.

This definition contains an ambivalence that encompasses both play and flop, two clown practices this thesis will explore. It can be read, 'A performer playing, with the specific intention of making spectators laugh', emphasising the activity of the clown as play. It could also be read, 'A performer, playing with the specific intention of making spectators laugh'. In this reading, it is the intention that the clown plays with; comedy can be created from failures to fulfil this intention. This definition sits comfortably alongside Gaulier's own definition stated at the start of this chapter, 'the work of the clown is to make the audience burst out laughing', but it is less dogmatic, and less aggressive - in my interpretation the clown seeks laughter but does not 'make' the audience do anything, and the laughter does not have to 'burst out' but can grow, gradually, and be sustained.

Clowns, unlike stand-ups, aren't necessarily 'single', they might be with another clown, or with a non-clown (such as an audience volunteer, Monsieur Loyal or character). Unlike the texts on 'the clown figure', my definition does not directly mention contradiction or duality, traditional methods or transgression. However, all of these might be possible tools to use to fulfil the intention of making an audience laugh, and so they are not excluded from the definition. The spatial relationship of clowns to audiences is further discussed in the Chapter 2. While a stand-up is 'in front of' spectators, the spatial and status relationship between a clown and her spectators is more complex. In this definition, the spectators are located only in the intention of the clown to make them laugh,

but they are present with the clown. The definition excludes performers whose spectators are not in the same space, and thus treats clown as a live performance genre. However, the skills of clowning taught at Gaulier's school are transferrable to recorded media - as the success of Baron Cohen makes clear - but this is not addressed at the school. The fact that clown students can see and hear all that audiences do is essential to the techniques of flop and complicit play. With a working definition describing what is being taught in Gaulier's Clown workshop, Chapter 2 will explore in more detail how the teaching itself functions.

Chapter 2: Pedagogy of Spectatorship

‘Listen to the laughter because it helps you discover your clown’ (2007: 302)

As a recent graduate looking to learn more about clowns, I took a clown workshop with John Wright at the National Student Drama Festival. Afterwards, wanting more, I asked the teacher for recommendations. Without pausing, he advised me to go ‘to Gaulier’, telling me I would ‘learn bad habits anywhere else’. Like Wright, many practitioners consider Gaulier to be the ultimate, or best, master clown teacher, irrespective of whether their knowledge is gained through personal experience or the teacher’s reputation. Basauri, who is highly regarded as a clown performer and teacher, told me:

I always think of doing another workshop. And I think, who will I do another workshop with? And I realise the only person I can do workshops with is Philippe. Until he dies. When he dies, then I will have to look for another master (Basauri and Park 2013).

Basauri has taught at the Gaulier school, and describes his loyalty by using the teacher’s first name as synecdoche for the clown practice of Spymonkey: ‘we do Philippe. That’s what we do’. But it is not just avowed Gaulier supporters who ascribe him this status. For example, Canadian director Tom Scholte, in an article exploring the later work of Stanislavski, worked with actors who, dissatisfied with mainstream actor training, went ‘to Paris to study with the avowedly anti-Stanislavskian clown and bouffant [sic] master, Phillipe [sic] Gaulier’ (Scholte 2010: 26). The status is awarded directly to the teacher, not to any particular ideas, skills or method. Likewise, the teacher and his words form the basis of entertaining anecdotes told by former students of the school.

While I agree that Gaulier’s charisma, humour and provocations make him an effective and highly memorable teacher, I argue that it is Gaulier’s pedagogical use of the student audience that sets his school apart. I propose that the pedagogy I witnessed in Gaulier’s classroom makes particular use of peer feedback and that the central skill being taught in the clown workshop is that of listening to the audience. Students watch one another perform every day, and in doing so provide a crucial interaction necessary to learn clowning. This chapter

will suggest that Gaulier's pedagogy constructs clown as a performance genre that gives priority and power to the audience. At the centre of this pedagogy is the relationship between students on stage and students in the audience. I build on Murray's observation that 'Gaulier's locus of attention is the student-performer's engagement - *complicité* - with [the] audience' (Murray 2010a: 226). The title of this thesis, a definition of clown provided by Gaulier, foregrounds the audience. It is also followed by a joke: 'The work of a clown is to make the audience burst out laughing. A clown who doesn't provoke laughter is a shameful mime' (2007: 289). The follow-up sentence mocks Gaulier's own lineage, and also makes the reader laugh. In this text, he performs in the same way as he does in his classroom, teaching clowning while always practicing as a clown as well. I argue that Gaulier is mediator of peer response, and the acknowledged expert - but his expertise is in the skill he teaches, which is clowning.

In this chapter I identify the ways in which Gaulier's teaching practice differs from models of learning in other classrooms, especially those in which adults are trained for performance. I explore the context in which this pedagogy emerges, and using Gaulier's own writing, I speculate on the potential political implications of the teaching practices.

Pedagogy

Pedagogy refers to the choices and actions being made by teachers, educators and trainers, and particularly the way that theories of learning are put into practice. I will adopt Peter Mortimore's definition of pedagogy, being 'any continuous activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another' (Mortimore 1999: 3). This definition highlights activity on the part of the learner, enhanced by the activity of another person, be they teacher, trainer, peer or employer. The discussion of pedagogy often adheres to a 'persistent dichotomy' of traditional, subject-centred education, versus progressive, child-centred education (Carr 2003: 214). There is also a third strand of vocational, competence-based education, which has been highly influential in late 20th century and early 21st century UK teaching policy. The teaching of adult learners, considered to require different practices to children, has been called

‘andragogy’.²⁹ One essay in Mortimore’s edited collection, *Understanding Pedagogy*, summarises the concept of a separate theory for adult learning:

Andragogy was [...] premised on humanistic assumptions about the adult learner as a self-directed human being who possesses rich prior experiences, has a readiness and orientation to learn related to the roles and responsibilities of adult life, and is internally motivated (Hodgson and Kambouri 1999: 178).

Practitioners of andragogy have found that adults studying a new topic may benefit from gradually taking over direction of their own learning. Ann Hodgson and Marina Kambouri surveyed the existing research on efficient and appropriate models of learning in adults. While they did not find any overarching theory, they discovered a set of principles espoused by Stephen Brookfield (1986), which are ‘well-respected and endorsed by many educators’ although not empirically tested (Hodgson and Kambouri 1999: 185). These principles describe effective practice for pedagogy with adult learners:

- participation is voluntary;
- effective practice is characterised by a respect among participants for each others’ self-worth;
- facilitation is collaborative;
- action and reflection are placed at the heart of effective facilitation (action in a sense of exploring a wholly new way of interpreting one’s own work, personal relationships or political allegiances);
- facilitation aims to foster in adults a spirit of critical reflection;
- the aim of facilitation is the nurturing of self-directed, empowered adults (Hodgson and Kambouri 1999: 185).

While they recognise the wide variety of contexts in which adults learn, Hodgson and Kambouri conclude that studies up to that date had found that ‘adults learn well when they are self-directed, particularly when they receive feedback from a supportive peer group’. Hodgson and Kambouri are rigorous with their use of the term ‘self-directed’, meaning that the learners must not only work independently, but must also be active in setting their own goals and evaluating their own learning. The educator of adults has a responsibility to create an environment where peer feedback can be provided. Mortimore’s definition of pedagogy as a ‘continuous activity by one person designed to enhance learning

²⁹ ‘Pedagogy’, from Greek refers to ‘leading a boy’, so the term for adult learners describes ‘leading a man’. See (Knowles 1980).

in another' describes a relationship between two individuals, a teacher and a learner. However, as Hodgson and Kambouri indicate, feedback from other learners can be a pivotal part of adult learning. Gaulier's teaching always occurs in a group context, and I will demonstrate that in the Clown course, learning is enhanced by the activity of several people. The clown classroom could be aligned with Hodgson and Kambouri's observations about supportive peer feedback, but it uses this feedback in a very specific way, as a central part of the learning process but also as vital to the skill being learnt.

Teaching policy and curricula in the UK state-funded sector are designed by teachers (or trainers); but also by policy-makers, who represent 'the wider society of parents, employers and citizens' when they stipulate what pedagogy and curricula should provide for learners (Mortimore 1999: vii). Gaulier's private school for actors could be included as part of a broad educational sector for learners over 16, discussed in theory and policy as Post-Compulsory Education (PCE). The sector encompasses higher school qualifications, university education, in-work training, and informal teaching. Being a private business, Gaulier's school is not governed by policy-makers, but it can be seen to follow some general practices of PCE. Recent investigations of adult education in the UK focus closely on the impact of educational policy, in particular the emphasis on 'lifelong learning' that impacts vocational training rhetoric. European policy at the start of the 21st century gives vocational training increased importance in school PCE (Speake 2007; CIRCE 2000). In their textbook for trainee adult educators, *Working in Post-Compulsory Education*, Andy Armitage and colleagues (2007) explain that vocationalism is influenced by the theories of early twentieth century educationalist John Dewey, who disapproved of subject-split teaching for its failure to achieve a 'general training of the mind' (Dewey 1966: 67). Dewey sought to remedy this by basing teaching of all subjects on 'active occupations'. Armitage et al. point out that the term 'vocational' has come into common usage in the discussion of teaching, with an imprecision that can mask theoretical problems in PCE policy. The authors, who attempt to defend a more knowledge-based liberal education structure, chart British trends in training through the late 20th century, which relate to employment statistics - and trace a movement of vocational training from the workplace into state-provided colleges and schools. As a result, 'mainstream education is dominated by the

vocational themes of a work-related, often competence-based curriculum' (Armitage et al. 2007: 28). Although it is outside these authors' focus on mainstream (school and college) education, and is in France with an international student body, Gaulier's school can be said to offer vocational training because it focuses on skills to be used in the workplace of theatre. Adults undertake theatre training with the aim of professionalising their skills, and clown training with the aim of improving their ability to do 'the work of a clown'.

Gaulier's school is proudly private and outside of policy or curriculum control. The following is taken from a page entitled 'frequently asked questions' on the school website:

Do you give grants to cover teaching costs?

The school is proud of never having received a cent in aid from anybody or any government. It doesn't give out grants. How could it? (<http://www.ecolephilippegaulier.com/faqs.html>)

The school, through its refusal of aid, emphasizes its autonomy from state teaching policy; it is not accountable to any PCE policy.³⁰ This differentiates Gaulier's courses from accredited drama training in the UK, which Evans explains 'has increasingly become part of the much wider Higher Education economy [...] driven by a mix of economics and educational politics' (2009: 64). Evans cites a survey by National Council for Drama Training (NCDT) in 2008, which found 56% of Drama School students to be enrolled in degree programs. The NCDT was created to scrutinize the vocational value of drama school courses, following the trend described in PCE, and furthermore to distinguish drama schools from Drama degrees obtained at Universities (Evans 2009: 123). Evans considers the accreditation and validation processes to benefit the Drama School curricula because:

the nature and purpose of the training has been rigorously examined and clear statements have been produced regarding the aims and objectives of these courses. The relationship between the training offered and the demands of the industry has also been more closely scrutinized (Evans 2009: 65).

³⁰ Gaulier claims that the school was 'invited by the Arts Council to move to London' (back cover 2007). I have been unable to locate any mention of this funding in the Arts Council Archives.

In France, actor training seems to be less scrutinised, although the vocational value of the training is still praised. The *Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique* (National Academy of Dramatic Arts, shortened to CNSAD) will 'soon' offer national diplomas but currently does not. It is competitive to enter, and separate from the university system:

CNSAD's main function is to provide specialized teaching of dramatic art, in the form of three-year diploma courses and professional training. Its teaching covers all the theory and performance skills required in the acting profession (<http://www.cnsad.fr/2.aspx?sr=20>).

Private acting schools, and teachers offering short workshops, are outside the regulatory framework of state education. Gaulier monitors his own curriculum and develops it - the school changes its course structure on a continual basis, and the teacher advises students that he changes his daily practice depending on the students' progress. In 2008 and 2009, the school distributed certificates to students on the completion of courses, but there was no exam or formal qualification or 'competency' measure taken as part of this. Nonetheless, there seems to be an informal network of practitioners who have met at the school and gone on to collaborate, and those who prefer to employ actors trained at the school. Unlike the accredited drama schools in the UK, Gaulier does not measure 'status and success by the number of [...] graduates who gain employment on stage and screen' (Evans 2009: 65). Instead we find a list of particular students considered to be successful graduates of the school - the list of 19 ex-students includes film performers from around the world as well as directors, teachers, and theatre performers that are 'all dissimilar and marvellous [sic] in their art' (Gaulier 2007: back cover).

As part of Gaulier's proud statement of autonomy, the website conveys that access to the school is financially restricted. Only those students both able and prepared to invest upwards of €900 in their own professional training can attend the school:

Are you willing to talk about money and conceivably lower your fees?
No.
Never?
Yes (<http://www.ecolephilippegaulier.com/faqs.html>).

This has an impact on who has access to the classroom. This inclusion in the ‘frequently asked questions’ part of the website suggests finance might be a problem for potential students.³¹ The intense competition for entry into accredited drama schools creates a different barrier, although finance can create a barrier in UK HE as well. Roanna Mitchell points out that students accepted to leading drama schools have already achieved a certain level of success, citing theatre critic Lynn Gardner’s finding that it is ‘twice as hard to get into a leading drama school as it is to get into Oxbridge, with the ratio of applicants to places averaging seven to one’ (Gardner 2008 cited by Mitchell 2014: 70). Mitchell suggests that this competition instils loyalty to the ‘brand’ of the school to which the students belong:

For students, becoming part of an institution which is lauded in this way may present a compelling argument against questioning training practices or structures within the school, thus instating an unequal relationship of power between the school and its students (Mitchell 2014: 70).

Mitchell suggests that the effect of competitive entry may be to make students compliant and non-confrontational, unwilling to raise issues not addressed in the curriculum.³² The differences in entry and funding requirements reflect different power structures - with an unregulated curriculum, Gaulier can take his teaching in different directions, freely exploring the practice with the individuals in each group rather than moulding them to an industry standard. On the other hand, students joining the École Philippe Gaulier get no assurance of achieving the standard set by the school, or guarantee (or even explanation) of what the curriculum will involve. All these elements would be significant decisions for aspiring actors considering whether to train in the accredited, regulated drama schools or in a private drama school such as Gaulier’s.

In a paper entitled *Double Zero to First Class? Clown Pedagogy* (2013), Peacock reflects on her experience of learning and teaching clown in contrasting training environments. Peacock has taken Clown courses with Gaulier and Angela De Castro; and has run a clown module at the University of Hull. In practice, she

³¹ Some students attend thanks to funding sources from their own country, or from universities.

³² Mitchell discusses hidden curricula and missing dialogues on the aesthetic labour implicit in training for commercial theatre industry.

finds that teaching and assessment in Higher Education has a fundamentally different feedback model that means it could not resemble private (vocational) training offered by Gaulier. Peacock explains that her students expected to be given a course breakdown, assessment criteria and constructive feedback with full reasoning behind grades. She also points out the lower status of the teacher in this environment, saying she was unable to take the ‘master teacher’ role because she was already known to the students, whereas Gaulier, thanks to his reputation, does not have to justify or explain his feedback, and has a very high status role in the classroom. As well as the difference in her own status, Peacock saw that she was less able to use the laughter of the peers for feedback and assessment due to the friendships, loyalties and in-jokes already established among the group of students. Gaulier and his students, on the other hand, are strangers at the start of the course, many are working outside of their first language, away from home. Peacock also raises the difficulty of working with ‘failure’ in the university setting, where students have invested time and money in passing (which, for degree students, is the opposite of failing). As a result, it is difficult to encourage failure in the workshop when there are external goals and criteria for assessment, which students are keen to pass. Nuances of failure and success, and of assessment in Gaulier’s clown workshop, will be explored in Chapter 4. Although there is a growing academic and practical interest in clown, Peacock concludes that teaching it within the university will require a different pedagogical structure to that found at the private theatre school.³³

In mainstream drama school training, there is an emphasis on the approach to acting developed by and after Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938). As part of a collaborative report on the teaching of Stanislavski in Higher Education, Thomasina Unsworth, lecturer on the BA degree in Acting at Rose Bruford College, explains that this emphasis is due to the demands of the industry:

Until that is no longer a primary demand of the industry we prepare for, it seems foolish to ignore the enormous influence that Stanislavski’s system has on the way that actors work in this country (2009: 59).

³³ My own findings discussion of ‘the flop’ may add nuance to this problem within HE, since it could be explained to students how playing with the flop could be generative of responsive clown performance. See Chapter 3.

Alongside Unsworth's observations in the report is a section on Stanislavski in university contexts, written by Philip Weaver, Head of BA Acting at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts at the time of this research. Weaver interviews four drama lecturers, and notices a trend:

compared with older institutions, new universities seem to have a more practical approach to teaching drama and theatre studies, and also appear more likely to use Stanislavskian methodology extensively. This suggests that the more practical the teaching approach the more useful Stanislavski is (2009: 45).

The teaching of a Stanislavskian system is considered the most appropriate vocational training for entrance to the industry. There is, however, an increasing interest in clown in mainstream drama schools. It seems not to be included in formal curricula or assessment, but to take the form of informal, additional short workshops (East 15, CSSD).³⁴ Though his approach has become mainstream, Stanislavski's own teaching shared with that of Copeau, 'the struggle against the theatrical institutions of the time, their lazy conservatism, and the fight against the nonchalance of the theatrical profession' (Barba and Savaresse 2006: 25). Thus, though his system of acting has become the relevant tool for the workplace of mainstream theatre, it originated the 20th century phenomenon of the 'atelier' or workshop school, such as Gaulier's.

In an interview with Towsen, McCrystal describes working with actors trained in Stanislavski-based practice, but finding a 'very convenient crossover' with clown practice, since these actors are concerned with truthfulness, and:

The only real truth is that there's a thousand people in the room, and if you're pretending that there aren't, you're not being truthful (19th April 2012 Towsen).

Scholte, the director mentioned at the start of the chapter, used Gaulier-trained actors to explore some of Stanislavski's ideas for practice (2010), and Davison includes a section in his book on clown entitled 'Clown and the Actor's Paradox: Gaulier vs. Stanislavski' (2013: 207-210). This describes Gaulier's opposition to naturalism, and his 'diatribes' against Stanislavski and his method. Davison

³⁴ Further observational research into the clown workshops at Drama Schools would be valuable, it would be interesting to see whether the difficulties faced by Peacock are also found in this more vocational contexts, or whether the problems of evaluation and assessment remain.

suggests that Gaulier's use of 'the game of artifice' frees the actor from Diderot's long-famous actor's paradox between falsehood and belief. This theme will re-emerge in the discussion of both play and the flop. It is possible that, given time, Gaulier's approach could penetrate mainstream actor training in the UK and perhaps the pedagogical problems raised by Peacock will be resolved.

Master status also stems from status as 'originator' of the codes of practice - or from the concept of lineage. In interview for Evans' project, Shona Morris, Senior Lecturer in Acting at Drama Centre, London, considers her own authority to have been initially related to her own training with Lecoq and Gaulier: 'I always had a gallery of my master teachers watching me' (Morris 1999, cited in Evans 2009: 133). 19th and 20th century movement pedagogues, including Lecoq, have pervaded movement teaching. Some of Lecoq's methods have, through tutors, become part of the physical practice of the mainstream drama schools. Evans briefly notes that the construct of master teachers bears 'gendered connotations' (2009: 133), a point that is picked up by Irving, for whom the patriarchal construct of the workshop made it difficult for her to engage with the teaching.³⁵ Irving finds that 'hierarchical and patriarchal studio teaching methodologies do not allow for the revelation of the lived experiences of women's material bodies' (Irving 2012b: 34-35). She argues that assumptions of 'masculinist essentialism' prevented her from being able to display particular aspects of her female body, specifically as a 'ridiculous naughty mature woman' (Irving 2012b: 103), which she struggled to express in Gaulier and Wright's workshops. Irving ascribes some of this difficulty to Gaulier's use of costume, which will be explored further in Chapter 5. However, the authority of the master teacher is not simply a social authority gained from being an older, European man; it 'derives from a personal mix of subject expertise; institutional, national or international status; personal charisma; and historical association' (Evans 2009: 132). Gaulier has not been granted status solely due to a patriarchal Eurocentric culture, but has earned his status as a master teacher and originator of ideas.

³⁵ Further observational study would be needed to comment on the gendered space/opportunities created by the pedagogical style. My own hunch is that on the course I took, there were fewer men, but that these men seemed to have an easier time of making the class laugh – but more investigation would be necessary to state this firmly.

The presence of ‘master-teachers’ is perhaps a surprising commonality between the mainstream schools and the private courses led by the charismatic individual:

students often have the one acting teacher for the whole year, if not for the whole course, and this builds up a master-pupil relationship by which the ‘embodied knowledge’ is passed on. In RADA, Jane Boston confirms there is a strong tradition of master-teachers from whom strict working parameters are delineated and with whom the acting process is experienced (Darce et al. 2009: 8).

In his study of movement training in the leading accredited Drama Schools, Evans finds a similar pattern of ‘master teachers’ (2009: 133). Firstly, this is evident in the level of individual scrutiny that is placed on the students. In movement classes, the tutor observes the bodies of students (revealed in a uniform of leotards and leggings) on a daily basis, in a way that students experience as individualised and even intimate. Evans finds that ‘students accept this scrutiny as necessary for the development of flexibility, self-knowledge and sensitivity’ (Evans 2009: 128). This scrutiny is regularly formalised:

A key teaching and assessment mechanism is the “crit”, an assessment method with a long tradition in schools of Art and Design, in which students present work for critical scrutiny by their tutors (and sometimes also their peers). [...] Students comment on the fact that praise is limited and selective. This operates to maintain discipline and focus within the class, sustaining the tutor as knowledge-holder and maintaining an attitude that the work is never finished (Evans 2009: 128-129).

Gaulier’s feedback could be seen to adhere to this model, in which the tutor works as both ‘informed expert and surrogate audience’ (Evans 2009: 129) to observe and comment on the movement of the students. The term ‘surrogate’ implies that the real audience is absent, but as Evans notes in his description of ‘the crit’, peers can have a part in critical scrutiny in movement class, and they have a distinct role in the teaching of clown. Gaulier also remains the ‘informed expert’ at playing with the intention of making spectators laugh. As such he takes a particular role in relation to the audience of students.

Pedagogies of Performance

Practitioner Charles Garoian finds equivalence between performance art and pedagogy. He offers an 'emancipatory pedagogy of performance art' and describes equivalencies between roles in the classroom and artwork - 'artist/teacher' and 'spectator/student' (1999: 39-67). Garoian explains that the first of these composite roles describe 'cultural agents' and the latter describe 'cultural depositories' (1999: 39). He points out that, when students perform their own artworks, the roles are switched, so that students become artist/teachers. Garoian's concept is of performance as pedagogy, containing a lesson for its audience. In Gaulier's clown classroom, I propose that the roles are commonly in the configuration 'spectator/teacher' and 'artist/student' - the student learns through performing, listening and reacting to their spectator/teacher(s). However, Gaulier is sometimes artist/teacher, and students who succeed become artist/teacher while their peers can learn from examples, as student/spectators. However, both Gaulier and the successful students, when in the role of artist/student, must always remain aware of the audience's reaction - so taking the hybrid role of student/artist/spectator/teacher. This is pedagogy where performers learn from spectators in the classroom and beyond - spectatorship as pedagogy.

Language in the school's publicity material and in Gaulier's writing emphasises the active personal learning journey that he hopes the student will undertake. Nonetheless, his status fits into a concept of 'teacher', and students arrive at the school to be taught. The roles of who is teaching, learning, spectating and acting are hybridized in the clown workshop, as Mary Dixon notes, 'the distinctions of teacher and student identities have become part of our ordinary way of pedagogical knowing' (Dixon 2008: 91). Dixon finds it difficult to name participants whose roles are complicated and multiple, and asserts that familiar naming of teacher and student roles solidifies roles unhelpfully.³⁶ The roles of teacher and student are more ambiguous in performance pedagogy. In Garoian's proposed pedagogy, the class is led by an artist, who creates a liminal zone in which students 'become critical thinkers' (1999: 43). Garoian briefly draws on progressive educational theorist Peter McLaren (McLaren 1986, 1993) who

³⁶ The context for Dixon's observation is a classroom where there are 'middle years students, student teachers and teacher educators' collaborating on a project about teaching and learning.

suggests that there are three pedagogical roles a teacher can play - the 'hegemonic overlord', the 'entertainer' and the 'liminal-servant'. McLaren identifies each one by the response of the students: disconnected, unresponsive students demonstrate that 'the teacher was reduced to the hegemonic overlord' (McLaren 1986: 112); teachers were 'as-entertainer' when students 'were actively engaged by the instructor, but due to various obstacles [...] remained isolated viewers of the action' (McLaren 1986: 112); and the teacher was successfully performing the role of liminal servant when 'students responded with a sense of immediacy or purpose, either verbally or gesturally' (1986: 111). McLaren idealises the latter role, and makes a set of claims for possible results, though he points out that teachers rarely perform all these traits at once. The liminal servant, he suggests, can eradicate mind-body dualism, uses 'myths, metaphors and rhythms' that will resonate with the lived experience of students. These rather abstract descriptions of teaching are considered by McLaren to enable the teacher-as-liminal-servant to 'educate for individuality, distinction and eccentricity' rather than for conformity (1986: 114). Garoian uses the phrase 'liminal-servant' to refer to a position in which his artist/teacher places the students - a limen - where they see the cultural constructs, but negotiate between their private knowledge and experiences, and those of the schooled, public cultural norms. Under the title 'performance art is not theatre', Garoian likens the performance artist to the liminal-servant:

Unlike conventional theatre, performance art does not dispense information to spectators through closed narrative conventions. Instead, it incites communication through intervention, a direct involvement of spectators in deliberating the binary oppositions contested by the artist. This transformative questioning process shifts the role of spectator to the role of participant (Garoian 1999: 49).

This uncritical dismissal of narrative theatre is reductive, but in this defence of performance art, Garoian offers the spectator the opportunity for learning activity. But, despite the differences to 'conventional theatre' outlined here, in Garoian's performance art pedagogy, the spectator learns while the artist teaches. Garoian emphasises McLaren's distinction between the roles of liminal servant and entertainer, where both engage the students, but the entertainer 'performs the narrative of the dominant culture' (Garoian 1999: 34). However, when compared with Gaulier's school that teaches its students to be clowns - entertainers - the role of teacher-as-entertainer becomes more complex. It must

also include the roles of artist, spectator, and even student - learning about the 'individuality, distinction and eccentricity' of each student and each cohort of students as a group. In this context 'teacher as entertainer' becomes 'teacher-as-clown', a multiple and responsive role that simultaneously relies on and creates actively engaged students. The presence of spectators in the classroom, watching each other, is a distinct kind of 'spectatorship as pedagogy' that is the reversal of Garoian's example of performance as pedagogy.

Pedagogy of Spectatorship

Gaulier's focus on the audience's laughter differentiates his classroom from other schools of clowning. However, even those schools that maintain the notions that clowns do not have to make people laugh recognize the significance of the audience to clown. For example, teacher Eli Simon's focus is on sharing authentic emotional experiences:

Making eye contact allows you to gauge whether the audience 'gets' what you're experiencing as clown. At the same time, it enables the watchers to experience the veracity of your clown's inner life (Simon 2012: 18).

This exchange sounds profound, with the audience experiencing the clown's 'inner life', but the relationship remains based on the audience watching and 'experiencing' what the performer does and feels.³⁷ Gaulier's focus on laughter prioritises the audience's experience. Despite the claim that laughter is not the only desired outcome, Simon's descriptions of clown return to discussion of laughter. One of his guidelines for audiences of trainee clowns is that they should be honest with their vocal feedback:

Laugh when it's funny and don't laugh when it's not [...] It's difficult to assess how you're doing if the audience is pumping you up because they feel sorry for you (Simon 2012: 12).

Here, a clown audience is advised on how to respond to trainee clowns. In Gaulier's classroom, few instructions are this straightforward, but an environment is created where students watching others provide honest critique,

³⁷ the concept of a clown performer's 'inner life' will be more fully discussed in the body chapter

which allows the clown student a very clear idea of ‘how they’re doing’. Jarmuz described students trying to develop material on the long Clown course:

You’re essentially coming out and doing the same thing, in front of the same people, all of whom are frustrated because they went up and nobody laughed. It’s 8pm on a Thursday evening, they’re exhausted, and yet, it’s astounding, that’s when clown *happens* - and that’s probably the best way I can say it, when clown happens: they laugh! Completely spontaneous. And it’s like magic (Jarmuz 2013).

Jarmuz introduces two phenomena: firstly, that the audience’s reaction is part of the very definition of clowning, meaning that when the audience are not laughing, clown is not happening; and secondly, the fact that the students have to entertain the same people throughout the course. He describes a feeling of hard work, long days, and ‘frustration’ being transformed by the ‘magic’ of clown. From the outset of the workshop, the students provide an audience for one another, making clear the defining nature of laughter to clown. The game structure of the workshop, which will be explored in the following chapter, provides many opportunities for students to listen to audience response. Regular games, including ‘Balthazar Says’, and ‘Mr. Hit’, played at the start of the class, begin the process of watching, responding to and laughing at each other.³⁸ The bulk of the class is used for students to take turns, as individuals or in small groups, playing a game according to the instructions of the teacher, watched by him and their peers. After each individual or pair has had a turn, Gaulier speaks to the student(s) before they sit, and another individual or group attempts the same game. In the workshop, students are always watching each other, and so every performing student has an audience of spectators who are hoping to laugh.

During *autocours*, students explore things away from the spectators and teacher’s eyes, but the sharing of their work in the Friday class means that spectator approval, and Gaulier’s approval, remains pivotal. It functions in a similar way to the ‘crit’ of movement courses in Drama Schools described by Evans, where the presentation of work to an audience is the moment for its assessment. The end-of-term show gives students a chance to perform to a wider

³⁸ ‘Balthazar Says’ is a version of the children’s game ‘Simon says’, as described in the Introduction. ‘Mr. Hit’ is a tagging game involving names and taps on the shoulder, in which students are eliminated for making mistakes until there is a winner. It will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

audience after first gaining approval for scenes improvised in the class or prepared in the *autocours*. The audience mostly consists of friends, family and ex-students of the school. It is not publicised in press or even on the school website, but in December 2013 there was signage in the window of the school building, and some residents of Étampes were in the audience. While there is no formal assessment of the clown workshop, for those on the longer Clown course, inclusion in this show must feel like a significant affirmation of competency in clown performance skills, and a judgement of readiness to perform in front of a wider public. Recent student Burgers considers the classmates the ‘toughest audience’ a clown will face, since they are more informed than the general public:

they’ve seen you in the shit, and they’ve seen you do great things, but they’re just as hard as Philippe, because they know what he’s talking about (Burgers 2012).

These critical students are understood as miniature versions of the teacher, because they have learnt from the same master, and presumed to have picked up the same critical abilities. If the peer group audience is consistently considered critical, their laughter identifying and evaluating clowning, public audiences can also have this pedagogical role. Clown director McCrystal uses public audiences to track the aspects of performance that are working as clown, in order to give performers notes:

I can go and see one of my shows, and the next day, without writing anything down, I can say every single thing that got a laugh, and didn’t get a laugh, and did all right (McCrystal 2013).

McCrystal judges funniness by what ‘got a laugh’ the previous night, trusting the public audience’s judgement, and his own memory of these moments. Students trained by Gaulier become accustomed to judging their performance by the reaction of the student audience, and McCrystal extends this structure of assessment into professional performance development. Audience response takes priority not only in training, but also in clown performance.

The audience can function as teachers and judges because they are in the same space. I asked Saunders how and when he knew he was doing well during the Clown course. He answered enthusiastically:

doing it, during it, while I was doing it. I mean, people were laughing. [...] It's very instant, clowning. You know, if you're getting a response, then you know that you're on to something (Saunders 2013).

The instant feedback of audiences has been explored by Josephine Machon. Machon (2013) explores the activity of audiences in immersive practices, prioritising what she calls the 'praesence' of the spectator's body in the play space. Her term 'praesence' draws attention to the etymological root of the term 'presence', meaning 'before the senses'. For Machon it is significant that the spectators' bodies be in the same space as the performers' bodies, where the artists involved can see, hear, touch and even smell them. While defining immersive theatres, she identifies laughter as being the only mode in which spectators at many theatre events make themselves 'praesent':

you may be present in this space through laughter and intellectual attention, other than that the performance is completed with little or no reference to your being there (Machon 2013: 55).

Machon indicates that the laughter of spectators reminds artists of the bodies of spectators. According to Machon's definition, separate viewing and playing spaces define whether performances are seen as traditional or immersive. Despite being housed in traditional (fringe) theatre spaces, several shows I have seen performed by Gaulier-trained clowns traversed the boundary between the spaces to comic effect. Eric Davies's show *Red Bastard* opens with the performer asking the technician to leave the house lights on.³⁹ He winks at the audience, 'yes, it's that kind of show'. The audience were then instructed to move seats, shout out personal aspirations, among other tasks, throughout the show. At one point, Davies played with the rules of immersive interactions, a woman was moved to the side of the stage and told 'stand over there until you realise you don't have to do what you are told' (August 13, 2014). A gentler traversing of the line between viewing and playing space could be seen in Trygve Wakenshaw's *Squidboy*, when over three rows of spectators were 'offered' imaginary crisps, and these people willingly joined the play, making the movements and sound of eating crisps, to Wakenshaw and the audience's laughter and applause (2013). McCrystal describes advising actors trained in the Stanislavski-based tradition, in the context of the National Theatre's *One Man*,

³⁹ Pleasance Courtyard, Edinburgh Fringe, August 2014

Two Guvnors, ‘The only real truth is that there’s a thousand people in the room...’ (Towsen 19th April 2012). With this approach, McCrystal deprioritizes any physical divide between audience and playing space, and reminds actors that they are in the same room and colluding together in the act of play. This emphasis on the ‘praesence’ of spectators, even if they are in a separate space, could be traced to the experience with peer spectators in Gaulier’s classroom. The workshops take place in daylight, meaning that very small responses, such as smiles or frowns, are evident to the performers. Perhaps, then, the invasion of audience space reminds all participants of shared ‘praesence’ as well as being a source of comedy in the disruption of theatre conventions.

Contemporary French educational theorist Jacques Rancière studies the status of the spectator in ways that may help elucidate the relationship between performers, spectators and the teacher in the classroom. Rancière’s essay *The Emancipated Spectator* (2011) offers a comparison of the theatre event to a pedagogical model he calls *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. He criticises the ‘stultifying’ logic of teaching in which the teacher imparts his own knowledge to the students. In trying to explain his own superior knowledge to the ignorant student, the schoolmaster traps the student in the position of ‘ignoramus’, never knowing what she doesn’t know, and so remaining the passive receiver of knowledge.⁴⁰

Rancière examines Brecht’s and Artaud’s views toward spectators, concluding that both these practitioners, who aimed to encourage activity in spectators with their work, did so because they considered audiences to be ordinarily passive and ignorant when watching theatre. Rancière believes this approach to share the stultifying logic of the classroom, and argues that both lessons and theatre should be structured according to the assumption that students and spectators are already active and have equal intelligence to the tutor. A far better logic for teaching and performance, he claims, is the ‘emancipated logic’, where students and spectators use their own intelligence to learning

⁴⁰ This model of instruction has been long criticised by educationalists, who have been promoting learner activity since the 1940s. Mortimore (1999: 8) points out that the concepts of ‘active learning, collaborative learning, learner responsibility’ have been discussed fifty years prior to their publication (citing Miel and Wiles, *Toward Better Teaching* 1949). Mortimore and his colleagues from the Institute of Learning also cover ‘meta-learning’, a newer concept of active learning that is an increasingly common part of pedagogical practice, in which the learner critically reflects on his or her own learning processes, goals and achievements.

using comparison and development of what they already know. This pedagogical practice forms a significant part of the post-compulsory education sector, as mentioned above in the context of Brookfield's 1986 guidelines for PCE, 'action and reflection are placed at the heart of effective facilitation [which] aims to foster in adults a spirit of critical reflection' (Hodgson and Kambouri in Mortimore 1999: 185). Rancière's argument is aligned with 20th century trends in pedagogy for adults, where different experiences and knowledges are trusted and drawn upon, and applied to problem-solving. In the theatre, Rancière argues that theatre-makers should abandon the idea that there is a gap to be filled between the active performer and the passive spectator, and instead reimagine the exchange with an emancipatory logic. He proposes that we consider that 'the spectator also acts, like the pupil or scholar. She observes, selects, compares, interprets' (2011: 13). Rancière's terminology is useful in examining the hybrid roles of student/artist/spectator/teacher found in Gaulier's classroom. According to Gaulier, the performance of the actor should 'arouse the imagination' (Gaulier 2007: 177) and be 'open' or unfixed enough for spectators to 'find a way in to the game or story' (Gaulier 2007: 167 and 195). Gaulier encourages students to give performances sufficiently ambiguous and playful that the audience can enjoy sharing in the creative process. Spectators are treated as creative and active in their imaginative responses to performance. In Gaulier's classroom the student-spectator 'observes, selects, compares, interprets', as Rancière describes, and also judges and voices her response. Student actors are taught to respect the audience's activity throughout their learning. The students are therefore taught to accept and expect the presence of spectators who are active, and interpretive, but also evaluative and instructive.

Gaulier's high status role and idiosyncratic feedback complicates but does not eradicate this relation to emancipation. Gaulier sets tasks and speaks for the assembled students, but like Rancière's teacher does not explain. When students ask for an explanation, he uses poetic language, imagery, metaphors and sound effects. This response cannot be used by the student unless she 'observes, selects, compares, interprets' - so the learning remains a creative activity at all times. Describing the Neutral Mask course, Gaulier explains a function of his feedback:

If the teacher corrects the student, hoping to change the person in his entirety, the teacher is making a big mistake.
The teacher corrects the student hoping that, maybe one of these days, the student will have fun with their 'disorders'.
The teacher doesn't change anything but rather teaches how to use these things.
How?
With enjoyment (Gaulier 2007: 183).

Here, Gaulier describes himself as an outside eye, helping the student by naming what he sees, and hoping for a change but not giving specific instructions for what the changes should be. Like the 'ignorant schoolmaster', Gaulier demands that students perform their own capability, and through this he hopes students can explore the subject they study, and make discoveries for themselves. This is a version of the self-directed learning found in effective PCE - but Gaulier does not explain this function, instead leaving the students to discover that their learning must be self-directed, including the interpretation of feedback from peer spectators.

Rancière's writing did not originate in Theatre Studies but in educational and political philosophy. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* he creates an analogy between the school, with its 'master explicators' and the wider society. He argues that in both these contexts, despite the intentions of liberal educators to reduce inequality, the stultifying logic of passing knowledge from teachers to learners only confirms and perpetrates inequality, as students in this structure will always know less than those that teach them. Charles Bingham and Gert Biesta (2010) consider Rancière's theoretical 'schoolmaster' and find that in both the school and construction of society, leaders cannot emancipate others, but must instead assume that all participants are equal in intelligence and ability. The teachers cannot 'give' equality because in presuming to confer it, they are perpetuating their own powerful status - instead they have to trust and respect the students already to be equal, and to ask students to perform their own emancipation and equality. In Rancière's ideal classroom, there still remains a teacher figure, with a clear role. Bingham and Biesta interpret the role of this teacher not as an imparter of knowledge, but 'only an authority, a will that sets the ignorant person down a path' (2010: 3). This authority offers opportunities for students to enact their equality, and to verify it by performing in their own way, making audiences laugh on their own terms. Gaulier performs

as an authoritative figure in his classroom, and for students and ex-students of the school, and for a growing network of people who have experienced clown workshops with Gaulier-trained teachers (an inexhaustive list would include Basauri, Davison, Morrison, Burgers, Clown Lab) he is held as an expert and master teacher. I do not wish my analysis of the pedagogical spectatorship of the student peers to be interpreted as a denigration of this status. However, Gaulier's expert status contains an ambiguity that complicates his relationship to students:

One of the unique aspects of Gaulier's classroom was its framing as a parody of an authoritarian classroom, in which he performed the role of the stern, highly-critical teacher; he and the students understood this as a clown performance due to his deliberate distancing of himself from the role through his displays of "pleasure" in performing it (Purcell Gates 2011b: 12-13).

A closer look at Gaulier's classroom will reveal the input of peers and a more complex distribution of power than the one being 'parodied'. The spectators, as well as being considered creative interpreters of the performance, have multiple roles, including the pedagogical.

The Student Spectator

After identifying the significance of peer feedback in the Clown course, I asked interview participants, 'what role did your classmates play in your learning?' Firstly, interviewees remembered watching classmates in order to learn what the teacher liked. Deans and Saunders discussed this process as critical, and personal to the students on stage, 'even in [the first] class I understood what it was he liked about *that* improvisation and what it was he didn't like' (Saunders 2012). For Saunders, watching other students improvising offered clues to the teacher's preferences, and thus helped him to prepare for his own attempt. Gaulier is understood to be an expert spectator whose opinion is treated as final. McCrystal describes the wish to please the teacher, but emphasises the fact that Gaulier does not make it clear what criteria would be necessary to achieve successful clown performance. McCrystal links the ambiguity of what the teacher likes to the environment faced by a clown in front of a public audience:

you try to please him, and you don't really know what he wants. And that's part of the training because [...] that's exactly what a clown going out in front of an audience is looking for (McCrystal 2013).

The students do not know what Gaulier wants, and set out to look for it by trying different possibilities. McCrystal suggests that this prepares a clown student for building the same relationship with audiences when they go into the professional world. For the teacher, and for students and public audiences, there is no fixed answer to what is 'wanted', yet the clown has to go onstage each time looking for what the answer might be in that moment.

This level of responsiveness to an audience, trying to please them when 'you don't really know what [they] want' does not normally come immediately to clown students. At least initially, students might spend their time in the audience comparing the current performance on stage to their own last attempt, or trying to pick up tips for their own impending turn. Deans and Saunders discussed their memory of this feeling at Lecoq's school:

Deans: ...you never sat there [...] feeling, 'why am I not doing something?' I mean, Never, I don't think in Gaulier's classes.
Saunders: ...No, no. 'Cause you, you were wondering, what, what's it going to be like when I'm up there?! [...] And dare I get up next? Or shall I wait for a few more people? (2012)

This describes a student-spectator who is always a potential student-performer, considering the classmate's performance as a clue to help with their own attempt, or even as a warm up. Saunders' deliberation suggests that he felt watching 'a few more people' might help him prepare to perform. However, he explained that this deliberation did not help, 'I also learnt that the longer you wait the harder it is to get up. First up was at least a brave thing to do!' (Saunders 2012).

Fairbairn explains the process of watching others as a consolidation of the lessons he had learnt when on stage - 'they enabled me to watch them making the same mistakes that I was making' (2012). The repetitive nature of the class, where exercises are attempted by every student in turn, provides an opportunity for students who are not on stage to reflect on individual feedback, and to compare the criticism they received with that given to their peers. If students ordinarily receive feedback while they are on stage during the course of a

complex game or improvisation, they often respond immediately, or do not take it in. As a result, it can be difficult to remember the feedback in detail. If the students can watch another student receive the same feedback, then they might be able to understand further their own performance. I had a similar experience, during *Le Jeu*, when I was often reminded to stand at my full height. When another student was told ‘you are not tall enough’, and then corrected her posture, I recognised what a difference it made to her appearance on stage, and thus I was able to see what a difference it would make to mine. Nonetheless, it remained difficult to keep this feedback in mind the next time I went onstage (and I was eventually told, in an exasperated parental tone, ‘Lucy, you are tall. It is not my fault’).

Students have on-going personal relationships with their classmates that are influenced by what takes place within the classroom. As many students are away from their homes, classmates are the primary social network as well as all the roles they fill in the workshop. This is influenced by the sense of simultaneous competition and solidarity to be found among classmates. Gibbons explains how solidarity sometimes worked to counter the teacher’s feedback, lessening the impact of dismissals:

mostly, people were willing you to be, to do well. [...] If Philippe was being harsh, there was a real sense of, sometimes they’d be like, ‘oh Philippe, you’ve pushed it too far’ (Gibbons 2012).

Peer support is relied upon here to balance the feedback of the teacher, and to create a sense of solidarity in learning. It is also related to the fact that most students are away from their usual support networks. Purcell Gates’ focus on disorientation in the pedagogy of Lecoq and Gaulier encompasses both physical and experiential sensations. Her overall project is to seek ways in which these teachers use ‘disorientation to create a different type of space, a space that allowed new patterns of thought and behaviour to occur’ (Purcell Gates 2011b: 2). This is a physical and intellectual state, which Purcell Gates discovered in a rehearsal room and then applied to her experience in the classroom.

Disorientation is ‘experienced as a sudden and temporary loss of moorings’ that destabilises the cognitive/embodied experience and creates the ‘externally negotiated self’ discussed in Chapter 5. In the context of the students’ confusion

about vulnerability, she mentions the difficulty of living in Paris for the majority of the students, who are away from home in an unfamiliar and busy urban French setting (now suburban, though some students live in Paris and endure a long commute by RER). She cites an interview with an unnamed student:

I've never felt like I need to [be] tougher than when I've lived in Paris, and at the same time I'm going to a school that's trying to teach me to be sensitive and open (Interview 2008 cited in Purcell Gates 2011b: 237-238).

Purcell Gates interprets this to be less of a contrast than the student suggests, since her interpretation of Gaulier's 'pedagogy of disorientation' privileges the 'openness of disorientation, of being between thoughts, caught in the moment of the mistake' (Purcell Gates 2011b: 238). Gaulier's school is not the only institution to use this separation from familiarity. Barba identifies a tradition of apprenticeship in Western theatre practice during the 20th century, where schools were formed (by practitioners including Stanislavski, Copeau, Jacques-Dalcroze and Laban) to function as:

the special place where the today of the future is lived, a separate community (separate from the city, from the theatre, from the 'normal' or bourgeois world) (Barba and Savaresse 2006: 25).

The experience of being away from home, without familiar physical surroundings or support networks contributes to a sense of vulnerability, and in turn, reliance on classmates for support, feedback, encouragement and assessment.

Students watching one another may be aware of a sense of competition, as they are well equipped to analyse one another's work. They put effort into decoding the inscrutable feedback given to themselves and their peers. They may also take watching others as an opportunity to reflect on their own learning and anticipate their next turn. But significantly, at the best of times, the students making up the audience are laughing in response to their classmates' clowning. Students do not have to be aware of their own role as spectators/teachers to fulfil this function, because it happens as they watch and laugh (or do not laugh). During the summer course in 2009, I studiously reflected on my own attempts, and tried to analyse what others did. However, my memory of the course is mainly of laughing, at what my classmates were doing, and at Gaulier. I

propose that Gaulier's expertise is that of a performer - crucially, a clown performer, who knows how to receive and respond to feedback from his audience of students.

Teacher as artist/spectator

The teacher's own performance is based on interaction with his audience. As I have argued elsewhere, Gaulier takes on a clown role in performance (Amsden 2011: 35-39). In my MPhil thesis I drew on observations of Gaulier's teaching where Worseley (2002) comically described him as a grumpy old man, interpreting such anecdotes to mean that Gaulier performs as he teaches, acting 'as both clown and teacher simultaneously, teaching through clown performance' (Amsden 2011: 39). I seek to develop this argument to show how Gaulier performs a clown role as he teaches, playing with the intention of making the students laugh. In doing so, he must be responsive to both the clowns on stage and the spectating students. We can explore further the relationships between teacher and students (on stage and in the audience) by exploring the exchanges between these groups in the classroom. Gaulier often phrases his feedback in such a way that places him among the spectators, and suggests that the audience are agreed on the quality of the act they just saw, asking leading questions such as, 'We loved him, no?' This phrase asks the student spectators to join the judgement, and is typically met by murmurs of agreement. The audience are asked how they felt about the student on stage, in the form of two hyperbolic options - the first a declaration of love and desire, the second a brutal, violent and torturous rejection. During *Le Jeu*, I noted one such question:

Do you want to spend six months in a boat with them and every night they will recite you this poetry? Or do you push them overboard as soon as they say one word? (2008).

This question made people laugh, as did the moment where students confessed, eyes twinkling, that they would push their friend overboard. Purcell Gates suggests an effect of these questions:

Students quickly learned to discern [...] what Gaulier wanted them to say; the format of feedback was to create a uniform and powerful judgment, not to discuss the subtleties of what worked and what didn't (Purcell Gates 2011b: 159).

Purcell Gates speaks of a classroom with a clear hierarchy in which Gaulier is the sole arbiter of quality. Though she describes students repeating ‘what Gaulier wanted them to say’, it is significant that he asks the students to contribute to this ‘uniform and powerful judgement’ at all. On the Clown course success is measured by laughter, so it is the students’ reaction by which the clowns’ success is judged. Gaulier can base his own feedback on the verbal and facial expression of the students around him. A laughing audience indicates that the performance was found to be funny, on an incremental scale. When there is no laughter, Gaulier’s judgement can be based on a more subtle judgement of the sounds, movement and faces of the spectators. As seen in the quote that titles this chapter, ‘Listen to the laughter because it helps you discover your clown’ (Gaulier 2007: 302), this method of assessment is made clear to students. During the Clown course I noted the same idea in slightly different terms, ‘when they laugh, your clown is coming’ (8th July 2009). The laughing audience have recognised clowning before the performer; at this point they know more than the performer about what is funny. For much of the course, though, Gaulier acts as an intermediary between this knowledgeable audience and the struggling performers. Whereas the movement teacher in Lecoq-influenced drama school ‘crit’ is revered as ‘informed expert and surrogate audience’ (Evans 2009: 129), Gaulier is a conduit for the feedback of the actual, present spectators. When a clown is skilled, she will be able to recognise the judgement of the audience, but Gaulier’s version of the ‘crit’ clarifies this feedback to the learning student.

The performances that I remember being assessed using a choice between love and hate were neither as good nor as bad as the hyperboles suggest, but were underwhelming or lacklustre. I had responded with a limp smile or chuckle. Gaulier used these hyperbolic questions to ask for a powerful, clear judgement, in order that the feedback is unambiguous. The student performing is left in no doubt that their offering was not met with as much enthusiasm as was wished for. Gaulier can be seen to make the success of each attempt clear to the student performer, by translating the response of the student spectators into a memorable, perhaps hyperbolic aphorism. The student on stage does not know whether he or she has done well unless she listens to her classmates and teacher, and takes this feedback seriously. The student thus learns from Gaulier’s example, how to listen to and trust the active spectators. This doubled

feedback exchange could be described as emancipatory when students learn to judge the quality of their own performance, based on the reaction of their classmates, while their performance is going on, and before Gaulier stops them. Through Gaulier's concise summaries of the giggles, silence or laughter of the audience, the student learns to be reactive to - or to spectate - the spectators. The spectators, in turn, are emancipated - always, already acting. The students onstage, the students sitting in the audience, and the teacher all spend their time in the classroom simultaneously acting and spectating.

Significantly, Gaulier sits among the students during class. The classroom in Sceaux was clearly divided into the stage and the audience, the former a large space with scaffold wings, curtains, and a backstage area in the new studio; and the latter two benches with a wooden chair between them.⁴¹ When the class was large, students sat on the floor in front of the benches, but always Gaulier sat in the centre chair, his drum resting in the seat during the breaks. Gaulier's feedback is thus always located within the audience. Dixon considers the body acts which lead to student and teacher 'positioning', contrasting teachers who position themselves as collaborators by moving and placing themselves in similar positions to their students, with those who position themselves as 'carer', watching all students, moving among them and squatting next to chairs to be in the eye line of students. In this second situation, the teacher is 'positioning the other as the informer, the holder of knowledge, the source of interest' (Dixon 2008: 101). These strategies of teacher positioning are in contrast to a more traditional image of the teacher at the front of a group of listening students. Gaulier's position is different to each of these - he is sat among the (watching) students, but differentiated from them by height and centrality. Students turn to watch him when he speaks, whereas they do not speak or listen to other seated students, unless directed to do so by the teacher. He listens and watches attentively, apart from the times when he deliberately flouts this, murmuring his boredom to those surrounding him, in full view of the performing student. He does not usually enter the stage space, but when speaking creates for himself an alternative stage at the centre of the audience. This brings power to the audience, but makes him appear as the head spectator. The paradox contained

⁴¹ In Étampes, Gaulier has an ornate upholstered chair, a birthday gift from students. The studios are larger but have the same layout.

in Bingham and Biesta's expression that the teacher is 'only an authority' is appropriate to this classroom. Gaulier's apparent role as head of the audience is one that is in fact guided by the other, less authoritative spectators. His role can be seen as setting students 'down a path' of exploration without maintaining control over the map. Thus Gaulier's master status is productively complicated by the belittling expression 'only an authority'.

Considering the status of Gaulier's feedback in the rehearsal room, I was curious to know whether his 'voice' remained present in the rehearsal rooms of clowns who had left the school. What I found was a sense that Gaulier's authority was temporary. Park and Basauri offered a strong image to describe how this authority was eventually rejected. While both clowns emphasised their continuing respect for Gaulier's judgement, they described a changing relationship with the spectre of Gaulier as teacher. Tentatively, Basauri suggested, 'I mean I don't know if Philippe would understand this, but um, we, I think we killed the teacher' (Basauri 2013). He explains a little further,

Basauri: Clowns, we need a master. We need a 'Monsieur Marcel'. Philippe, of course, is our Monsieur Marcel. But Spymonkey, [...] every time we do a new show and we get a new director - [he makes a sound and gesture to indicate a sudden change] He is our Monsieur Marcel. [...] We believe, like idiots, what that director says, and then we kill them.

Park: ha, we kill them! (Basauri and Park 2013)

Through a humorously violent metaphor with Freudian undertones, and using a fictional figure from the workshop - provider of stupid ideas for clown acts, M. Marcel - the performers describe a transition from relying on the feedback and judgement of the teacher, to forgetting the teacher, and prioritising the laughter and other feedback of the audience.⁴² Though Gaulier remains the master that helped them to discover clowning, at a certain point his opinion is no longer the critical judgement of a piece - he has set them 'down a path' to make decisions and discoveries for themselves. The process of 'killing the teacher' completes the students' act of emancipation - it takes the lesson of the

⁴² They go on to describe how, as they get older, they would like to move on to being their own 'monsieur marcel's', having ideas and directing other actors rather than continue 'slinging our bodies around', the physically demanding work of performance (Basauri and Park 2013).

school, and moves away from the translating teacher to a direct communication between audiences and clowns.

On a smaller scale, moments of rebellion against the teacher also occur in the classroom, as a venting of frustration against the elusive strategies of the teacher. In 2009, an experienced clown who had had a lot of success in the workshop was asked to tell the teacher all the things that frustrated him. He spoke in his first language, Spanish, in response to Gaulier's questions, complaining about the costume and the exercises. Encouraged by the laughter of the Spanish speakers in the class, the complaint escalated. The student-spectators shared in the impulse to rebel against the authority, and empathised with the frustrations of the student. Suddenly, he looked up at Gaulier and cringed, 'you can speak Spanish, can't you?' which was greeted with loud laughter from the whole class. A 'good student' who normally impressed the teacher had revealed a rejection of that authority, in favour of the response of the audience. In both the classroom and in the rehearsal room of Spymonkey, rejecting the authority of the teacher resonates with the idea of the emancipated student assuming equality with the 'schoolmaster', enacting her own intelligence and refusing the stultifying logic of the classroom.

In the end of term Clown Show (December, 2013), Gaulier took his position of power in his usual chair, but was less visible among the larger audience, who were also seated on chairs. At the opening of the show, the role of the audience was guided by an interaction between the performing students, the teacher, and (perhaps unknowingly) the audience. A ringmaster, introducing himself as Monsieur Loyal, dressed smartly with a clear English-accented, resonant voice, welcomed the audience to the show.⁴³ His introduction was interrupted by a clown dressed as a policeman. The clown explained that he had an idea for the show, which the director hadn't liked in rehearsal, but which he wanted to try for the audience. M. Loyal allowed this, and for a while the clown amused the audience as he prepared to sing. When he began to sing, we heard the sound of a telephone ringing. M. Loyal answered using a prop kept just offstage. It was 'the director', unhappy and reprimanding M. Loyal that this clown had been let loose on stage, telling him to end the act. The audience laughed and applauded

⁴³ See Chapter 5 for discussion of 'Monsieur Loyal' in circus tradition.

the clown as he exited. Various other clowns followed the policeman, all with the same aim to steal the chance for some moments in front of the audience. Some presented jokes, acts or props. As soon as any clown stopped making us laugh, or if they made nobody laugh, the telephone rang again. Many clowns looked dismayed as they heard the sound effect, and left the stage immediately. As I laughed, I remembered the feeling of being dismissed from the stage. Next to Gaulier sat a light and sound operator. It was clear that Gaulier cued the sound of the telephone ringing. When the audience were laughing at what the clowns did, the phone did not ring. His power came from within the audience, making their silence evident, and did not ever override the laughter of the guests.⁴⁴ When the phone did ring, the audience were reminded of Gaulier's presence in the room, and, for those who like me had studied at the school, we were reminded also of his vivid and funny feedback. At times, the timing of the sound of the telephone was greeted with laughter. My second viewing provided evidence that Gaulier's cueing was not arbitrary but responsive to the laughter of the audience. On the second night, the clown policeman remained on stage for longer than he had done on the first night. Following some laughter, he turned his head to look at the individuals who had laughed, with a surprised and angry expression. This made more people laugh. The performer repeated the interaction twice more. It was not until the performer stopped responding to laughs, and began his song, that Gaulier's phone rang to terminate the scene.

Gaulier's position as 'only an authority' depends on a complex relationship with the students. He creates his role as authority to be (eventually) rejected, as the students go through a process of taking on what they are taught, then moving their attention from the teacher to the audience. This happens within and outwith the school, with the classroom encounters feeling anarchic and mutinous. To begin with he is a spokesperson of the student-spectators, teaching them to be clear with their feedback, and interpreting their response for the onstage student-performer, until the student-performers no longer need this, at which point he becomes a spectator and complicit player, as the following chapter will explain. In the end-of-term show, a miniature version of this

⁴⁴ The students not performing remained backstage throughout. Several clowns only appeared in the opening section and the finale, where they entered to music, and bowed. These students, who must have been feeling bad about not qualifying for the show, also expressed regret at not being able to watch each other's performances.

transfer of power takes place. The audience's reactions to the 'bad clowns' at the start are translated into clear judgements by the teacher's participation in the performance (via sound cues). The teacher's authority does not ever overpower the audience, and after the first section, it disappears. The clowns selected to perform longer scenes in the show are not threatened with the telephone in the same manner - instead they are trusted to interact directly, and to gather their own feedback from the spectators as they perform.

Considering the politics of spectatorship in participatory art, Claire Bishop takes note of the popular use of Rancière's writing but finds it 'striking that his polemic makes no reference to the emergence of critical pedagogy in the late 1960s, which attempted to empower students through very similar means' (Bishop 2012: 359). The critical pedagogy espoused by Paulo Freire (1968) considers the teacher to be co-producer of knowledge, and collaborator with the student learning. Freire did not seek to eradicate hierarchy, 'critical pedagogy retains authority, but not authoritarianism' (Bishop 2012: 266). She cites Freire on this balance of power:

Dialogue means a permanent tension between authority and liberty. But, in this tension, authority continues to be because it has authority vis-à-vis permitting student freedoms which emerge, which grow and mature precisely because authority and freedom learn self-discipline (Freire and Ira 1987: 102).

Though somewhat tautological, this tension describes what Bingham and Biesta refer to as 'only an authority', and can be seen in Gaulier's authoritative - but not authoritarian - pedagogical role. Bishop considers critical pedagogy to be

a rupture in the history of education that is contemporaneous with upheavals in art's own history circa 1968: its insistence on the breakdown of teacher/pupil hierarchy and participation as a route to empowerment finds its direct correlate in the breakdown of medium-specificity and a heightened attention to the viewer's role and presence in art (Bishop 2012: 267).

Perhaps Gaulier's clowning can be placed alongside these movements in art and pedagogy. Certainly, they share a historical period and a concern with the audience. Similarly, the political context can be seen to have bearing on the content and delivery of his Clown course.

Pedagogy and Politics

In Gaulier's book there are explicit references to politics and ideology that suggest some rationale for his focus on audience response. Locating himself in late-20th century Europe, he finds direct, heavy-handed messages repugnant, and refuses to defer to authority. A chapter in *The Tormentor* entitled 'The Primary School Fascist' (2007: 233-237) offers some autobiographical insight into Gaulier's life. In this chapter, Gaulier reminds the reader, via the interrogator, to 'never soil a dream with the real' (2007: 237). This seems to be a warning against taking the story literally, encouraging the reader to engage with the story on an imaginative level.⁴⁵ However, he does describe, in some detail, experiences of being a young child in post-war France. He tells a story of a school visit to a graphic exhibition of images and artefacts from Nazi camps, when:

The teacher said to the class that the Marshal who collaborated in these crimes was called Philippe, 'just like your fellow-pupil, Gaulier' A remark like that doesn't help your popularity. I was the designated fascist at primary school (Gaulier 2007: 234).

In this anecdote, a seven-year-old Gaulier is ostracised and even physically punished for the associations of his name with Marshal Petain, leader of the Vichy Government, in the context (or possibly façade) of anti-fascism. For the young children the anti-war and anti-fascist message is as brutal as the one it tries to oust. Gaulier describes the smells of the playground and his rejection of traditional authority, embodied by 'teachers and my father' (Gaulier 2007: 234).⁴⁶ A rejection of blind acceptance of mainstream values, in the context of post-war France, is also a rejection of authority, and of traditional education structures. This suggests that Gaulier would approve of Spymonkey's decision to 'kill the teacher' and find their own strategies for interacting with audiences without considering his authority first.

⁴⁵ Of course, there is no sudden recourse to facts and figures. He gives his date of birth as both 1943 and 1941, but includes many precise but superfluous details, such as the fact the children went out to play at 1.15.

⁴⁶ In the same section of text, Gaulier elucidates his early experiences of movement classes, associating them with the 'disgusting' smells of disinfectant, greasy food and 'fart'. Gaulier's relationship with movement classes will be explored in the Chapter 5.

Gaulier plays with authority and gives space for his students to disobey his instructions, as long as they are making the audience laugh. He also plays with the role of authoritarian in a way that makes rebellion seem attractive. Park happily describes one such event when he and a friend in the workshop, Gabriel Chame Buendia, rebelled from Gaulier's authority to create a funny clown sketch:⁴⁷

it was like a huge explosion of fun and all the things that had been really difficult, [...] painful suddenly were [...] we had a great time. We, we stole his stereo - cause you know when it's enough, he puts the, he starts to play the music to tell you to stop (laughs) we, we went into his office and started dismantling all the (breaks into laughter) speakers and stuff! It was very funny (Park 2013).

This feeling of 'explosion of fun' amongst strict rules will reappear in the following chapter. Significant here is the deliberate and specific rejection of Gaulier's ability to control the students. Park describes dismantling one of Gaulier's tools for stopping performances - in so doing, he and Buendia ensured their own scene could not be stopped with the playing of exit music. Park does not refer explicitly to his peers, but his laughter at the memory, and the statement 'it was very funny', suggests that the pair were given approval and encouragement in the form of laughter from their fellow students.

In *Contemporary French Theatre and Performance* (2011), the editors, Clare Finburgh and Carl Lavery, notice a common concern with "a politics of perception" - a politics of how voices, images and bodies are perceived as sensual objects in space and time' (2011: 17) in the theatre and performance practice and criticism in contemporary France. The aim of their collection is to introduce Anglophone readers to contemporary trends and practices in France since the start of the 21st century, and in doing so, explore the aesthetics and politics that are to be found. They identify a broad difference between theatre and performance in the UK and France, the former having more explicit political reference and statement, and the latter being more formally experimental. The French writers translated in the collection reflect a trend to 'actively reject a political hermeneutic' (2011: 5), but the editors believe that:

⁴⁷ It was on a workshop led by Chame Buendia, in Madrid in the summer of 1991, that Park and Basauri first worked together.

the radical reappraisal of theatre and performance aesthetics [...] is in itself politically inflected, since it resists conventional conceptions of reality, thereby entreating audiences to see, hear, feel and act differently (2011: 4).

For the editors, explicitly political theatre gives a statement and asks the audience to agree with or contest it, but theatre which 'entreats' a new way of looking rather than demanding a new way of seeing has a freer, more personal and less dogmatic politics. However, in experimental use of form, as Finburgh and Lavery argue, there remains an impulse to educate the spectator, albeit in a way that resembles progressive pedagogy, with an emphasis on methodology and creating puzzles in which students and audiences can make discoveries. The British trend for theatre and performance with explicitly political texts similarly resembles the traditionalist liberal pedagogy, with its focus on content - but both set out to teach the spectators. Gaulier's clown, which is based in France but taught in English, differs from both of these styles in the exchange that takes place between performer and spectator. Clown is not a pedagogical genre of performance, rather it shrugs off authority and looks to the audience, seeking what they want, and what can make them laugh. Clowns give authority over the performance to the people in the room.

Facts from Gaulier's later life further inform a political reading of his teaching practices. He was a student at Lecoq's Paris school in the year of 'les evenements', and Murray observes that 'the anarchic spirit and dispositions of 1968 continue to embody and inform his practice' (2010a: 220). Contemporary French theatre practitioners who were also associated with the uprisings of that year share his concern for the audience. Bradby and Sparks (1997), describe an increased concern at this time for democratization and accessibility of theatre:

May 1968 left no man of the theatre intact - let alone a man concerned with political matters. He constantly asked himself the key question: for whom do I make work? To whom is my art directed? (Ubersfeld 1994: 18; cited in and translated by Bradby and Sparks 1997: 39-40)

Ubersfeld describes one particular director, Antoine Vitez, who searched for the group identity of the audience. Vitez' concern has parallels to Gaulier's

insistence on the performer paying attention to the reactions of the spectators.⁴⁸ However, it could be said that Vitez' question assumes homogeneity among audiences, perhaps according to socio-political groups, and also that it suggests he can choose who attends his performances. In comparison, Gaulier asks his performers to be responsive to changes between one audience and the next, listening and responding to each new group, according to what energy they bring, or how prepared they are to laugh. Paying attention to the audience can be seen as a democratic performance mode, in which the spectators are active participants in mutual understanding, and even prompt the performance to change. Bishop identifies a dual interpretation of 'participation' in the context of 1960s Paris, when '[s]ome artists enthusiastically made participation a foundational principle of their artistic practice, while others vocally rejected it as a mode of artistic coercion equivalent to social structures' (Bishop 2012: 79). Nonetheless, participation was 'hailed as a popular new democratic mode' by artists of the time.

Gaulier concludes his autobiographical chapter by telling the interrogator about a 'contraption' in the human body, made to deal with suffering and grief, which can 'neutralise the poison of the sorrow, though it still preserves its outlines. It even allows you to laugh about it'. When asked, he reveals that the device is called 'Humour' (Gaulier 2007: 237). Gaulier has turned what sounds like a painful childhood experience into a dramatic story, and one that the reader can imaginatively interpret. He has perhaps also highlighted humour as a tool of political agency, where, rather than fighting, the better counter to aggression is complicitous and humorous play. In interviews and less formal conversations, people have told me that the most significant element linking Gaulier students is the humanity evident in their performances.⁴⁹ Although Gaulier denies imposing such a thing, this could even be considered a dominant 'style' amongst his students. Jarmuz suggests that humanity is evident in the interaction between audience and spectator, 'Because the clown is not about *what you do*, it's about *how you are*: what essentially comes through is the human, the ridiculous, the

⁴⁸ Vitez taught at École Jacques Lecoq between 1966 and 1970, while Gaulier was a student there, so it is likely that these two men would have met and talked together.

⁴⁹ Humanity, humanism and the post-human are represented by a wide body of critical literature, which are not necessarily being evoked by Gaulier or his students in this discussion. See Davies (2008) and Braidotti (2013).

idiotic' (Jarmuz 2013). This list, conflating the 'human', 'ridiculous' and 'idiotic', reveals a conception of what it is to be human, alongside Jarmuz' emphasis on 'how you are'.⁵⁰ The experience in the classroom is embodied and particular to each student. Educationalist and dance pedagogue Sherry Shapiro argues that pedagogy that draws on embodied experience creates an interpersonal politics in line with postmodern and feminist theories:

humanness - being human - means to be bound up with what we materially are. This boundness demands that we, through critically reflective, socially sensitive and ethical processes, live in such a way that is concerned with the particular *and* the universal (Shapiro and Shapiro 2002: 341).

Though Shapiro's vocabulary is very different to that found in Gaulier's classroom, the concept of embodied performance and the blurred roles of teacher/spectator/artist/student can be connected to a sense of the value of shared humanity, reflexivity, sensitivity and even ethics.

Gaulier's politics are not prescriptive, and students seem to find their own version of what clown performance might 'mean' in the wider sense. For Murray, Gaulier's politics are directly related to the historical moment in which he has lived. He argues that deliberate internationalism is 'rooted and contextualized by the holocaust' (Murray 2010a: 234), while the attention to individual difference and shared humanity that he shared with Lecoq, 'has at its heart a subversive and radical dimension which chimed with the spirit of 1968' (Murray 2003: 62). Murray cites an interview with Evans, who is interested in physical training, and sees clown as 'offering space for the body to be unruly - to break away from the docility of training' (Interview with Evans 2002 cited in Murray 2003: 62). It seems that these two interpretations are possible according to each student's own interests or politics. In our interview, Gibbons told me that she often saw parallels between the beautiful simplicity of clowning and aspects of her own Christian faith - particularly when we discussed the flop, she made

⁵⁰ Jarmuz also compares Gaulier's clowning with the popular conception that clowns are 'scary'. For Jarmuz, humanity of clowning eradicates the unnerving ambiguity created by makeup or costume, 'when you take the humanity away, they are terrifying figures, [...] the stuff of horror stories and phobias. Whereas if the humanity is strong and clear, then we as an audience, we, our hearts just open to what is happening on stage, because we see the humanity in it' (Jarmuz 2013). In this comparison, the humanity of a clown is reassuring; it reminds the spectator of the co-presence they share.

tentative comparisons: 'It's like the salvation, the redemption, you know [...] it's really interesting' (Gibbons 2012). Similarly, Coburn and Morrison draw spiritual comparisons, in their case in terms of a wholeness that is part of Native spirituality. My own reading of the politics in clown practice is an inter-personal celebration of silliness, and a commitment to listening and complicity as a rare and gently radical form of communication. However, these may all be personal reasons, or justifications for enjoying laughter. Gaulier's teaching on clown focuses primarily on the individual performer making the audience laugh. It does not prescribe reasons for doing this, nor does it rule out whatever reason each individual student might have. Following a similar pattern to Gaulier's stated intention to allow students to find their own pleasure, and to find their own ridiculousness, the Clown workshop allows students to explore their own (political or spiritual) function of clown.⁵¹

There is a potential difficulty in the pedagogical method of encouraging the students to laugh at one another. It is not always the case that people that make others laugh do so intentionally. In response to my question on the role of classmates in the learning process, McCrystal answered that he felt that 'one of the wonderful things about Gaulier's school, is that he doesn't audition anyone', but takes anybody who is interested (and can afford the course fees). McCrystal, at the time an experienced and trained performer, remembers watching a much less experienced student and seeing something he wanted to attain:

it was so funny, we were all laughing, he didn't know why we were laughing but he carried on. And I remember saying to Philippe afterwards, "how can I be that funny? How can I be as funny as the guy that just doesn't know anything?" (McCrystal 2013).

McCrystal happily remembers his experience of laughter at the other student, but at the time sought to learn from the examples he saw, critically examining the performance and seeking to achieve the same results. McCrystal was aware of his own comparative weaknesses, despite his extensive drama training.

[A]nd that was a big influence on me, just seeing somebody being funny without knowing why. In a situation where that was supported.

⁵¹ During the Bouffon workshop, I asked Gaulier whether he considered bouffon to be a political style, and he answered that it is, but he wouldn't demand that it was '*the* political style,' because he wouldn't prescribe politics to his students.

So, we were laughing *at* him, yes. But, um, but in - in a place where “laughing at” is good (McCrystal 2013).

McCrystal’s analysis raises a complex issue of agency - while the more experienced and confident McCrystal may have been striving for the authenticity of the student who didn’t understand his own performance, he was also ‘laughing at’ a novice from a position of experience. McCrystal tentatively distinguishes between ‘laughing with’ somebody and a good variety of ‘laughing at’ them. The inexperienced performer cannot determine what their peers will laugh at, and may find this moment distressing. However, McCrystal indicates that somehow the classroom in which ‘laughing at’ is good negates this problem.

The pervasive idea of humanity seems to be connected with students learning to laugh at themselves, or of using humour to ‘neutralise the poison of sorrow’. Nonetheless, Gaulier is aware that humour can be used aggressively, in what he calls ‘group jokes’ and ‘men’s jokes’, that pick on physical difference and create ‘a vulgar, artificial, degrading bond’ (Gaulier 2007: 235). In an article on clown training, Eric Weitz raises the concern that laughter at clowns gives the laughers pleasure for their own conformity to social norms,

The pleasure of laughter furnishes an undeniable bodily reward for being ‘one of the group’, serving as a most convincing incentive for behaviour modification and remaining inseparable from its lessons (Weitz 2012: 81).

The ‘bodily reward’ encourages the laughers not to put themselves in the position of being outside the group, and discourages them from displaying non-normative bodies. Weitz’s own optimistic position suggests that comedy and clowning are innovative and responsive to ongoing socio-political changes in the audience. However, he also finds it difficult to deny that a clown can become an instructor into the mainstream, by reinforcing ideas of what is acceptable and what is deviant, and thus maintaining social standards. He illustrates this by suggesting that:

In mainstream contexts - meaning those in which the practitioner seeks laughter from a largest possible audience - the vectors of political force surely favour prejudices of the status quo or dominant discourse (Weitz 2012: 84).

Weitz follows the classic humour theory of Henri Bergson, which describes laughter as social pedagogy. This early 20th century theory situates laughter in a group or imagined group of people, who laugh together at the expense of a separate person (1999: 12). The object of laughter makes the others laugh by displaying ‘mechanical inelasticity just where one would expect to find the wide-awake adaptability and the living pliable-ness of a human being’ (Bergson 1999: 15). This theme continues throughout the short book, covering comic characters in plays, caricatures, the ‘butt’ of jokes.⁵² The comic objects have no intention of gaining laughter – rather the laughter teaches them how to be more flexible and human, rather than mechanical or inelastic, ‘Laughter is, above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed’ (Bergson 1999: 176). By responding to the audience, the clown makes the majority laugh, and in doing so can humiliate anybody that does not conform to social standards. This might extend to the classroom, and it also might be problematic if it works at the expense of minority or non-normative groups.

Irving suggests that the hierarchy of Gaulier’s classroom created a structure in which ‘people who are...not white heterosexual Euro-American men’ (Irving 2012a: 12) may have found it difficult to be laughed at, and so not accepted the role of clown. Gaulier points out the idiosyncrasies of everybody in the class, and does not comment only on the differences from the dominant normative figure. It could be true that individuals who have had their bodily differences used against them, might find it more difficult to use these differences for comedy than would a ‘white heterosexual Euro-American’ man with some small distinct feature. However, an observation made by Gibbons offers an interpretation of the humanity shared between clown and audience:

if you’re happy to be there then the audience are happy to watch you. You know? And that’s... that’s really key, and I think with clown, [...] it’s not acting, it’s [...] bringing your ridiculous self to an audience, and being comfortable and, happy! (Gibbons 2012)

⁵² Clowns are considered as the crudest, least refined form of comedy (1999: 25) and described in extremely abstract terms (1999: 56-58), with no consideration that the clown might actively seek laughter.

The nature of this exchange explains how, as McCrystal suggests, ‘laughing at’ can be good. If the clown is comfortable and happy to laugh at herself, then the audience are laughing ‘at’ the clown, but simultaneously laughing ‘with’ her. This is not the same communicative exchange as ostracizing an individual child for his physical differences, or a teacher pointing out a child’s shared name with a reviled fascist. While people are learning to be clowns, they rely on their peers to point out the potentially ridiculous things about them; but with the aim of becoming sufficiently ‘comfortable’ in the knowledge of their ‘ridiculous self’ to be able to consciously - and happily - share that with an audience, inviting laughter.⁵³ The moment of the clown presenting herself and inviting the audience to laugh is embodied and also draws on key clown practices taught at the school, which I will explore in the following two chapters, complicit play and the flop.

Gaulier’s rejection of authority and disapproval of the mainstream and normative places him amongst a contemporary French concern with non-dogmatic performance politics. It takes this further to cede authority for determining clown success to the audience. At his school Gaulier teaches students to be attentive to the individual spectators at each performance, and to be responsive to their laughter. This occurs despite awareness that laughter can have ‘vulgar’ pro-conformist functions, and despite protest that Gaulier remains in a position of authority as master teacher. The search for complicity in laughing at the human ridiculousness of each individual creates an experience of communality.

Conclusion

This chapter has emphasised the centrality of peer laughter as feedback in the clown workshop. The audience’s reaction is a defining feature of clown performance; ‘The work of a clown is to make the audience burst out laughing’ (2007: 289). Clown students learn this specific skill by practicing the ‘work of the clown’. The methodology of the workshop requires students to make an audience (of their fellow students) ‘burst out laughing’ in whatever manner they can. Though the school is not accountable to policy-makers or accreditation

⁵³ The phrase ‘ridiculous self’ will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

boards, this approach fits into a generally held consensus of adult learning - students are self-directed and supported by peer feedback, and they learn skills by practicing and reflecting on their activities. Gaulier's school does not formalize or explicate these processes of self-direction, feedback or reflection, and nor does it stipulate what students are to do in order to get the response of laughter they seek. Thus it leaves the goals and measurement of learning up to the students to decide for themselves. Unaccountability means that the intuitive skill of the expert clown and experienced teacher is trusted and unregulated, and the students measure their own progress.

I have argued that Gaulier's use of peer laughter as feedback constitutes a 'pedagogy of spectatorship', where learning takes place in the act of being watched and assessed by the reactions of a group of spectators. This pedagogy does not only take place in the classroom, but continues into the work environment - clowns must continue to be active in their quest for learning what will make each particular audience laugh. Thus the roles of student, clown performer, spectator, and teacher are blurred. Unlike in Garoian's pedagogical performance practice, the role of performer is blended with that of student, and the role of spectator with that of teacher. The charisma of Gaulier creates the impression that he has the ultimate authority in the classroom, but his hybrid role as teacher, clown performer and expert spectator complicates this - as a skilled clown it is his job, too, to make his students burst out laughing. He shares the audience with his students, and supports the task of laughter-making, taking over when students are unable to incite laughter, but not stopping successful clowning. As a result, the always-present audience are not only active in their spectatorship, but also in judging and teaching - they decide what is successful clowning and what is not. The teacher does not explicitly guide this activity, but it takes place according to the sense of humour of those individuals in the classroom.

What the master clown teacher does provide is an authoritative translation of the audience's response. As students look for what the teacher likes, they discover what the audience like, and simultaneously they learn the skill of discovering what pleases an audience. Gaulier's feedback from among the audience allows students to consolidate their learning, and to be clear about what responses they received. However, part of his performance of authority

contains the possibility of its own rejection - Basauri has called this 'killing the teacher' - where students learn to leave out the intermediary and receive communication directly from the audience. We can trace this impulse to Gaulier's own rejection of authority, rooted in his socio-political background in postwar France. Gaulier rejects the right of authority figures (and perhaps also performers) to educate, instead seeking his own path, and encouraging his students to similarly find their own way of performing and entertaining audiences. By inviting audiences to laugh, Gaulier and his students seek a shared human ridiculousness, which is responsive and open to change.

A sense of ridiculous, shared humanity at the heart of clown performance is created using performance skills. The following chapter will consider the way in which clowns learn to create shared, or complicit, play.

Chapter 3: Complicit Play

‘The game and the imagination are thick as thieves’ (2007: 196).

Play is one of the most familiar terms in the discussion of clowning, especially at Gaulier’s school. This chapter examines the various meanings for play, and the types of behaviour that are invoked by this word. I suggest a particular characteristic of play evident in the Clown and *Le Jeu* courses, by combining the observations and analyses made by Kendrick and Murray. Drawing on terminology from the school I call it ‘complicit play’. Complicit play holds together multiple competing strands in a way that is engaged, but never fixed, meaning that no player is ever fully in control. I begin with an exploration of theoretical approaches to play as a human behaviour, before going on to examine what happens when play is professionalised. This is followed by a detailed example of play in Gaulier’s classroom. A combination of my own classroom experience with insights from other commentators - including potential neuroscientific explanations for what might take place - allows me to develop the concept of complicit play as a clown practice learned by clown students at École Philippe Gaulier.

In the teaching of Gaulier, Pagneux and Lecoq, play is a basic element of all performance styles. Wright (2006) identifies Lecoq’s ‘levels of play’; *Tragedy, Melodrama, Psychological Realism, Commedia dell’Arte, Buffoon and Clown*. Lecoq students learn to play at each of these levels, and Wright suggests that each actor will find a level of play that gives them the most pleasure. Gaulier emphasises that each genre of performance demands play equally, and should be entered into with the same spirit of pleasure:

What are we going to play this evening? “Antigone”? Or “La Porteuse de Pain”? Or “Victor ou les Enfants au Pouvoir”? Comedy? Tragedy? Clown? The same pleasure leads the bacchanal (Gaulier 2007: 211).

Gaulier offers a choice between texts in different genres, but implies that the same pleasures of play are present in each genre, and also in ‘the bacchanal’,

which refers to drunken revelry.⁵⁴ Play is not solely found in clown, but this genre has been conceived as a particularly pure form of play, even in the playful syllabus of Gaulier's school. Though Kendrick examines Gaulier's use of the ludic in actor training, she considers clown 'the ultimate player and arguably an entirely ludic construct' (2010: 113).⁵⁵ For Wright, clown is the most direct and life-like level of play:

It's not about character, it's not about routines, or structured material of any kind. Clowning is no more than a credible idiot playing for an audience - it's theatre's first base (Wright 2006: 184).

He suggests that clown is without tradition, characters, or narrative, an interpretation that has been firmly dismissed by Davison, as will be discussed in Chapter 4. Wright suggests it is lack of 'structured material' that leads to 'purity' of play, and he deprioritises clown routines in favour of the relationship with the audience. Wright further separates 'different levels of play within clown': simple, pathetic and tragic. Simple Clown debunks any and all dramatic action, and Pathetic Clown sustains 'credible emotional engagement with the dramatic situation (Wright 2006: 226). At this level of play, the audience see an idiot negotiating relationships, and after they laugh at this idiot, their emotions are provoked. It shares territory with melodrama but maintains an ambiguity between optimism and hopelessness (2006: 233). Tragic clown plays games beyond the point at which the audience stop laughing, so the clown might begin by showing 'stupidity and ineptitude' but eventually becomes determined and tragic (2006: 247). These levels of clown play are associated with dramaturgy and plot in devised or scripted scenes.

Play Theory

There exists a small but inter-disciplinary 20th century field of play studies, within which key writers include Johan Huizinga (1949), Roger Caillois (2001),

⁵⁴ *Victor ou Les Enfants au Pouvoir* is a surrealist comedy by Roger Vitrac, *La Porteuse de Pain* a melodrama by Xavier de Montépin.

⁵⁵ Kendrick uses 'ludic' to describe rule-bound play. This will be explored in greater detail later in the chapter. The word 'ludicrous', a synonym for 'ridiculous' is derived from this term, connecting the ideas of play and amusement.

James Carse (2012 first published 1986), and Brian Sutton-Smith (1997).⁵⁶

Huizinga felt that the human species, *Homo Sapiens*, could be usefully renamed ‘Homo Ludens, Man the Player’, because play is such a ubiquitous element of human culture, and its irrational, social and fun qualities make it ‘one of the main bases of civilisation’ (Huizinga 1949: 5). Play is understood to be voluntary, separate from ordinary life, limited to a particular time and place, ordered (and thus, perhaps, beautiful), and it can be either a contest or representation, or both (Huizinga 1949: 1-13). These characteristics have been replicated in the more recent studies, and Huizinga’s ideas have been formative to the field since.

Rhetorics of Play

Brian Sutton-Smith (1997) sets out to explore *The Ambiguity of Play*. He suggests that play is not inherently ambiguous, but that its definition has been made so by the existence of multiple competing and divergent rhetorics on the subject, located in different disciplines and value systems. Seven different ways of discussing and conceptualising play are examined:

- play as power (as in contests or sport)
- play as identity (as in community celebrations)
- play as fate (chance and gambling)
- play as progress (a tool of learning and development)
- play as the imaginary (flexibility and creativity)
- play as selfhood (enabling high-level experiences for players)
- play as frivolity (opposed to work, and relating to the carnivalesque).

Play as progress, as the imaginary and as selfhood are the most frequently used when discussing contemporary clown play, as will be seen below. The first three rhetorics listed (play as power, fate and identity) are understood by Sutton-Smith to be ‘ancient’, since they are identifiable in mythology and ancient history. According to these rhetorics, participants are not in control of their play. When play is understood as contest, players are challenged by the skill of their opponents, and must play in order to represent and claim their status. When it is considered equivalent to fate or chaos, people are ‘played with’, by gods or chance and luck. In play as identity, all members of a community are

⁵⁶ There is a proximate but separate field of games studies, which takes a mathematical and logical approach to choices available to players of rule-bound games. The fixity of game theory is not applicable to clown play, which as we shall see depends on flexibility and ambiguity.

expected to engage in shared play forms such as carnival, and in play as frivolity, a trickster or shaman is expected to play for the sake of playing (1997: 9-11). Sutton-Smith suggests that in the seven rhetorics of play, the players might be children, sports players, artists, gamblers, or performers. However, he suggests that there is a group for whom play is axiomatic: 'dilettantes, harlequins, clowns, tricksters, comedians, and jesters who represent a kind of characterological summit of playfulness' (Sutton-Smith 1997: 6).

Peacock (2009) briefly indicates that different contemporary clown traditions may emerge from the different rhetorics of play as delineated by Sutton-Smith. She suggests that the tradition of clown doctors originates in the rhetoric of play as progress, which sees clowning as a tool for healing or learning, a way by which patients can find optimism or healing pleasure.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Peacock suggests, the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) and the clown ministry understand play more along the lines of identity formation as used in carnival or festivals.⁵⁸ By engaging with communal play in these contexts, clowns and their audiences reinforce their communal identity. These are ways of using clowns to social ends.

Theatrical clowning, though, Peacock understands to best fit the two rhetorics of play as imaginary and frivolous. Sutton-Smith gathers under the heading, 'rhetorics of the imaginary', all writers and artists 'who believe that some kind of transformation is the most fundamental characteristic of play' (Sutton-Smith 1997: 127). Play as imaginary thus includes writers who value the play of children as a creative tool, those who see art as play, and writers who play with language. Sutton-Smith considers actors to be 'players' according to this rhetoric. Romantic theories in the late 18th century conflated art with play, and idealized play as pure imagination, leading to creativity. The rhetoric of the imagination thus 'dignified' play in comparison to the older rhetorics. Play was seen as a valuable and creative act, rather than a low-brow and timewasting activity. This was the play of dreaming and of creative ideas, and also of

⁵⁷ Clown Doctors visit hospital wards to play with or perform for children there. See <http://www.heartsminds.org.uk>

⁵⁸ Clown Ministry describes a movement where the skills of clown performance are combined with Christian ministry. CIRCA are a group of political activists using clown performance skills to create playful and subversive demonstrations. The connections are traced to a longer tradition of clowns working in spiritual and political contexts: see (Peacock 2009 Chapter 5)

slippery, multiple meaning, and Derridean 'play of signifiers' (Sutton-Smith 1997: 144). 'Play' as behavior was conflated with 'the playful' in writing and art. Sutton-Smith suggests that:

usage might be clarified by reserving the concept of the playful for that which is meta-play, that which plays with normal expectations of play itself, as does nonsense, parody, paradox and ridiculousness (Sutton-Smith 1997: 147-148).

If dramatic theatre is understood as play, clown performance might be understood as 'meta-play', and thus 'playful', as 'normal expectations' of performance are played with.

In reference to Sutton-Smith, Peacock suggests that contemporary clown is not part of the rhetoric of 'play as self', because of the limited personal risk involved. However, she does later place a great deal of emphasis on the self of the individual performers, contrasting this to the work of actors playing written characters.

When a clown performs, the audience sees the ideas and attitude of that individual conveyed by an adopted persona that has developed out of the individual's personality and which could never be adopted and lived in the same way by anyone else (Peacock 2009: 14).

In fact, Peacock's vision of the clown as individual could be seen as exemplar of this rhetoric, as it prioritises the flow of the individual, the peak experience of play, and the personal performance of skill. In this way, clown play is aligned with contemporary physical theatres, where presentation of the performer's self is frequently valued above representation of externally created characters (Murray and Keefe 2007: 21). Murray and Keefe see a hidden complexity in the invocation of 'self' in performance, explaining that while the instruction 'be yourself' seems to be 'an easily translatable code towards honesty, economy and simplicity [...] it also covers a complex range of issues surrounding the nature of identity' (2007: 21). These issues contain intangible concepts: 'we are in the world of *charisma*, of corporeal qualities which transcend rational or acculturated explanations, and of mystique and mystery' (2007: 21). To consider clown play as play with identity and the self is to discuss ungraspable performance, elusive in a number of ways. Purcell Gates (2011a) points out that

the discussion of 'self' is common among students after class. This will be explored further in Chapter 5.

Types of Game

Kendrick's thesis (2010) is a coherent application of the ideas of play theorist Roger Caillois to Gaulier's classroom.⁵⁹ Kendrick hypothesises that Gaulier seeks free and pleasurable play, created using rule-bound and strict teaching. This correlates with Caillois' concept of *paida*, and the 'complimentary, and in some respects inverse' *ludus* (Caillois 2001: 13). It seems that Kendrick's impulse is to create a systematic understanding of Gaulier's play, which can be analysed in a straightforward manner, and this terminology helps her to break up play into constituent elements. However, another effect of its use is to describe an abstracted concept of play, rather than the ambiguities and confusion experienced by many students of the school (Danzig 2008: 16).

When looking at classroom play, Caillois' four types of game are especially useful. These are: *agôn*, competitive play and sport; *alea*, play with chance and the uncontrollable; *mimicry*, the play of pretending; and *ilinx*, the bodily experience of dizziness or vertigo. Kendrick identifies moments in the Gaulier clown workshop where each of these game-types appears - often in short succession, so that the player must shift between them. Her example is a game of musical chairs, in which two players circle a chair, and try to sit when the music stops. With the winner of the chair 'in major', they improvise a scene - the 'major' player taking control in centre stage, while the 'minor' player supports her. Kendrick identifies all four types of game in this exercise - the competition for the chair is agonistic play, but the fact Gaulier controls the music means that winning is out of the players' control, so the outcome is aleaic. When the music stops, the dash for the seat gives ilinx, and the improvisation could be called mimicry. Kendrick's analysis demonstrates that the transitions between game types must be smooth, so that the ways of playing are blended together. Using examples from the workshop, Kendrick illustrates that these sequential types of game require subtle but visible changes in tactic. The

⁵⁹ Caillois wrote *Man Play and Games* in 1958. Sutton-Smith refers to Caillois' study as an 'excellent account' (Sutton-Smith 1997: 65) but only draws on the theorist's earlier analysis of games of chance, not on his categorizations of play and games.

wrong type of playing at the wrong point causes a lack of pleasure, meaning that students fail in their attempt. One pair, she explains, were stopped because their agônistic play over the chair looked to the audience like a fight between ‘two chair maniacs’ (Kendrick 2010: 148), too competitive and not pointed toward the pleasure in mimicry which is the intended outcome.⁶⁰ Gaulier stops the game if the player cannot shift between types of game (Kendrick 2010: 151-152). Strict adherence to one type of game is interpreted by Kendrick as too rule-bound, or *ludic*. Mimicry that is inflected with agôn, alea, and ilinx gives a pleasurable, free play called *paida*. Gaulier’s game rules, or *ludus*, become ever quicker, more complex and more difficult to adhere to, creating the necessity for the rules to be broken. In this moment, the student is a ‘bad student’ and, at the same time, experiences a childlike pleasure, which is ideally shared with the audience.

Ludus and paida are not opposites but have a relational existence (Kendrick 2010: 54-55). The relationship is explained using the game Kendrick calls ‘Name Tag’, which I know as ‘Mr. Hit’. Players stand in a tight circle, with a player (A) named ‘Mr. Hit’. I noted the rules in my journal during *Le Jeu*, ‘A hits B, and B immediately says the name of C. C is [now] “Mr. Hit”’ (2008). The structure of the game is that players are ‘out’ when they are too slow or otherwise make a mistake. This continues until there is a winner, meaning that all but one of the players inevitably fail during the course of the game. It is a game with simple basic rules, in which the demands on the player get ever more urgent and complicated, which Kendrick calls ‘increasing ludus’. Each student, according to Kendrick, experiences pleasure when she breaks the ludus and is ‘out’ of the game:

The failure of playing this game is always expected but the experience is nevertheless a surprise when it arrives and this is almost always pleasurable for the player (Kendrick 2010: 129).

The pleasure experienced is one of freedom and Caillois’ term ‘paidic’ is applied to it. Paidic pleasure is created from confusion, and surprise, which have been generated breaking away from the impossible ludus of the game. Kendrick

⁶⁰ Kendrick cites the following article: Spencer Sochaczewski 2001 ‘Find Ze Kom-Plee-Ci-The’ Singapore Airlines Silver Kris Singapore: SPH Magazines Pte Ltd. 2001

acknowledges that this moment is short-lived, but maintains that the experience of this paidic pleasure is valuable to the learning process:

In the moment of sheer confusion lie many possibilities for Gaulier's theatre, in particular training for the clown. Though the player may be at this point jettisoned from the game, in failing they have found a state that is useful for performance (Kendrick 2010: 131).

For Kendrick, the ideal playful 'state' is located in failure of ludus. In a contrasting approach, Murray (2010a) deliberately avoids pinning down the techniques or experiences of students or teacher. This follows Gaulier's own playful way of writing and speaking:

Central to Gaulier's tactics of teaching and of rehearsal is the indirect vision, an arrival from the oblique or - in his own words - exploring the "angle of aberrations". In practice these are manifested in a constant destabilisation of the student actor in the belief that out of such perturbation dynamic dramaturgical solutions will be found which would be elusive or impossible through a more straightforward approach (Murray 2013a: 217).

While Murray observes 'perturbation' leading to 'dramaturgical solutions', he mimics this approach by finding oblique and metaphorical ways to discuss it. Kendrick's writing appears to take a more straightforward approach, but like the straightforwardness described by Murray, this writing style creates an impression of Gaulier's school that makes it difficult to see the nuances and paradoxes of the classroom. Perhaps to continue Kendrick's line of thinking, her analysis and its precision could be thought of as ludic play, in which a thorough understanding of the types of play function as rules to be followed for student success. As a performer and former student of *Le Jeu*, I would have found this terminology impossible to use in the classroom. I picture myself running back to my seat to rifle through the pages and decide whether I should play 'musical chairs' in an ilinxic or aleaic way. These boundaries and distinctions are difficult to keep in mind during performance, and it is likely that the student experiences something less defined. It may be the case that for some students or teachers, ludic play seems more attractive, if they want to know what to do and how. However, Kendrick's analysis suggests that the difficult games do not offer the chance to learn complex ludic skills, but instead, as Murray indicates,

destabilisation leads to a fugacious experience of play, which can be understood better when considered obliquely rather than directly.

Pat Kane embraces the multiplicity of play, as a potential philosophy, in his book *The Play Ethic: A Manifesto for a Different Way of Living* (2004). Kane acknowledges the usefulness of Sutton-Smith's rhetorics of play for a history of the ways in which play is discussed. However, he considers that all seven rhetorics of play should be understood as a multi-stranded definition of the same phenomenon. Thus Kane reinstates the unfixed 'ambiguity of play' as a valuable and generative way of seeing all the activities of play as part of the same behaviour. In part, this is a way to integrate the modern definitions of play (progress, imagination and selfhood) with the ancient rhetorics (fate and chaos, identity, contest). As a result of this combination, his concept of play becomes complex, because although '[t]he player as a richly potentialised individual, imaginative, energetic and freely intending, is attractive and appealing', play can also be 'more coercive, more violent, less voluntary, less optional' (2004: 49-50). Kane seeks a 'different way of living' that encompasses the play of these extremes:

To be a player is to try and live and thrive between freedom and determinism, chance and necessity. It is this seeming paradox that the player needs to embrace (Kane 2004: 40).

Kane considers the ancient rhetorics to compel play in a way that is 'violent' and 'less optional' than the play of the modern rhetorics. This interpretation allows us to consider the sides of Gaulier's teaching which are experienced as something 'more coercive, more violent, less voluntary, less optional' than the rhetorics of play as self or imagination would suggest. Play can be seen as competitive, and necessary to define identity, and not voluntary at Gaulier's school, and the students learn to play in and with these conditions. The paradoxical relationship between 'freedom and determinism' is strikingly similar to Kendrick's dialectic of *paida* and *ludus*. The strict and complicated rules 'play with' students, and the loss of control creates destabilisation which can become an oblique approach to creative or imaginative play.

Drawing on Caillois' observation that make-believe play, or mimicry, is not associated with rules, Davison prefers the play theory of Carse, who draws a

distinction between 'finite' and 'infinite' games: 'Finite players play within boundaries; infinite players play with boundaries' (Carse 2012: 12). Davison's interpretation is that clowns play infinite games that are not rule-free, but the players can have a freer relationship with the rules, 'Not taking the rules seriously is subtly different from disobeying them or cheating' (Davison 2013: 216). To Davison, infinite play is more liberating for the player, and less easy to control. Carse's distinction is more philosophical, he puts infinite and finite games on different scales, including as finite games sports matches, careers and wars, and defining 'culture' as infinite play, an ongoing, forward-looking play with life, that considers nothing fixed and the past open to reinterpretation. Infinite players (people who contribute to culture) are ready to be surprised by new directions of play, and aim for play's continuation rather than its outcome. Carse's infinite play chimes with the way clown play is discussed, where the purpose of infinite play is echoed on a smaller scale - the clown that wants to stay on stage, improvises and negotiates with other players and the audience. However, this takes place within the boundaries of the performance, which must be understood as a finite game, having spatial and temporal limits, and expectations from the audience and other players.

After discussing the differences between finite and infinite play, Carse warns against the misunderstanding of his distinction. Carse sees the 'challenge' of the infinite player to be:

how to contain the serious within the truly playful; that is, how to keep all our finite games in infinite play.
This challenge is commonly misunderstood as the need to find room for playfulness within finite games [...] This is the sort of playfulness implied in the ordinary sense of such terms as entertainment, amusement, diversion, comic relief, recreation, relaxation.
Inevitably, however, seriousness will creep back in to this kind of play (Carse 2012: 38).

Carse clearly determines entertainment and comedy to be finite games, moments of defined games within a serious world, which can be monetised or used for other 'serious' functions. Clown can be understood as finite, despite its players having an informal relationship with the rules of theatre. If we were to understand clowns as infinite players, this would be on the level of the individual's life, not on the level of the moment of performance. A person is

free to join the finite game of the performance (or workshop, or role as teacher), but once they are there, they are expected to behave within the rules of that finite game (not, for example, sitting in silence or ignoring the audience). Davison's use of Carse's theory is at odds with his assurances that there are definable things that 'clowns do' - these expectations and rules point to the fixed, finite games of clowning that have occurred historically. Davison's espousal of Gaulier's definition that the clown makes audiences laugh delineates clowning as a social role, or finite game, that has inherent expectations and boundaries. While it is difficult to define clowning as an infinite game, it could be said that 'infinite players' have a lot in common with the role of clowns, or may be drawn to this role. Carse's explanation of finite games also contributes to the question of the voluntariness, or freedom of play. Carse follows Huizinga by considering all play to be freely entered into, but describes 'veils' that conceal the free nature of our commitment to a finite game. These are the expectations of play, which may be the apparent stakes of a competition, or commitment to taking a role seriously. Carse compares a woman playing the role of mother to a woman playing the role of Ophelia in *Hamlet*, seeing both roles as 'veils'. In the latter case, the audience 'are in complicity with her veil. We allow her performed emotions to affect us, perhaps powerfully. But we never forget that we allow them to do so' (Carse 2012: 13). In everyday life we may forget that we (or others) have freely chosen to play roles such as 'mother'. Students on the clown workshop have all also chosen to be there, to play the role of 'student' and of 'clown'. So when, during class, expectations of clown (to make the audience laugh) are imposed, this may feel like play which is 'forced' or 'imposed'. However, any individual could make the choice to stop playing these roles and leave the school.

Writing about Gaulier, Murray uses the term play in a sense that explores the ambiguity of the term's everyday use. For Murray, play in the training of Lecoq and Gaulier is less of an activity, delineated by games, but rather an 'embodied and emotional disposition' (Murray 2010a: 224) necessary for performance and learned indirectly, over time spent at the school. This disposition of play can be seen - and felt - in the body; 'The student who tries too hard (*trop fort, trop volontaire*) - who is anxious, brittle or stiff, and frozen by lack of confidence - will find it difficult to play' (Murray 2010a: 235). Murray describes exercises

from the school but avoids analysing them closely in the surrounding text. The stated intention is that these ‘offer associations, rather than illustrate, the text’ and the games are not directly implicated in the teaching strategy (Murray 2010a: 235). Murray interprets play as lack of tension – in a children’s game in the classroom or when speaking a text or playing a character. In the latter case, he illustrates this as a physical quality ‘as one might talk about the ‘play’ in a bicycle chain, or a piece of string or rope [...] slack, looseness, a relaxation of the sinews which connect performer to character’ (Murray 2010a: 225). Frost and Yarrow use the same image, describing ‘shades of meaning’ for play, which ‘include the hint of “bringing into play”, and the sense of “possible movement or scope” as in the degree of play in a bicycle chain’ (Frost and Yarrow 1990: 64). Both Murray and Frost and Yarrow discuss slack play in mimetic games, and contrast slackness between performer and characters to a tight, close identification to character espoused in Stanislavskian acting methods. However, perhaps the slackness described by Murray could also be applied to the other game types as outlined by Kendrick. In the example from musical chairs, above, the students who clung too tightly to the agonistic game of competing for the chair were too strongly attached to the game, needed to be less direct in their approach to it. Although Murray emphasises ‘loose’ or ‘slack’ play, he is absolutely not discussing a disconnected or lazy approach, rather a conscious and attentive distance. Wright uses a similar metaphor of play as movement as opposed to fixity; he claims to ‘use the word “play” in the context of acting [...] in the sense that you might say “moonlight plays on a pool of water”’ (2006a: 27). Wright also explicitly refers to games on stage, so this metaphorical image of play as flickering movement of light on water is not maintained in every context. For both Murray and Wright, the physical similes used to explain the actor’s play emphasise flexibility and movement.

The emergent tropes from the theories of play examined here are ambiguity and multiplicity. Play, being spoken about from different perspectives, can be used to refer to a widely variegated set of activities, according to the context in which it is discussed. Attempts to classify or categorise play forms, or even the ways in which play forms are discussed and studied, can be too rigid, and thus remove the play of meaning inherent in this action, or disposition of action. The fluid concepts that are contained in the word ‘play’, describing multiple

functions, values and practices, would all be brought to the school by students arriving on the first of Gaulier's courses: *Le Jeu*. Kendrick's use of theory offers a robust and rich way of discussing what happens in the classroom, and is backed up by observations on a clown workshop, and by interview material from fellow participants. However, the terminology of Caillois' theory is alien to the classroom, and I suspect that a student who read Kendrick's thesis before attending the school would very quickly have to let go of the theoretical perspective. In contrast, Murray's descriptions of the disposition of play, which may resonate with ex-students, may not communicate to inexperienced readers the level of complexity in classroom play or games. Since I seek an understanding of the classroom that would feel more familiar to those who have experienced it, I wish to develop the concept of play as slack, or engaged distance. This will incorporate the concept that clown players can play with the rules of theatre, despite taking part in the finite game of clown performance. It will also incorporate the older rhetorics of play, acknowledging that the conditions of clown play are not always voluntary, but may exist in a more competitive or unpredictable setting.

Le Jeu

The first course in Gaulier's curriculum is called *Le Jeu*, and is sometimes translated as 'the Game' in the text of *The Tormentor*. Gaulier's website and brochure for the school describe the course:

Base, foundation, infrastructure, framework of the theatre, of the lessons given in the school. The pleasure of playing children's games. Complicity (<http://www.ecolephilippegaulier.com/courses.html>)

This brief summary demonstrates the fundamental nature of the course to Gaulier's training, and introduces some key terms. Murray considers that the course 'engages with the core of Gaulier's philosophy which will underpin and permeate everything that follows' (Murray 2010a: 224), citing from an earlier version of the website, 'Why begin with the "jeu"? Because "jeu" - game and play - is the source of everything: of the pleasure and desire to be an actor' (Gaulier in Murray 2010a: 224). While *Le Jeu* is not a clown course, it is the base of all Gaulier's courses, including Clown.

The course consists of children's games, some of which are expanded into improvisations. Sometimes during a game such as Grandmother's Footsteps, students are instructed to add 'text' as though in performance. Texts varied from improvised conversations about what we had eaten for breakfast, to remembered childhood songs. A few games are repeated many times. Kendrick discusses a game called '*Complicité* Ball Game', a name I will adopt as I analyse my own experience of playing it. As the game developed, it had increasing ludus, leading to a point at which, overwhelmed by ludus, I consider myself to have experienced paidic play.

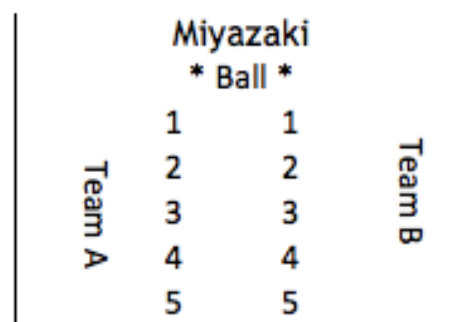


Figure 2: Players in "*Complicité* Ball Game"

I am player 1, on team A. Miyazaki holds a large, soft ball, at chest height. She calls numbers, to name two players at a time. When she calls '1', player B1 and I move to stand in the positions indicated *, facing each other. In order to win a point for team A, I need to take the ball, touch the wall behind my team, and return to my place in the line. If B1 is holding the ball and I touch her, she must give me the ball (and vice versa). If I win the ball this way, and then touch the wall behind my team, I score two points. The first few rounds of this game are played quickly, with players trying to grab the ball and running. This is Caillois' agônistic playing; it could be a sport for which we could train.

Player A3 realises that B3 is quicker at grabbing than her. She waits for B3 to take the ball, and touches her, taking the ball and winning two points. Other players develop this tactic; there are longer pauses before the ball is taken, as players watch each other and try to anticipate the other's actions. This way of playing is more dependent on watching and predicting the actions of others. This could be said to make the game more aleaic, depending not only on the

respective skill of the players but also some elements of chance. But this does not fully explain the change that has taken place in the game. More attention goes to the opponent, the pair has fun together, teasing or waiting, watching each other. They are still opponents for the point, but play together. Gaulier calls the stillness as players focus on one another 'fixed point'.

A new rule is introduced. When players reach Miyazaki, before they can take the ball, they have a conversation about the weather, in audible and theatrical voices. At some point during the conversation, Gaulier will hit the drum, and players can take the ball and play as before. Some players are distracted by the text; they do not react to the drumbeat. I wrote in my journal, 'It's really hard to remember the game when you have to riff about the weather and sound good' (2008). Three types of play have to coexist at this point - the competition with the partner, anticipating the uncontrollable timing of the drum, and the pretend play of the conversation, with the attendant performance skills this requires. It is difficult to focus on the *agôn*, *alea* and *mimicry* at once, creating disorientation similar to *ilinx*.

Later, two players are on stage in front of the class. They play a scene, with the spirit of the game described above, although there is no ball or teams on stage. The text: one player tells the other that they are in love with someone from the course, 'Which was too hard. No-one could do it...[my partner and I] jiggled all over the place, mumbled and didn't work together - and Philippe mimed throwing fruit at us' (October 2008). Unable to remember or recreate the competitive, risky play with one another, our performance had no fixed point, theatrical voice, or *complicité*. The game would be described as *mimicry*, the play of pretending, but in recreating 'the spirit' of the previous game, we also had to recreate (through *mimicry*) the split focus of the multiple play types. Gaulier's mime of throwing fruit commented on our attempt at the complicated game. By offering his own mimetic play, Gaulier communicated to us what the spectators could already see; that we were not performing well. Gaulier's interruptions use mimetic play, but also could be understood as agonistic play, as his mime outperforms the play of the failing performers, and he 'wins' the laugh we, the students, did not achieve.

We were given another chance, and a reminder of the game. Miyazaki stood between us with the ball, and then slowly moved around the stage. Though we faced the audience and the instruction to improvise text was primary, the game was back. If the drumbeat sounded, we would grab the ball and run. This part of the workshop remains a very clear memory. I remember thinking about the many instructions I had been given, or complex ludus. The text I spoke surprised me; my improvised words were silly, my voice was loud and clear yet desperate, tense with split concentration and contained energy. My classmates laughed and my performance was judged to be a success, as I wrote, 'Philippe said they loved me when I played like that' (2008). *Complicité* Ball Game is a training exercise, which would not be performed on stage, but the version of the game where we played the text with 'the spirit of' the ball game could have been part of a theatrical production. Perhaps it was the case, as Kendrick suggests, that I broke through the ludus, and free, paidic play was the result. My experience was that the scene went on for a while, the various games continued to jostle for space in my head. This play, which was commended in the workshop, was high-energy, ready for action, and alert.

All of Caillois' four types of game are present in this example; they are kept in jostling suspension, all together. Kendrick's breakdown demonstrates the multiple forms of play in the workshop, but Gaulier's choice to refer to them all together under the name *Le Jeu* gives play an ambiguity which is also present in the performances of the classroom. This play is opposed to rigid tension and instead describes an engaged distance, like the 'play of a bicycle chain', described above. I experienced it as a physical oscillation, a loose restriction of movement, a jiggling, jostling sensation, which led to a relaxation of control. The words that came out were not rigidly controlled, and in turn this meant they were creative, funny, not logical or obvious ways to describe love. This type of loose jostling play resembles Caillois' *ilinx*, in that it suggests a lack of self-control, but in *ilinx* games this sensation refers to the player's bodily experience, and is physically created by an action such as spinning. Gaulier's students remain in control of their body, but they experience what Purcell Gates call 'disorientation' (Purcell Gates 2011a: 236). The loss of rigid control is created by multiple and ambiguous competing games, shared with the opponent and the audience. Kendrick's application of the term *paida* does not fully

capture this, because it suggests a freedom and creativity that is not always needed, and a too total disruption of the games that created it. Instead, it would be helpful to have a term to describe these multi-layered, simultaneous game(s), to which the player is engaged but without rigidity.



Figure 3: A word cloud to depict Gaulier's language use

Gaulier conflates, muddles and 'plays with' the differences between the multiple ways of playing, in part through the ambiguities of terminology and language. The course is named *Le Jeu*, in which he teaches acting (*jouer*) as play (*jouer*) using a number of games (*les jeux*) in which students mess around (*deconner*), seek pleasure (*plaisir du jeu*) and enjoy themselves (*s'amuser*). Gaulier emphasises his use of this last verb, highlighting its particular meaning and connotations in French, more than once conjugating the verb slowly and carefully, perhaps with a hint of irony, in class (2008). Its inflection is of finding pleasure, of entertaining, more active and deliberate than 'having fun' or 'enjoying'. *S'amuser* has the potential etymological root '*muser*', which can mean both 'to waste time', and 'to think carefully about' something. This duplicity suggests to me that *s'amuser* could be understood as attentive but not forced, and thus aligned with the intense, loose, ambiguous and multiple playing described above. *Amuser* is literally translated as 'to entertain', and if something is *amusant* it is funny. It seems to be stating the obvious to discover that Gaulier's clown play is enjoyable, funny and entertaining. The play of clowns could be described as *amusant*, and it is significant that the clown *s'amuse*, but while these are an important aspect of Gaulier's clowns this terminology does not enable clarification, summary or explanation of the multiple and simultaneous ways of playing that have been explored above.

The pleasure, enjoyment and play evoked by Gaulier is bodily and related to nature; he speaks of animals and plants playing in the spring, horses ‘galloping to their hearts’ content, copulating, whinnying with joy’ and flowers ‘assuming the most scandalous, lewd and pornographic of positions’ (Gaulier 2007: 193). A word that does not appear in his text, but may be present through inference or homonymy is *jouir*, which also means ‘to enjoy’, but with the secondary meaning of sexual pleasure, ‘to reach orgasm’. Derived from this verb is the noun *jouissance*, a term meaning enjoyment - of both sexual pleasure and referring to rights of possession. *Jouissance* appears in the theories of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan as a concept connected but opposed to pleasure. *Jouissance* describes an orgasmic limit to pleasure, created when the subject attempts to go beyond the limit of bearable pleasure, as Fink explains, ‘[b]eyond this limit, pleasure becomes pain, and this “painful pleasure” is what Lacan calls *jouissance*’ (Fink 1995: 92). Because of the homonymy described above, perhaps application of Lacan’s theory can offer insight into the type(s) of play sought by Gaulier. Gaulier does mention sex, and sexual desire, frequently. Gaulier’s feedback to students includes asking a female student about the *complicité* with her male partner on stage:

You receive a fucking beautiful *complicité* from him? You say “Ah I go to bed with him tonight”? Or “For sure I don’t go to bed with this monster”? You have to answer (Gaulier in Kendrick 2010: 230).

Another student, male, was told he shows no pleasure in performing, so was asked to repeat what he did while two female students of his choosing ‘kissed and fondled him’ (Kendrick 2010: 233). This, Gaulier assured the student, enabled him to show ‘good pleasure’ (Kendrick 2010: 233). In both these cases, and when similar moments occurred in 2008 and 2009, playful pleasure is equated with sexual attraction, and the two can be mutually causal. These two examples use heterosexual attraction, in the first case almost as a metaphor, and in the second as an act to provoke *complicité* and pleasure. Gaulier’s language also features metaphorical ‘bursts’, of laughter, or of pleasure in play, such as when the show begins and ‘Fellow-feeling, friendship and, perhaps, love explode on all sides of the stage’ (Gaulier 2007: 211). Kendrick’s explosive *paida*, breaking through *ludus*, could be interpreted as the *jouissance* of *paida* acting as an orgasmic limit to the pleasure of ludic play. These suggest an applicability of the theory of *jouissance* to the pleasures espoused by Gaulier.

However, while the playful pleasures of clowning intermingle with suggestions of sexual pleasure, attraction or desire, there are problems with this interpretation. Although the course is named *Le Jeu*, references throughout the course are to play (in English). The terms *Jouer* and *jouir* are not explicitly mentioned. Gaulier's emphasis on *s'amuser* and preference for the term '*plaisir du jeu*' suggests an avoidance of *jouissance*. Lacan's use of *jouissance* is concerned with 'limit, lack, loss [...] what Lacan refers to as castration' (Fink 1995: 101). Castration is the renunciation, or sacrifice, of personal *jouissance*, to the other, and thus the loss of it to the self:

The sacrifice involved in castration is to hand over a certain *jouissance* to the Other and let it circulate in the Other, that is, let it circulate in some sense 'outside' of ourselves (Fink 1995: 99).

Fink identifies this occurring in writing, where part of the meaning of language is given over to the reader. Similarly, in Gaulier's classroom, part of the meaning is given over to the audience, if understood as Lacanian *jouissance*, the play that is shown to the audience would be a loss, or expense, to the performer. In Gaulier's classroom, however, the relinquishing of control is seen as the sharing of pleasure, in giving pleasure to the spectator, the performer does not sacrifice her own. If 'the game and the imagination are thick as thieves' (Gaulier 2007: 196), the performer's pleasure (the game) and the audience's pleasure (the imagination) are accomplices, joining in their pleasure and finding freedom and growth together. Lacanian *jouissance* is tied up with loss and pain in a way that Gaulier's *plaisir du jeu* is not. Perhaps the feminine *jouissance* described by Kristeva and Cixous is more appropriate (Ives 2007). French feminists write of, and seek writing with, depictions of feminine *jouissance*, not representable in patriarchal/masculine art or writing: 'explosive, blossoming, sane and inexhaustible *jouissance* of the woman' (Kristeva 1977: 63). Although the pleasurable, and successful play of *Le Jeu* is tiring, and confusing, it is relational and not selfish, being connected to other players and audience, sharing the pleasure of play with them. Rather than being a limit to ludic play, this pleasure might work alongside Kendrick's understanding of paida breaking out of ludus to be expansive and free of boundaries.

The terminology used to describe the experiences of play at Gaulier's school is kept deliberately ambiguous, to avoid formulaic tactics and maintain the energy

created by the multiple, jostling forms of play that students are asked to engage with. The use of French and English vocabulary together further enhances this looseness of description, which mirrors the student experience of being unable to grasp, define or fix any of the strategies found at the school. Nonetheless, the pleasure of play is fundamental to the whole school, and this tension between the centrality and ambiguity of the concept is wholly appropriate. Play is high-energy, with split, multiple foci, attentive but not forceful. An exploration of language and terminology offers more relational meaning, and the significance of pleasure being shared with the audience and partners suggests that this pleasure is not a Lacanian *jouissance*, but could be a Kristevan feminine *jouissance* characterised by expansiveness, lack of limits and shared pleasure.

Writing in an issue of *Modern Drama* that set out to explore the definition of 'theatrical', semiotician Anne Ubersfeld (1982) describes the 'pleasure' available to theatre spectators through their role in semiotics. For Ubersfeld "the pleasure of the sign" (1982: 129) is available in multiple strands. Firstly, 'Pleasure of Imitation' - where the audience can enjoy both an apparent transformation and the human skill of mimesis (1982: 129-130) is accompanied by the widely accepted pleasures of spectacle and 'bricolage', where there is an unusual abundance of visual stimulus. She describes the 'Pleasure of Transgression' (1982: 134) - where things that would be impossible in life appear to occur on stage. In Gaulier's terms, pleasures of imitation and of transgression may be read as a pleasure of pretending, a complicity in the game of pretend, or complicit play. However, perhaps most pertinent here are Ubersfeld's 'Pleasure of Understanding', where spectators decode existing signs to see the intended signified; and 'Pleasure of Invention', where they have space to be creative, using the gaps between signs to find their own meanings through semiotics (1982: 132). These dual activities of reception, of both decoding and creating meaning are framed as 'the very source of theatrical pleasure' (1982: 129).

For Purcell Gates, ambiguity lies at the centre of this course:

Gaulier defines successful play as communicating the "pleasure of the play" to the audience; the performer is meant to take visible delight in the "ambiguity of intent", the inter-"play" between meaning something and only pretending to mean it (2011b: 35).

Purcell Gates was a participant on the Neutral Mask course, the one immediately following *Le Jeu*. While she did not participate in *Le Jeu*, she draws on knowledge and experience gleaned from conversation with her classmates. The analysis developed by Gates on what she calls ‘pedagogy of disorientation’ is theoretically based on both Caillois’ paidic ‘play’ and Csikszentmihalyi’s ‘flow’.

At the heart of *le jeu*, for Gaulier, is the pleasure one takes in lying to the audience. This apparent deception is mitigated by a key requirement: the audience must be able to know that the performer is lying, must be able to sense the pleasure the performer takes in this game (Purcell Gates 2011b: 180).

Le Jeu is understood by Purcell Gates as ‘aesthetic distance’ from that represented, perhaps similar to the concept of play as slack, previously examined.⁶¹ Kendrick’s interpretation of the course is that it ‘is designed to reintroduce the performer to play and to develop their playing skills in order to perform’ (2010: 120). This suggests a regressive quality, ‘reintroducing’ play as a skill that has been lost with maturity.

Before discussing the playful pleasure communicated and shared with the audience, it is important to consider the fact that clowns perform their shows for multiple audiences, as well as the fact that these audiences professionalise clown play by exchanging money for it.

Professional Play

Too much concern with paidic, disoriented play, or indeed with *jouissance*, can lead to neglect of the fact that clowns can, and are often required to, present the same material repeatedly, so that more than one audience can experience pleasure from the show. A professional clown may be required to *s’amuser* with a particular text every night for a whole season. Kendrick’s concept of paidic play breaking through ludus functions within a rhetoric of clown play as necessarily spontaneous, that can be seen in Lecoq-based clown traditions (Peacock 2009; Simon 2012). Spontaneity also features in play theory. One significant feature of Huizinga’s theory, adopted by Caillois and Sutton-Smith,

⁶¹ Purcell Gates indicates that Fusetti, another Lecoq-based teacher, uses *Le Jeu* to refer to “a quality of performance that can only be discerned in the experience of playing or observing” (Interview, cited by Purcell Gates 2011b: 36). Play is active, or embodied, and cannot be written in a script or description.

has been the opposition between play and work. Theoretically, play is necessarily separate from life, unproductive and free from exhortation. To Caillois, play must also be unpredictable: ‘an outcome known in advance, with no possibility of error or surprise [...] is incompatible with the nature of play’ (Caillois 2001: 7). This is problematised when considering professional clowns, who, like professional sportspeople or gamblers, are in the position of playing for their livelihood, and thus need a more reliable way to create play.

Play in the clown workshop or rehearsal room is removed from being ‘work’, but it is usually understood to be training for professional play. Students who have spent money in order to take part in the workshop expect their time, and their play, to be productive of skill, relationships, ideas or reputation that can be used to further professionalise their own play. This creates an environment where teachers and classmates expect each student to participate fully, and approach their play with some level of diligence, that could be understood as a ‘work ethic’. Kane contrasts play to work, considering the possibilities of a ‘play ethic’, as a possible way of living and organizing life, in contrast to a ‘work ethic’ characterised by repetition, routine and duty. In a personal and autobiographical style, Kane endorses embracing the paradoxes of play, in order to be ‘energetic, imaginative and confident in the face of an unpredictable, contestive, emergent world’ (Kane 2004: 63). The player accepts and is able to interact with a world in which they will not always have agency or freedom, but they will have opportunities for creativity. Kane finds a ‘play ethic’ amongst musicians and dancers in his immediate social and professional circle. He considers these individuals to be ‘players’ rather than ‘workers’, and wonders if their approach to engaging with what they do can be applied to a wider society (Kane 2004: 25-34). The arts are recognized as providing significant play possibilities, but are not the only places in which a playful ‘ethic’ can exist (Kane 2004: 223). This resonates with a feeling among Gaulier students that play is not just for the stage but also forms a kind of loose philosophy, advocating that playfulness, pleasure and complicity should be sought in life (Burgers 2012; Gibbons 2012; Amsden October 2008).

In Alan Clay’s ‘clown user guide’, in which he describes the working and performing lives of clowns in street performance, theatre and hospital settings, a chapter is devoted to play. Clay prioritises the childlike, ‘for a child everything

is play' and claims that when people mature, 'we lose our spontaneity, our ability to find the joy in each moment, which is what guides the playing process' (2005: 59). Despite Clay's emphasis on childlike joy in play, the story contained in his chapter monetises the play of a child. In 'Jasper's Long Life Matches' (2005: 62-64), the son of a street performer impresses his adult companions with his childish spirit of play. The boy suggests that they 'play a game', his game of choice being that they 'sell something'. Using creative wordplay, he sells a single match to a passer-by, who 'was delighted with the game, and happily paid a dollar' (2005: 64). The spectator rewards the child's play with real cash. Clay's stories, which all concern a group of street performers, recognise that the street performers are playing in the hope or expectation of money collected at the end of their act. The performers' play is work, but is nonetheless a genuine interaction with the spectator, who values delight, and accepts the exchange of money for inventive play. The context of street shows in Clay's book brings this into focus for the reader - while play could be considered work for all clowns, in a theatre or circus the performer is at some remove from the financial exchange. Nonetheless, Gaulier and the students who go on to work as clowns (or actors) are all playing professionally.

At the end of term, Gaulier gives the students responsibility for rehearsing or repeating scenes for an end of term show. Acts are selected from successful presentations in the classroom, which students develop during *autocours*. The best pieces from the Friday sessions throughout the term are selected for the show.⁶² However, the line-up does not stay fixed. Pieces are performed again the week before show week, and any that are no longer funny are cut. This process continues after each performance. Gaulier's repetitive use of games in the classroom could be identified as an indirect strategy for teaching the rehearsal or repetition of clown scenes. Students play the same few games, some of which are played every day through a month-long course. Every time the class play 'Mr. Hit', 'Complicité Ball Game', or 'Balthazar Says', the game has the same text, the same gestures and the same rules. Although it is the same game, each time it is played anew, and the playing is different. Students improve certain skills, such as speed, and people laugh different amounts, as in-jokes and relationships

⁶² This show does not always happen, Trygve Wakenshaw points out that if the students do not have good scenes to show, it will not go ahead (Wakenshaw. 2 October 2014, Personal Communication)

develop. Nonetheless, the game is still being repeated, and it progresses the same every day and is more or less the same to watch.

Repeating a game is equivalent to repeating a scene, as each scene may include necessary text, gestures and rules of interaction, but this does not make every repetition identical. In the game or scene, the clown (accidentally, perhaps) does something funny, and notices that the audience liked it. Next, the clown does it again, to see if they can make the spectators laugh again. In 2009, Gaulier made a very clear statement on this topic, 'It's a good idea never to forget "yesterday I was funny"'. He paused, and then added, 'If you were funny' (2009: 12). McCrystal describes creating this relationship to material with Basauri:

If I say, "Aitor, do this. And do it like that, and count to three before you say your next word, and then turn around, and then, blink", he won't ask why, he knows that it will be funny [...] And he just goes, "oh, good". And he can't wait to show it to the audience. Because he knows it'll get a laugh and it does (McCrystal 2013).

McCrystal is prescriptive with his direction, and as a result the material is fixed, and the same actions are performed every night. While the audience remain the judge of whether the material is funny, in this instance McCrystal describes a productive working partnership, in which Basauri does funny things in rehearsal, McCrystal, as director, proposes repeatable ideas that build on Basauri's offer, and each trusts the other's comic ability. This trust is productive to the show, but precedes the moment described in the previous chapter, when the company 'kill the teacher' and trust instead the audience. Nonetheless, for the director, it is a technique to avoid inconsistency:

...none of my shows contain any improvisational elements at all. [...] They're all absolutely set [...] and in order to make it work, I absolutely rely on the pleasure of the performers and the spirit of play, and the spirit of mischief, and the greed for the audience's affection, and the, [...] unashamed desire to show off (McCrystal 2013).

For McCrystal, repetition and 'the spirit of play' are not incompatible, but interdependent. It is the playful attitude to the audience that allows for reliable comic performance of the material, and the performer's faith in the material that gives her the confidence to play it for the audience. Kendrick's notion of

‘paidic performance’ is troubled by this finding. The clown (Basauri) confidently and hopefully replaying material is not playing paidically, because he does not escape from the ludus of his material. The attitude that says ‘yesterday I was funny’ also says ‘I want to be funny again today’. This is a responsive quality that is captured in what McCrystal calls ‘spirit of mischief, and the greed for the audience’s affection, and the, [...] unashamed desire to show off’. The energy this attitude generates allows each repetition of the ‘set’ material to be a repetition of a game, as though the clown introduces a game to a new set of players in each performance. Kendrick’s explanation that paidic play erupts from broken ludus hides the fact that both can exist together, making repeated rules feel enlivened.

Davison engages with what he considers to be the misleading notion that contemporary clowns are always playing spontaneously. He connects this notion to a twentieth century ‘vision of clowns as revealers of truth’ (Davison 2013: 284). Davison argues that it is this historical perspective on clown that has led to the apparent irreconcilability of play and repetition. Davison is critical of Eli Simon, a clown teacher who creates an opposition between scripted performance and personal revelation. Davison considers Simon’s rejection of ‘anything which is pre-prepared, reproducible, non-individualised or not deemed to be spontaneously occurring in the moment’, to be limiting for a performer who wishes to deliver professional clowning, making audiences laugh every time she goes on stage (Davison 2013: 284-292). Clown material can be based on a script, or movement score, but demands that the performer remain playful throughout. Jarmuz recalls a lesson significant to replaying scripts:

Consistency is the mark of a professional. You know a trapeze artist doesn’t do something different every night, they always do precisely the same routine, and it’s to an extremely high standard. Same with an actor, same with a clown. But, always, when you’re in front of people there is this something different that is happening that changes what you’re doing in that particular moment with this particular audience (Jarmuz 2013).

Davison persuasively demonstrates the existence of enduring ‘clown texts’. He shows that there are a number of ‘gag types’ with discernable formula, in which one element of an action or image must be wrong in its context. This means clown performances can be repeated, but also copied, adapted, and crafted.

Davison suggests that Gaulier's emphasis on the pleasure of pretence eradicates the opposition between script and playfulness. The tension between the freshness and responsiveness of play, and the professional need for repetition is bridged by Gaulier's use of flop, which will be further explored in the following chapter. Enabling the coexistence of spontaneous play and repeated (scripted) material, discussion of flop causes 'confusion' between play and improvisation:

The confusion results from the discovery that the flop cannot be scripted, that the clown's relationship with the audience must be created in the moment. It is often then assumed that everything the clown does must be somehow spontaneous, that the audience should see everything coming into creation in the present (Davison 2013: 291).

In the classroom, play allows for exploration that does not necessarily translate to the stage. Davison augments a game of Gaulier's in order to teach this skill of replaying scripted material according to spontaneous responses. At Gaulier's school, a line of five students stands on stage. The game is a race to the front of the stage, each student taking a step forward each time the audience laugh at them. In Davison's version, rather than taking physical steps forward each time she hears a laugh, an individual student performer has a text and progresses with each 'step' (a section, movement, or line) only when she gets a laugh. Using his own teaching experience, Davison argues that the relationship between clown and audience must be honest and original to the moment in which it is performed, but that it is not important whether the material performed is improvised or scripted (Davison 2013: 291).

Professional clowning does not have to be at odds with its status as play - as long as it is the game that is repeated, rather than the actions of play themselves, that is, the responsive communication with other players and audience. This coexistence of scripted and spontaneous play problematizes the idea of paidic performance, because it does not demand a 'breakthrough' of rules, but rather is interdependent with rules or script that enables professional play. Rehearsal and fixed material does not, necessarily, mean a destruction of the 'spirit of play' nor does play need to be radically different each time for the experience of watching clown to be playful and responsive.

Complicit play

A term that appears alongside ‘play’ in Gaulier’s classroom - which has been acknowledged by Murray, Kendrick, Purcell Gates and Davison - is *complicité*. *Complicité* helps explain the nuances of play in Gaulier’s theatre and clowning. Murray suggests that there is ground for further exploration of play in neuroscience as well as in the classroom. If combined with the above findings on play, *complicité* offers a productive way to discuss the multiple, shifting, slackness of play. Murray and Keefe explore the relationship between play and *complicité*, interpreting the latter term as ‘*rapport*’ or - more piquantly - a spirit of the “accomplice” (Murray and Keefe 2007: 146). In bullet lists expanding on the qualities of these states, play and *complicité* are very similarly explicated. While ‘play must attend to “rhythm, tempo, space and form”’ (Lecoq 2000:29 cited 2007: 147), ‘*complicité* requires constant attention to rhythm and tempo’ (2007: 147). While ‘without *complicité* there can be no “collective imagining” for theatre making’, ‘play renders the moment onstage into life’ (2007: 147). Murray and Keefe quote Michael Ratcliffe in the programme notes of the theatre company, Complicite, using the term to refer to ‘a form of collusion between celebrants’ (Ratcliffe 1994 cited 2007: 147). *Complicité* enables play that is colluding, empathetic, embodied and attentive. It joins the players on stage with the spectators, and, as we saw in the previous chapter, in the classroom the performers, the audience and the pedagogue are all complicit in play.

The French term *complicité* is used in the classroom, with Murray and Keefe suggesting that ‘there is no immediate translation’ (Murray and Keefe 2007: 146). In Gaulier’s book, the translator Ewan Maclachlan simply replaces it with the English ‘complicity’. Gaulier provides a dictionary definition and illustrates it with onomatopoeia that captures my own experience of this moment:

[Students] look for fellow-feeling and complicity with a friend. (The Robert dictionary defines ‘complicity’ as a profound understanding between people, which is spontaneous and often unexpressed). Boom. Badaboom. Boom, crack, click. I’m getting somewhere (Gaulier 2007: 204-205).

Though the definition is of a French term, referring to a French language dictionary, the book ascribes a direct translation between the elusive ‘*complicité*’ and ‘complicity’. Gaulier must have agreed to the translation,

despite the fact he mixes French and English in class. Irving (2012b: 75) and Bye (2008: 219) both use the English term to refer to the phenomenon without commenting on it. However, perhaps Murray and Keefe's echoing of Gaulier's 'untranslatable' term is a method of holding the technique at arm's length, keeping its meaning elusive. The sound effects described here convey my experience of the ball game, as I held all the games together in my head, and stayed aware of my partner, the audience and the games while I improvised text. This feeling of synchronicity, understanding and powerful connection slightly out of my control did feel like the high energy, overbearing disorienting sounds 'Boom. Badaboom. Boom, crack, click'. Complicity becomes a mutual relinquishing of control, suspended between individuals. Players have a shared, flexible, complicit control of the game; it is overwhelming as students attempt to hold all of its facets together.

This term, being used frequently at the school, informs the complex, multiple, concentrated yet indirect, flexibly engaged play that I have been describing. I offer the term *complicit play* to describe an interaction where many types of play or game co-exist; held together, blurred, united or competing. Complicit play would differ from agonistic play, as players are not opposed and judged by skill, and the play is not competitive. However, like agonistic players, complicit players can train their skills and use their play professionally. Complicit play is not aleaic, as participants do not compete, and because they are active, have some agency over what they do, despite holding this agency at a relaxed distance, and allowing others to take control. Play could be both mimetic and complicit, because when clowns or actors play complicitly in performance, they ask the audience to be complicit in the mimicry, pretending together that a character exists. Lastly, though the player (especially when studying and learning the skills of play) may feel disoriented, dizzy or vertiginous, complicit play is not exactly the same asilinx, but it contains a confusion created by focussing on many games at once. Thus *complicit play* holds all of Caillois' game types together, loosely and productively, and invites the audience to collude in play.

Gaulier's teacher Lecoq valued the mutuality and relational nature of play, saying, 'True play can only be founded on one's reaction to another' (Lecoq 2002: 30). By not considering whom the clown plays *with* or *for*, Kendrick loses

an important focus of Gaulier's classroom. Peacock (2009) also prioritises the individual clown performer and the communication of self as a function of clowning, although she is talking only about a more loosely defined 'contemporary clown', part influenced by Angela De Castro. Perhaps this comes from focusing too closely on the actions of the clown performer, and neglecting the context in which we find the clown - on some kind of stage in front of spectators.⁶³ I consider play to be created between performers and spectators. Peacock, Purcell Gates and Kendrick's shared focus on the individual nature of the clown highlights the notion that the clown is understood not as a character but as a way of being or reacting on stage. Perhaps relevant here is Cormac Power's view of 'theatre's potential to stage presence in a play of appearance and disappearance' (Power 2008: 201). Seeking depth in the clichéd phrase 'the magic of theatre', Power compares the creation and disruption of fictional worlds to a magic act, where despite the impossibility of the realities actually being changed a 'complex relationship between disclosure and concealment' takes place, and realities are manipulated to the enjoyment of the audience (Power 2008: 204). 'There is willing imaginative collusion involved in watching the conjuring act, and in theatre this collusion forms the ground on which presence is manipulated on the stage' (Power 2008: 205). As will be seen in the following chapters, although clown seems to seek direct contact and shared literal presence with the audience, clowns can also use a variety of skills to present layered realities of character and ineptitude, all for the aim of laughter, and 'collusion', or complicity, is a key part of making these realities play together.

If collusion is necessary to play, complicit play cannot occur with just one player, but occurs between two or more individuals. As well as the audience, students must play with the other performers, who may be other students, or the teacher. Jarmuz describes a moment when he 'started to discover something in clown'. When tired and dozy, he tried to listen to Gaulier's feedback, and people started to laugh at the exchange between him and the teacher.

I started playing games with it, you know [...] he seized the game immediately, so he knew I wasn't being rude to him, or anything like that, he knew I was playing a game. So, I'm going like this,

⁶³ Further discussion of the clown 'self' can be found in Chapter 5.

[demonstrates sleepy face] and he goes “I’m speaking to you, I’m speaking to you”. So I ignore him for a bit, and then he goes “you, you!” so I slowly turn back towards him, which took it back to square one. And we just played like that for twenty-five minutes! (Jarmuz 2013).

Jarmuz describes a successful moment in the clown workshop when he played games with Gaulier, that entertained classmates for a long period of time. The game he describes relies on the interaction of the two partners, the bossy teacher trying to get the attention and the inattentive student. Interestingly, Jarmuz also describes feeling non-complicit, even disruptive at the same moment:

...I was also in a mood where I didn’t want to do anything to please him. ’cause I’m too much of a people pleaser, I want to please the audience or something. And I was really selfish, I was like “fuck off everyone. I want to do it for me, I want to have fun for me, not for you!” (Jarmuz 2013).

This suggests a tension between playing with and against Gaulier, similar to that created in the ball game of *Le Jeu*. He works with Gaulier as his partner, but maintains a sense of opposition. This suggests a rejection of ludus and the social expectations of clown, disrupting the rules of clowning. This calls to mind Carse’s infinite games, playing with the boundaries or rules of the finite game of clown performance. However, despite his rebellion, he still defines the moment as successful within the ‘rules’ of clowning, and is proud to have created something that made the audience laugh for 25 minutes, although the impulse behind his actions was to *not* please them. His sense of defiance tested but reinstated the expectations of his role as clown, and thus found playfulness within the finite game.

As well as training on an individual level, the requirement to play together means that the time spent at the École Philippe Gaulier is an opportunity to find like-minded performers with whom students can collaborate after leaving the school. Fairbairn remembers the same process happening at the Lecoq school:

there was the whole *autocours* system where you devised work with other people. And so you learned about how relationships can very quickly deteriorate [and] about taking position within a group. What your strong points were, what your weak points were, in devising work

[...] I think it's very hard to find people that you can really work with, productively and easily (Fairbairn 2012).

In the proposed scenes and improvisations, students try to play with a number of different partners, and are judged on their ability to play complicitly. In a blog post written while working with less experienced performers, who met at Gaulier's school, Basauri writes of his own experience with playing as a company:

I realize that with Spymonkey there is so much work already done. We have been working together for so many years that for us the easy thing is to play together and come with things to do. If someone comes with an idea we all go and play with it for a very long time and we make [it] funny.

It is part of what it is to be a clown company (Basauri 20th July 2012).

Basauri's post, which is partly a response to ideas in my MPhil thesis, refers to the shared approach to play, the familiarity and practiced skill of playing together as a company.⁶⁴ This account of the rehearsal process emphasises the idea of complicit play, the individuals that make up Spymonkey quickly become complicit in each other's propositions for play, and they are able to immediately accept or try ideas. In the context of this blog, Basauri's reflection suggests that clowns who have not played together for as long still have 'work' to do in discovering play relationships. While it may be difficult to find complicity with fellow students, it is possible to find (or develop) play relationships that are productive, or even, as Fairbairn and Basauri both suggest, 'easy'. Familiarity or even comfort can emerge from complicit play.

Inviting the Audience to Play

The clown's primary complicit relationship in performance is with the spectators. Throughout Gaulier's school, complicity with the audience is foregrounded as an essential part of play. Kendrick includes a short interview with Gaulier as an appendix to her thesis, in which she asked him directly about the ludus, or rules, present in 'classic theatre' compared to clown. He answers:

⁶⁴ Basauri writes, flatteringly, 'I have been reading a very interesting essay that a girl called Lucy Amsden [wrote, ...] because I am directing a show these words really help me or inspired me to talk to the actors I'm working with. It is so difficult' (Basauri 20th July 2012).

some people in the classic theatre they say ah we can play, there is nobody in the theatre and with the clown they say ah we can play because the spectators are in the house and we can change the rules. But [...] always we play for spectators. Either we play directly or we play pretend there is no spectator (Kendrick 2011: 255).

While, in Gaulier's opinion, some theatre practitioners would only play when they were not being observed, for him it is the presence of an audience that allows and enables play. Even when Gaulier's actors play in a text with a fourth wall, this imaginary divide is a playful pretense. The actors 'play pretend' that nobody is watching, always aware that the spectators is watching, and the spectators collude in this game. The spectator is part of the game:

In the theatre, before the curtain rises, there is already an atmosphere of 'pleasure in playing'. The audience and the actors are getting ready. What are we going to play this evening? (Gaulier 2007: 211).

Gaulier imagines the audience to be looking forward to playing along with the game they are presented with, ready to be complicit. When placed together, these two quotes suggest that the audience arrive prepared to play on whatever level is offered by the performers, even if this were to be playing the part of invisible observers.

The game that 'there is no spectator' is not common in clown compared to the more 'classic theatre' genres that Gaulier teaches (Melodrama, Shakespeare-Tchekhov [sic], Tragedy). Clowns play directly with the audience, and directly invite spectators to be complicit in the developing games. This directness of communication and apparent simplicity of complicit play makes attractive an approach that examines the cognitive processes behind complicit play. A model of clowning was used, in the context of infant development, by psychologist Vasudevi Reddy (Reddy 2001). Reddy observes 'infant clowning' in children under twelve months, behaviour he defines as 'deliberately repeating actions in order to re-elicite previously obtained laughter' (Reddy 2001: 217). Reddy compares this behaviour to what he calls 'adult clowning', and though he doesn't describe his sources from performance studies (referring generally to Bergson 1913, Hayworth 1928 and Greig 1923), his assessment of this fundamental basis of clowning is astute. In the clowning of adult performers and infants, 'the humour creator needs both to understand the significance of

responses and to have a desire to maintain them' (Reddy 2001: 253). This means that the clowning observed in infants is contextual and social, rather than textual - it relies on communication, observation and response, rather than material generated by the individual. This interpretation could be applied back to the clowning of trained adults, who enact the same behaviour in a more formal context. Furthermore this is an emotional exchange, 'the play with others reactions is the emotional key to such engagements' (Reddy 2001: 254). By looking at the child's clowning behaviour, Reddy is considering the psychology of deliberate eliciting (and re-eliciting) of laughter, and perceiving laughter, and laughter-making as a social exchange. Humour theorist Bergson understands humour to be a temporarily unemotional exchange - in his classic example, a spectator can laugh at a person falling over because she is not worried about how the faller feels (Bergson 1999: 13-14, originally published 1911). Bergson's view, that the emotions and 'intelligence' can be separated, is unsupported by research in the intervening century, that show complex connections between emotion and understanding in the production of laughter.⁶⁵

Murray and Keefe are also drawn to the cognitive aspects of play in their book, and draw connections between play, empathy and mimesis. Actions of the body, they explain, are always mimetic, because 'the human agent can only do what the body is capable of whatever the farthest reaches of such capability are' (Murray and Keefe 2007: 39). Mimetic actions are transformed by the imagination of the spectators, but the fact actions are mimetic is also the cause of empathy - the spectators recognise movements by their similarity to everyday bodily experiences of their own. This is how spectators make sense of dramatic action - 'feeling' the pain of a character by mapping it on to their own bodily experience of pain. Murray and Keefe apply the same notion to 'popular physical entertainments' including circus performance. As we recognise the make-believe pain of the tragedian, so we recognise the play and skill in manipulation of body and objects by mapping it onto our everyday movement, admiring the physical ability that is beyond our own, and finding 'a strange form of empathy [...a] shared somatic pleasure' (Murray and Keefe 2007: 51). This considers the

⁶⁵ See Martin 2007 for a broad overview of psychological, psychobiological, developmental and evolutionary theories of laughter.

movements of play in juggling or acrobatics to be similarly mirrored in spectators.

More recently, the exploration of the implications of neuroscientific findings for theatre performance have been explored by Bruce McConachie and Rick Kemp. McConachie considers the psychophysical experiences of actors and spectators in theatre. He points to an accepted understanding of the 'strange form of empathy' described by Murray and Keefe, investigated by Paula M Neidenthal and colleagues, who concluded from brain monitoring that 'individuals embody other people's emotional behaviour' (McConachie 2008: 66). According to these findings, spectators do not only admire the skill of the tragedian or circus performer, they simulate the performer's apparent emotions in their own body, and their thoughts and actions are affected by this emotional state. For McConachie, it is important that this works whether the emotion is real or feigned, 'the facial, postural and vocal expression of anger, or any other emotion, whether in earnest or in a game of pretend, is catching' (McConachie 2008: 67). This is complicit play on a neuronal level - the audience are asked not only to join the game of the players, but also to embody the emotional states enacted through empathy. This form of empathetic mirroring is not exclusive to actors using Gaulier's complicit play, but would function in the same way whatever approach was used to feign emotion. Though the emotions on stage are acted, the spectators' emotional states are physically altered.⁶⁶

Kemp trained as a performer with Gaulier and Pagneux in the 1980s. He applies some key findings from the field of neuroscience to the models of actor training espoused by Stanislavski, Chekhov, Grotowski and Lecoq. A major part of Kemp's exploration seeks connections between the physical body and the emotions. Kemp considers Lecoq to have been insightful and prescient, his training predating neuroscientific findings that physical experience is the foundation for

⁶⁶ Tim Etchells prioritized the real-world effects of play in his theatre company Forced Entertainment. The company explores 'flickering between real time and play time' by pausing games as a way of 'measuring how far things had gone, how much the world had changed because of the game' (Etchells 1999: 58). This need to pause in play suggests a way of playing that is trance-like, totally absorbing the performers and rendering them unaware of the audience while the game exists. Etchells uses the word 'complicit' to describe the audience's relationship to Forced Entertainment's play, insisting that by witnessing a private, invested action take place, 'the complicity of performers with their task' (1999: 49), which leads to an audience being complicit in the risks they see. While this audience are 'complicit' in the 'play' they watch, the performers do not seem to be engaged in 'complicit play' with the audience.

the conceptual metaphors on which we base language. More closely connected to the experience of empathy described by McConachie and Murray, Kemp illustrates that the mind/brain does not have separate pathways for real experience and imagination:

the imagination's response to fiction [...] uses a very similar pathway in the brain to perceptual responses to external stimuli. Imagined responses are to some extent the actual experience of what fictional characters do (Kemp 2012: 143).

Kemp argues that feelings can be aroused by representations of feelings, even when the spectator knows they are watching fiction. However, he points out that this does not also mean that fictional actions compel spectators to physically move, because awareness of performance as fiction, or play, prevents this.

Murray's later interpretation of Gaulier's play moves away from the connection to games. Instead, he sees in the work of Gaulier, Lecoq and Pagneux, 'play is an embodied and emotional disposition' which is 'psycho-physical' (Murray 2010a: 244). Psychosociologist Luc Ciompi and neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp share this perception of play. In their article examining the relationship between emotion and cognition, Ciompi and Panksepp include play as one of six basic emotional systems, and consider how this emotion can have an effect on cognition.⁶⁷ For their study, emotions are defined as 'large-scale energetic states of brain and body' (Ciompi and Panksepp 2005: 23), and cognition is based in perception and information about the external world. They suggest that play is connected to increased social perception and associative thinking. Elsewhere, Panksepp writes that the emotional system of play corresponds to the emotional 'urge to exhibit rigorous social interaction' (Panksepp 1998: 50). This interpretation chimes with Murray's view of play as a disposition. The emotional state of play leads to attention to others, and to flexible thought patterns, which would allow for creative thinking among playful students or actors. If play is an emotion, and if the process of empathy means that emotions can be contagious through empathy, then by exhibiting play, actors can incite playfulness in audiences. This suggests the scientific possibility of complicit play,

⁶⁷ The other emotions identified by Ciompi and Paksepp are fear, rage, panic, care, and seeking See McConachie (2008: 94).

where the emotions of the actors, or students, and audiences, are engaged in play together.

It could be useful to consider play as the actor's emotion, potentially contagious to the spectators. This would mean that perceiving play in an actor would cause a spectator to unconsciously mirror the same brain and body systems. The spectator engages in creative play, and also participates in the emotion of play, which gives him or her pleasure, *plaisir du jeu* or *s'amuser*. As Gaulier emphasises play as the central behaviour or disposition for acting, then by performing playfully, students are inviting complicity with the audience at an emotional level, which would impact on the creative, imaginative perceptions of the spectators. This is more playfully described by Gaulier's words, 'The game and the imagination are thick as thieves' (Gaulier 2007: 196).

Gaulier asks students to have fun pretending they are feeling emotions:

The tears of real pain are worthless in the theatre. It demands good, big tears flowing in streams, tears which impress them up in the balcony (Gaulier 2007: 213).

According to Gaulier, playful display of pain is good for the theatre, but not the emotion of real pain. What the audience may imagine to be grief of a bereaved character is visible because of play with the signs of grief, and the playful emotions this generates in spectators. The emotion of grief is simulated by the performer's 'good, big tears', but according to McConachie, something similar to real grief may be felt empathetically by the spectators in response to the fictional emotion (McConachie 2008: 67). At the same time, however, according to Ciompi and Panksepp, the emotion of play is felt by the performer, and by the spectator who accepts the invitation to complicit play. The spectator also experiences a playful exploration of a performed emotion, and can be 'impressed' by this game of tears, without having to experience 'the tears of real pain'. Perhaps it is only the emotion of play that is felt by the spectator, who engages not with real grief but the imagined (playful) grief.

If play is seen as emotion, actors would need to feel and exhibit the pleasure of real emotional play in order to create the mutual pleasurable experience for which Gaulier strives. However, this does cause difficulty for students who have

to find ways to experience play on stage, whatever their emotional experiences offstage. It comes back to Murray's idea of play as a 'disposition'. The students who featured the most in the end-of-term Clown Show (December, 2013) brought with them to the stage a sense of reliability, as a spectator I felt that I would laugh when they entered. Their classmates, in the bar after the show, gave the impression that these individuals had had the same effect throughout the course - they seemed to bring the same play and similar games with confidence each time they reached the stage. Particularly during the difficult workshop, experiences of flop (which will be explored in the following chapter) cause a variety of emotional responses, not all of which are conducive to play.

McCrystal describes the school as fitting perfectly with his own attitude to theatre, and explains that Gaulier was the first teacher to encourage his own tendency to 'show off'. When I asked McCrystal if there was anything he struggled with in the Clown course, he answered, 'No, it was right up my street, I felt I'd arrived, home where I belonged' (2013b). Not all students experience McCrystal's ease with the techniques of play. It could be seen as a shortcoming of the school if the performance and teaching style demands an already existing, 'authentic' emotional disposition. Despite Gaulier's emphasis on fakery and pleasure of lying, the disposition to find lying pleasurable has to be real. Individuals who could not 'find' this disposition would remain unable to play in the way prescribed. On the second day of the Clown course, in my journal, I considered the difficulty of playing with and for strangers, compared to the ease and fun of playing to make my partner laugh. Perhaps feeling homesick and nervous, I decided that private play, laughter and pleasure meant more to me than the performance skills that seemed to seek this exchange with strangers.

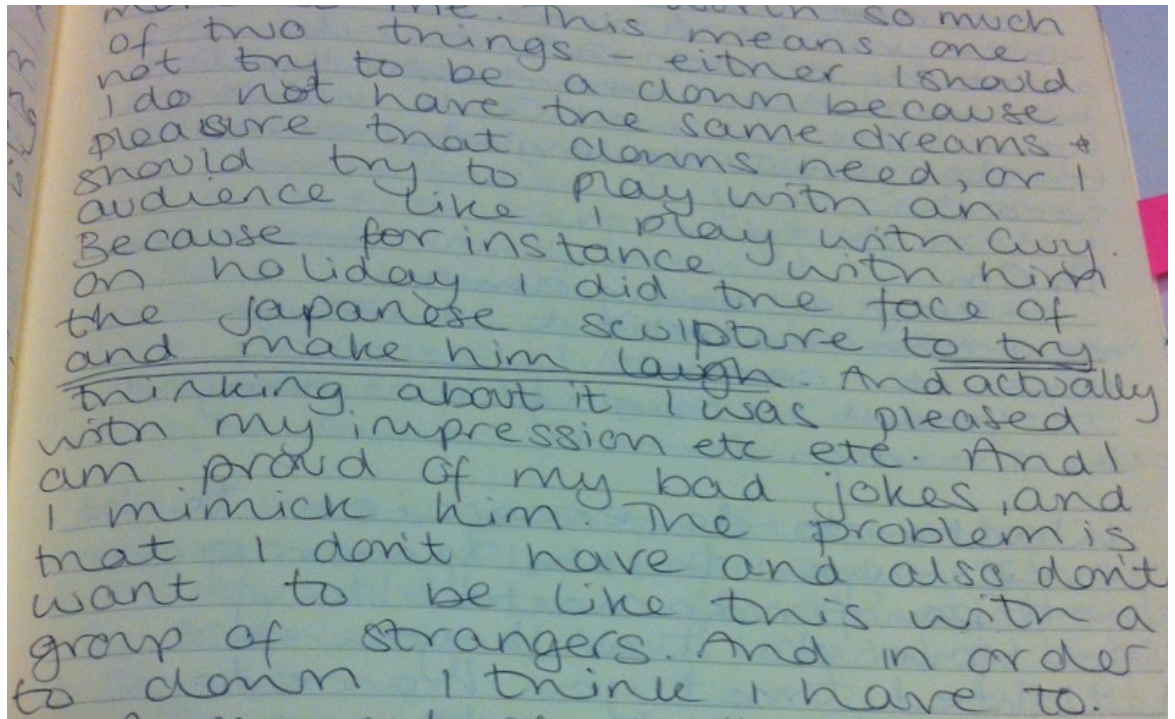


Figure 4: A page of my journal (2009: 9)

At the time I considered it a possibility that I had an inherent dispositional barrier to becoming a clown, ‘I should not try to be a clown because I do not have the same [...] pleasure that clowns need’. However, at the same time I identify that in a different, personal sphere of my life, I do get pleasure from making people laugh. I could say that I experienced a barrier to the emotional openness that complicit play demands, and was afraid to share my emotional play with the ‘strangers’ (some of whom were to become friends).

Interviewees who had been at the school recently described similar emotional processes. Jarmuz describes feeling a related difficulty when arriving back at the school after a break between courses and finding that his classmates had learnt a lot in his absence.⁶⁸ As a result, he became defensive, ‘I wouldn’t show myself, I didn’t have fun, I wouldn’t play’ (2013). Jarmuz describes this as an obstacle to being able to perform at all, and Gaulier’s parting feedback, ‘if you keep on like this you will not succeed’, stuck with him as relevant and true. The emotional block of feeling left behind by his classmates, and defensive about his own abilities prevented Jarmuz from performing, and from seeking complicit play at the time. Gibbons also described a similar block. In an interview halfway through her own time with Gaulier, during a very tiring Bouffon workshop,

⁶⁸ Jarmuz took *Le Jeu* in October 2009, Characters in Spring 2010, and the remainder of the courses between 2011 and 2013.

Gibbons offered thoughts on a personal reconciliation that she was yet to resolve:

where I could go and have fun on the stage in clown is, ... it's like a part of myself that's a little, almost, kind of, maybe I haven't recognized how to, to be comfortable, with that place (Gibbons 2012).

As indicated by the number of qualifiers used, Gibbons found it difficult to express this personal response to the workshop. It sounds as though she was having difficulty at the time with 'finding' the real emotion of play when on stage, but also that it may require personal development or change for her to comfortably inhabit the emotion of play. Both Jarmuz and Gibbons suggest that time, and a real emotional or dispositional change, would be the only way of changing this problem. Perhaps the placing of the Clown course after several other courses reflects this requirement for emotional disposition - if students have been learning to play, starting with *Le Jeu* and then in different genres, they will be most fully prepared for this most communicative, complicit and emotionally-dependent play of clowning.

Students' accounts of the workshop (and of clown play according to the principles of the school) invoke some personal connection of disposition, of excitement and willingness to complicit play. This ineffable quality of play as emotion complements but also hides the real connections of communication with other players that make up the relationship of complicit play between the clown and her audience. The social (and psycho-biological) reality of clowning is one of collusion; where performers invite spectators to engage willingly in ambiguous processes that generate the emotion of play, creating responses of imagination and laughter.

Conclusion

Play takes multiple and ambiguous roles at the school. While students may seek more straightforward explanations of what and how they are supposed to play, they are (playfully) denied this. As a result, students play in several ways at once, which detaches them from the rules and prevents rigidity. Control of play is shared between student performers, spectators and the teacher. This sharing

means the play is held at a distance from the student, who does not have a close identification with what they do. I have called this complicit play, play shared between different strategies and different players. This distance is not detachment, rather, it is a playful distance that mystifies the process of learning to play and replay as a professional clown. Perhaps, in fact, this play cannot be taught, or even deliberately learnt, but the students must have, or develop, a real emotional disposition that enables them to relate to what they do with the engaged distance of complicit play.

In writing on Gaulier, the rhetoric of play as imagination remains pervasive. However, at the school, play is rarely far from flop, which brings back into view those rhetorics that give less agency to the player - the play of competition, of being played with or expected to play. In the following chapter, I will examine my own experiences in the Clown course, where I found that the flop is a primary tool used to channel the audience's playful collusion in theatre into the direct communication of this emotion, laughter.

Chapter 4. Failure and the Flop

‘Thank you, Monsieur Flop, for your help. Now, I save the show’ (2009)

Writers on clowning have used the word ‘failure’ to explore Lecoq-based pedagogy and a wider dramaturgy of clowning, often in specific reference to Gaulier (Davison 2013: 198-199; Purcell Gates 2011b: 145; Purcell Gates 2011a: 232-233). However, this chapter will use Gaulier’s more elusive terminology to discuss instead ‘the flop’. The clown flop can be a joke (or a whole show) at which nobody laughs, it can be an instruction misunderstood, an attempt at a task gone wrong; but is also a tool for eliciting laughter, the basis of clown acts and of the relationship between a clown and audience. The experience of flopping is central to the clown workshop, and is the most prominent emotional experience for many clown students. An embodied understanding of the flop is necessary for the development of a relationship with spectators and the discovery of a ridiculous body, because it is the counter to the clown’s intention, to make the audience laugh. The dramaturgical structure created using flops is significant to an analysis of the clown performances made by Gaulier’s students and so helps to define the genre.

I open the chapter with a survey of the contemporary discussion of failure in performance outwith clowning, considering the differences between failure as a comment on the pitfalls of representation and as a comic strategy. I consider Beckett’s use of clown images as metaphor, but draw a distinction between clown pieces and works that use clown signifiers to comment on failure. By contrast, I offer discussion of comic dramaturgies, which also use repetition and disruption, but on a more temporary and flexible basis. I then examine the flop as discussed by clown practitioners, and compare what they describe to the structures of comic dramaturgy. Failure and the flop are not totally separable, but I explore notions of ‘badness’ discussed by Gaulier students to discover differing views on the seriousness or finality of flops experienced in the classroom. Understanding clown failure as temporary and flexible - or to consider instead the comic flop - enables me to consider the clown techniques or skills that use failure in order to make the audience laugh. In this chapter I examine how an understanding of the flop may inform theoretical analysis of

clown pedagogy and performance. I examine the potential for failure to be transformed into comedy through the student's reaction, and through complicity with the audience. This leads me to argue that Gaulier encourages and engineers the conditions in which students will flop, in order that students see their comic value and learn to flop deliberately and consciously, to generate laughter. I problematise the interpretation of Gaulier's use of flop as 'via negativa', arguing that flops are used as fertile ground for comedy, and thus should be returned to by aspiring clowns, rather than simply dismissed as ineffective strategies for clowning.

The chapter moves on to comparing clown flops with wider theories of humour, in which apparent failure resurfaces in the theories of Peter Marteinson (2006; 2010). I further explore ambiguity between comic failure and success with a philosophical discussion of laughter, and death as the ultimate failure of life. Finally, I look to examples from performances by Gaulier alumni to examine the uses of flop and apparent failure. Flop in its live form - where an audience does not laugh, but the clown manages to make them laugh by acknowledging the fact - does not appear to be highly valued by those making clown productions. Instead, repeated and crafted flops in narrative or representation are sought. This implies that the experience of flopping at the school enables students to learn to craft flops for performance.

Failure in Contemporary Theatre practice

The attention paid to the use of failure at Gaulier's school is part of an emerging trend in the contemporary cultural context of the late 20th century. Recently emerging literature in theatre studies examines the potential artistic uses of failure, and the different political motivations that invoke the concept. Introducing a special issue of *Performance Research* (2012), editors Róisín O'Gorman and Margaret Werry summarize a current 'modishness' of the subject of failure in the established and mainstream press as well as in arts scholarship. They site this interest in relation to contemporary socio-cultural events and political intentions of scholars, who are understood as attempting to

recuperate failure, even champion it as a site of resistance. For them, failure's promise lies in its capacity to unravel the certainties of knowledge, competence, representation, normativity and authority.

Failure, they argue, is the inevitable and critical counterpoint to modernity's empty promises of progress and betterment. And this is failure's moment. From the recent catastrophes of the global economy, to the impending collapse of our eco-system, to the long, slow entropy of the political left, we live mired in failure (O'Gorman and Werry 2012: 1).

The journal issue focuses on the use of failure in performance. The existence of this special edition serves to highlight the current trend in exploring failure in theoretical and performative ways. O'Gorman and Werry explain the emergence of the postmodern trends in the uses of failure, and link them to a concern in late twentieth-century avant-garde performance, which used an inherent failure of performance to be fixed, 'deliberately slipping the yoke of commoditization by failing to achieve permanence, failing to offer the bankable rewards of virtuosity or emotional satisfaction' (O'Gorman and Werry 2012: 2). Failure is used for its radical potential to resist mainstream values. Gaulier does not engage with theoretical discourse on failure, or experimental performance trends, but his ideas correlate in some ways with the themes explored by the practitioners with whom he shares a socio-cultural moment.

In theatre and performance, there have been experiments with the use of comic techniques to highlight failure of representation. Donald McManus examines Samuel Beckett's use of character pairs as enabling comparison to clown acts, and suggests that Beckett's work has a significant role in the cultural visibility of clowns at the time. However, McManus's chapter gives several examples from Beckett's texts in which the pieces do not function as clown texts, but as dramatic ones that use the expectations of clown to draw different perspectives on theatricality. McManus describes *Film* (1964), in which Beckett cast comic star Buster Keaton. According to McManus, Keaton did not understand the ideas behind Beckett's direction, but followed it nonetheless.⁶⁹

the result of his [Keaton's] clown-logical approach to action (to carry it through whether it made sense to him or not) was that Keaton's humanity shone through. He looks more alive because of the very pointlessness of his action. Beckett understood this aspect of clown and simply utilised Keaton's ability without the gags (McManus 2003: 88).

⁶⁹ Keaton does not share this failure to understand the directions with the spectator via the camera, and so the scene cannot be considered to use the flop.

In this passage, McManus suggests that Keaton's skill as a clown was simply to follow pointless instructions. McManus dismisses Keaton's ability to perform gags as less significant for performance than his 'humanity' and willingness to perform the actions of the film carefully and meticulously. Further, Keaton's face is hidden until the end of the film, and the character goes to great pains not to be seen - in the street he covers his face to hide from people, and walks along the wall, he moves the cat and dog out of the room, and places covers over other potential spectators; a bird in a cage and goldfish in a bowl, the window and mirror and even a drawing of a person on the wall. In *Film*, which McManus takes as an example of Beckett using 'clown *sans* gags', the character actively denies a relationship to audiences of any kind. In this film, Beckett has employed a famous comic performer, hidden his face and according to McManus, removed the gags. Despite this, McManus asserts that Beckett is using clown 'logic' and tropes:

Beckett worked clown theory into his dramaturgy and expressed it through the text in such a way that even a non-clown performer will use clown logic when carrying out the specified words and action (McManus 2003: 89).

McManus suggests that a non-clown performer could follow Beckett's precise instructions to produce something that resembles clown performance. The removal of Keaton's comic skill from his performance seems to echo this idea that Beckett's writing creates clown scenes without clown performers to suggest that for McManus, Beckett's strength is in creating performance that resembles and invokes tropes of clown. He describes another of Beckett's plays, *Act Without Words 1*, in which a silent performer is trapped on the stage by an unseen, offstage force. The performer physically tries to escape and is pushed back in, but is taunted by props appearing and disappearing from above, until he rebels by choosing not to interact with them. McManus sees this play as reversing the tradition of a vaudeville cane which would pull performers offstage if they were not pleasing the audience (not unlike Gaulier's drum). He maintains that the play is:

an inversion of the clown conditions [...] Rather than a plucky and determined comedian who tries to avoid the cane, while simultaneously winning the love of the audience through direct

appeal, the mime-clown in *Act Without Words 1* is violently forced to remain onstage by the off-stage presence (McManus 2003: 83).

This understanding of the play as an ‘inversion of clown conditions’ demonstrates that this is not a clown piece, but one that calls to mind the traditions of clowning, deliberately upsetting them in order to consider the mechanics of control and rebellion. Beckett uses the audience’s expectations of clown performance, but not to satisfy the comic potential of the scenarios. He does this by offering images associated with clowns and comic performers of the twentieth century, but removing direct appeal to the audience. While Beckett’s work draws on images, tropes and even ‘logic’ of clowning, it does not pursue the same intentions as Gaulier’s clowns, and it does not aim to ‘be’ clown, merely to mimic it, assume its theatricality, and even to undermine its intentions in order to comment on the failures of representation in theatre. A parallel is noted by Stoddart, who acknowledges the use of circus imagery in *Theatre of the Absurd*, but argues that the potential use of circus skills in the avant-garde theatre does not align the intentions of the two practices:

[W]hile the circus clown [...] and his frantic, nonsensical behaviour may be held within absurdist theatre as emblematic of a modern condition of existence, the circus itself has never been informed by or required any such philosophical framework in order to explain the enjoyment of absurd behaviour (Stoddart 2000: 92).

The use of clown imagery to depict failure is an approach that contrasts with comic structures, where failure and flops are successfully used to make people laugh. In these two dramaturgies, comedy and failure function in different ways, despite the fact that similarities can be found in the material used and even techniques employed. Similarly, a contemporary concern with failure is not necessarily informing, or informed by, clown flop, despite the two sharing similarities in material, inversions of structure, or even performers.

Describing the contemporary theatre of Forced Entertainment, director Tim Etchells considers similar themes and approaches, where failure emerges as part of a critique of dramatic representation. Forced Entertainment, along with Goat Island and Elevator Repair Service, are examined by Sara Jane Bailes for the ways in which they use failure in an experimental performance setting. The work of the three companies, she tells us, is ‘dominated by displays of the

protagonist-performers' inability to achieve, finish or complete the most fundamental task' of actors, to create illusion (Bailes 2011: 12). Bailes focuses on Forced Entertainment's use of 'amateurism' as a strategy for creating failure, which she considers interesting because 'the amateur actor offers a fine example of someone doing something badly while trying to do it well' (Bailes 2011: 93). Forced Entertainment strategically performs amateurism, which Bailes tells us radically disrupts the apparatus and conventions of theatre and the separations between spectator and performer. Deliberately falling short of an industry standard, they call into question how and why the standard exists. Like the amateur actor, a clown may also appear to 'do something badly while trying to do it well'. In clown training, this may happen for real, and an audience may laugh at a bad attempt to complete an exercise, as will be explored below. The clown does not radically critique the conventions of theatre, as behind her apparent failure is humorous intention.

Halberstam (2011) offers a more ambivalent use of failure in comic and popular texts, including the films *Chicken Run*, *Finding Nemo*, and *Dude, Where's My Car?* Using what he calls 'the "silly" archive' in order to get lost among 'the unplanned, the unexpected, the improvised, and the surprising' (2011: 15-16), Halberstam explores 'low theory and counterknowledge in the realm of popular culture and in relation to queer lives, gender and sexuality' (2011: 19). In his engaging and funny readings of these texts, failure is presented as a creative, and potentially radical alternative to the adherence to normative values. An ambivalence is ignored by Halberstam's argument however, in which the film characters find failure to be generative and freeing, but in which the audience are invited to laugh at the character's failure. This means that the texts retain the ability to function as instructive, social pedagogy.

Failure and comedy in narrative

A comic dramaturgy exists which relies on failures to create comedy, but which does not call for a radical failure of theatre as described above. A different late 20th century genre, modern farce, can be seen to use failure in its dramaturgy despite being a relatively conservative genre. In *Theatre, Body, Pleasure* (2006), Simon Shepherd discusses a routine in the second act of Alan Ayckbourn's 1994 *Absurd Person Singular* (1977). Shepherd isolates an example in which a

character named Eva spends the whole act looking for ways to end her life, while nobody notices due to a chaotic scene unfolding around her. Shepherd explains that each new moment of failed suicide is, 'a surprise; but not unexpected. Eva's previous attempts had also failed. This failure is becoming a predictable pattern, a set of variations on a theme. It is both surprising and regular' (Shepherd 2006: 77). We could consider this to be a prototype dramaturgical structure for comic scenes: 'regular and surprising variations on a theme', or 'expected surprises'. While the theme of failed attempts at suicide is specific to this play, perhaps the comic dramaturgy of 'regular and surprising variations on failure' could be seen in other comic genres.

Film historian Robert Knopf provides a persuasive structural analysis of the films of Keaton, who is for many theorists the exemplar clown or physical comedian in early cinema. Knopf describes a comedy or 'gag' structure that is different to, although it works alongside, Aristotelian linear narrative.

Narrative structure accumulates horizontally, with one sequence building upon the next. Gags accumulate vertically - one on top of the other - each "step" in a gag repeating a step, culminating in a climactic gag that usually consists of a variation on its predecessors (Knopf 1999: 12).

These steps are variations on a theme, that are repetitive and increasing, and he follows Keaton's own vocabulary from the vaudeville tradition, referring to the climactic gag as a 'topper'. Knopf's 'gags' work in a similar way to Shepherd's 'regular and surprising variations' - they share a theme, but repeat and build on it through variation. Film theorist Gerald Mast suggests the existence of 'eight comic film plots' (Mast 1979: 4). As these plots are to be found in narrative, Mast explains that all but one are also to be found in comic drama and literature. The plot identified as unique to film comedy, is 'described with a musical term - "riffing"' (1979: 7). Mast's 'riffing' involves a series of moments that are related by a central theme or idea. He suggests that the pace and physicality of comic film allows for this unique structure, comparable to structures used in dance and music. Though Mast does not consider live comedy, there is no reason why this comic plot could not be used as a structure for clown performance. The concept of a riff structure is comparable to the gag structure described by Knopf, and to the 'regular and surprising variations on a theme'

described by Shepherd. While it can be used to structure written or recorded comedy, riffing could also be a highly appropriate description for a clown responding to an audience's laughter, a scene based on a riff structure could leave space for laughs and flops to be acknowledged by the clown. Bailes understands gag themes to be failures of narrative, and 'the gag and stunt sequences in Keaton's films often exert a disruptive force on the narrative's causal line' (Knopf 1999: 84). While the failures of *Absurd Person Singular* are part of a comic narrative, gags can also be disruptive of narrative, or even demonstrate failure in the representation of fictional characters. However in each of the comic genres described, gags are expected surprises.

Bailes understands slapstick comedy to consist of moments of failure at tasks or actions:

The gag is widely recognized as the moment in which all that is seemingly coherent and correct about a given world appears to go horribly wrong... the disruption it generates suggests alternative ways of thinking through the unlikely coupling of continuity and uncertainty (Bailes 2011: 39).

Bailes understands slapstick gags to be incorporated but not assimilated into narrative, following Tom Gunning by understanding the two structures as 'contrapuntal'. Bailes uses this musical term to indicate two threads through slapstick films, which operate separately, and with different rhythms, to build a film structure in which comedy disrupts but also builds narrative:

producing formal resistance to the cohesive world that narrative seeks to establish. The gag is, however, a constituent of that narrative, an eradicable intervention within its logic, running through and alongside it (Bailes 2011: 45).

For Bailes, Gunning and Knopf, narrative and gags coexist, to mutual advantage, and this corresponds with Shepherd's understanding of the modern farce, where gags are constituent of the plot, and lead to complications of the narrative. The narrative can flop, repeatedly, but brings itself back to the foreground, assimilating or ignoring the gag. The 2012 National Theatre production of *One Man, Two Guvnors* (October 29, 2011), had both a director, Nicolas Hytner, and a 'physical comedy director', McCrystal. The two roles could reflect the dual structure of narrative and gags, and certainly moments of comedy are found

when the performers break the narrative frame. In these moments, the process of communicating narrative appears to have failed, and the scene has gone wrong. An example much discussed online by spectators, was a scene in which the hero, Francis Henshall, played by popular TV comedian James Corden, told the audience that he was hungry. A plant in the audience offered him a sandwich from his bag. This intervention appeared to have shattered the narrative, and there followed a scene in which the actor/character wrestled with the decision between eating the offering or continuing with the play - which would only make sense if he were still hungry. This scene, which brought a lot of laughter, looks as though the performer was facing an interruption of the representative mode, because the intervention (or gag) could not be reconciled with the plot. When asked about this type of dramaturgy, McCrystal was very eloquent, giving the impression he had explained it many times before in rehearsals:

the audience will turn on a dime. If one minute, ... your character's sobbing your heart out, and the next minute you turn to the audience, and say 'I do this awfully well, don't I?' it doesn't matter. The audience will be heartbroken watching you sob, and then you'll say something like that, and they'll laugh.

[...]

And if in the next second you want to do something pathetic, in the traditional sense of the word, you can do that and they'll go with it. And the audience, you can just, pull them about, and they'll just go, and they love that. And they love to be surprised. And by keeping them surprised, you're keeping them in a position to laugh their hardest (McCrystal 2013).

For McCrystal, undercutting of the narrative frame is a valuable tool for comic scenes, and allows for this potential for 'surprise' in the audience's experience. These moments surprise the audience but not the performers; they are a tested and permanent part of the dramaturgy of the piece (McCrystal 2013; Basauri and Park 2013). Though the strategy of audience interaction cannot exactly appear in film, it resembles the disruptive gag structure as examined by Bailes. A summary of the show might include references to failure, of the plot being broken, of representation failing, but in McCrystal's pieces these devices are a functional and deliberate part of the performance event. The performers are not actually failing but performing failure, representing failure, even.

To Shepherd, the action of *Absurd Person Singular* progresses according to a particular 'logic', apparently beyond the control of the human participants. This appearance is very significant in understanding the dramaturgy of the play, as the action is created by the writer, director and performers, but appears to be uncontrollable for the characters. Here, the 'technical skill lies in the establishment of sequences or routines that have their own sense of inner logic: cause and effect, necessary unfolding, accident and repetition' (Shepherd 2006: 78). Shepherd notes that the audience of a modern farce expects this structure, which unfolds according to its own logic, seemingly out of the characters' control. This expectation of a logic that seems uncontrollable is created by, and fulfilled by, the dramaturgy of repetition and escalation, executed with skill.

In the above examples from experimental theatre, film comedy and farce, the comedy is structured on pre-written failures, which can be repeated in the same way every night, and would work just as well in recoded media as in live performance for an audience. However, at the moment described above from *One Man, Two Guvnors*, a more complicated exchange is taking place, even if we know that the offer of a sandwich was scripted. The laugh was extended by the performer's interaction with the audience. The complicit play described in the previous chapter depends on an open declaration of the intention to make audiences laugh, and acknowledgement when that intention is not fulfilled - when the act flops.

The Flop in Clown Practice and Teaching

In Gaulier's writing and classroom, the flop takes many roles: the allegorical character, 'Monsieur Flop'; performers describe shows unpopular with audiences as 'a flop'; and students wrestle with the relationship of flop and laughter as they learn to 'play with the flop'. At its most simple, the clown flop resembles failure, but it is a failure to achieve the intention of performance: the clown goes on stage and does something she thinks will be funny, but nobody laughs. This moment of failure is ripe with potential for comedy. If the clown can respond to silence, showing the audience that she knows that nobody is laughing, often, the audience will laugh. Davison succinctly offers insight into the relationship between the two terms, 'The dynamic of the accepted failure is what Gaulier calls the "flop" and explains why it is the clown's "friend"'

(Davison 2013: 198). Failures can be ‘accepted’ by clown students in a variety of ways, but only some of these transform failure into flop. The expression ‘the flop’ conjures a visual, kinetic image and describes a moment of metaphorical slippage, falling, or collapse. Though there are useful comparisons to be made between Gaulier’s *flop* and the more serious *failure*, Gaulier’s term is lighter, less final, less absolute. It has comic potential, it is onomatopoeic, has bodily connotations and it suggests movement and flexibility, the opposite of rigidity. It can be gradual or sudden. Most importantly, the clown can recover from a flop, balance on its edge, and play with it, turning it into success.

Lecoq calls flop his ‘teaching-method’ for clown classes (2006: 115). In his earlier book, he makes more use of the word ‘fail’, describing clown performance, ‘the professional clown must know how to do what he fails to do, with talent and effort’ (2006: 116). However, in his later text, he uses both ‘flop’ and ‘failure’ to describe what a clown student does:

The clown is the person who flops, who messes up his turn, and, by so doing, gives his audience a sense of superiority. Through his failure he reveals his profoundly human nature, which moves us and makes us laugh (Lecoq 2002: 156).

In this section of *The Moving Body*, Lecoq uses ‘flop’ to describe the onstage action, whether it is an over-billed but unimpressive feat or ‘the “accidental flop”, where the clown fails to do what he attempts’ (Lecoq 2002: 160) Lecoq’s uses of ‘fail’ and ‘flop’ are not interchangeable, partly because there are instances where ‘flop’ would simply be ungrammatical. For example, one example of an ‘accidental flop’ uses the words, ‘he fails to balance on a stool’ (Lecoq 2002: 160). ‘He flops to balance on a stool’ would make no sense, but to call the act itself ‘a failure’ would be confusing - after all, the clown is deliberately failing to balance, in order to amuse the audience. While both terms are useful to Lecoq, ‘flop’ is more dramaturgical and metaphorical of a physical action, and it contains the potential to create laughter, even while the audience might understand the falling off a stool to be a ‘failed’ balancing act.

In Gaulier’s book, the term ‘failure’ appears before ‘flop’; in a description of his clown show *Les Assiettes*. In the chapter entitled ‘Monsieur Marcel’, clowns are advised to find a stupid idea for their clown to follow faithfully. Gaulier

describes an ‘idiot’ who visits the café, and follows the advice of M. Marcel to ‘break a plate’, and is surprised by the outcome:

When my friend and I smashed a plate, the audience didn’t laugh. We didn’t understand why they didn’t laugh [...]. This made them laugh uproariously.

‘The audience’s timing’s all wrong’, we thought. So we broke another plate, so they could get their timing right. Another failure. More laughter at the wrong time (Gaulier 2007: 280).

In the scene described, the plate-smashing did not make the audience laugh. However, the performers transform it into something that *does* make the audience laugh: their own incomprehension of flop. The timing of the audience’s laughter transforms the failure into something else. Interestingly, Gaulier maintains his stance of incomprehension at his own initial failure by suggesting that it was the audience who failed to laugh, and got their timing ‘wrong’. In Gaulier’s view, the performer does not fail. Instead, he helps the audience with their own failures. This is key to an understanding of Gaulier’s relationship to the concept of failure; Gaulier rarely sees failure as something for which the performer should be blamed. There is also a performative tone in the text that replicates the premise of the show, meaning that the reader can laugh at the same incomprehension in the retelling.

Gaulier’s character ‘Monsieur Flop’, is constantly involved in physical, and damaging accidents with traffic, banana skins, and things landing on his head, to the amusement of his acquaintances. M. Flop is given a job in the theatre, giving performers an ‘alert if there’s a failure’ (2007: 286). Gaulier uses the passive phrase to suggest that M. Flop does not alert the performer ‘that they are failing’, but that ‘there’s a failure’, and the expression he chooses does not imply blame. ‘Flop’ suggests an engagement with failure, a recognition and transformation of failure into something artistic and amusing. It only exists in the relationship between clown and audience, because it happens when the audience don’t laugh, so it could be said that M. Flop draws the performer’s attention back to the audience, reminding the performer of the importance of complicit play. It is for this reason that Gaulier suggested that we should be thankful for the appearance of flop, as in the title quote, ‘thank you Monsieur Flop for your help. Now I save the show’ (2009: 20).

Student flops are not directly explained in *The Tormentor*, but are present in the chapter ‘Clown Exercises’, where students do not understand, are not deemed funny, think they are amusing when they are not, and also when they transform responses of silence into laughter. I will consider how students experience, interpret or understand these moments and how they might function pedagogically. I propose that in the classroom, students can flop in the following situations:

- Appearing to make a mistake or misunderstand an exercise, and in doing so, making people laugh.
- Revisiting a flop, repeating a mistake to make people laugh.
- Flopping as a way of learning what not to do - via negativa.
- Misunderstanding, not ‘getting’ the exercises.
- Doing something onstage that does not make people laugh.

In clown performance, there are further incarnations of the flop, in various situations where people laugh, or not, at one of the above situations. As in theatre and film vernacular, ‘a flop’ may also refer to a production that failed with critics or at the box office. In conversation and analysis, practitioners trained by Gaulier describe all of these incarnations of the flop.

The Flop as Discussed by Practitioners

The interview respondents and bloggers whose contributions I use in this chapter are performers, skilled in telling a good story and in making audiences laugh. In all the interview recordings, I can be heard laughing, which suggests that my respondents are enacting their skill and status as trained clowns. People writing about clowns often aim to portray a sense of humour in their account, and describing a painful experience caused by a frivolous activity is a reliable way to create comic content. Stories of flop are emotionally rich, and can be told in a way that allows the listener to imagine the lesson. While there may be other, very precise lessons going on at the school (Basauri describes learning the habit of standing up straight), the stories of flopping can be relied upon to elicit laughter and empathy, which may mean they are paid more attention than the more straightforward somatic lessons. Evidence of the value of anecdotes about the flop can be found in Gaulier’s exercise, ‘Emergency Clown Hospital’. Gaulier describes it thus:

for students who haven't made anyone laugh during their work. The student explains the problems of their clown and the many flops it's endured. Every time, there are roars of laughter from all sides (Gaulier 2007: 308).

Gaulier guarantees 'roars of laughter' from this exercise, and laughter can also be gained when, in writing or interview, a student describes their experience of flopping on the Clown course. Though I didn't do the exercise during the course, I have used this tactic to generate comic material about my research. During the course of writing my PhD, I performed at Bright Club, a public engagement event where university researchers introduce their subject in the form of stand-up comedy. In my act, I re-enacted a difficult moment from the course, a game mentioned in the previous chapter, where we stepped forward only when the audience laughed. In this moment I combined 'Emergency Clown Hospital' with the game I was describing, and played them both with the present audience. The following is a transcript from my performance:

The object of the game was to get to the front of the stage. We could only step forward if the audience liked us.
[I played this game with the comedy club audience. They laughed and cheered until I got to the front].
Well I've never been this close to the front before! When I played at the school, I had to stand with my back against the wall. Then he told me to sit down. Then he told me to pull the curtain in front of my face. Only my flippers were visible (2012).

I described failure at a game that, at the time, was genuinely painful and prompted tears, but in performance, recounting this moment provoked laughter and so was a successful moment of comedy. 'Emergency Clown Hospital' is described by Purcell Gates in her article, *Locating the Self* (2011a). Here, Purcell Gates has been exploring 'good' and 'bad' failure in the Gaulier classroom. She asserts that this exercise challenges the distinction between the two, as students were able to transform 'bad' failures into good. She describes one self-identified 'bad student', who performed this exercise successfully, 'At moments during her recounting scattered laughter broke out in the room, usually during her transition from describing her efforts into stating that they had failed' (2011b: 238). Purcell Gates situates this laughter in a revelation of how the woman really felt, and that the audience understood moments such as that above as 'signals that [students] were being their true selves' (2011b: 238). She

describes Gaulier telling this woman that her sadness at the described flops was ‘beautiful’, and that this is how she should perform. The concern with ‘self’ in the Clown course will be further explored in the following chapter. This terminology notwithstanding, in this account of the exercise, what had been a failure to make people laugh became funny in its re-telling, or re-performance. In this moment, paying attention to the flop seems to be used as an exercise in humility and a provider of comic material.

In their interview, Park and Basauri discussed the experience of going on stage in the clown classroom. Basauri described going onstage in the knowledge that his attempt would either be ‘good’ or ‘bad’, judged in a direct and clear way. Their following discussion demonstrates how this clear-cut judgement helps to provoke laughter:

- AB: I was really bad.
LA: Really?
AB: Ssh - yeah!
TP: I don’t think you were. I think you were really good, weren’t you?
AB: Clown? No.
TP: no?
AB: I was very good clown in all the other workshops.
TP: Oh ok! (*laughs*)
AB: but that one I was really bad... Except, one day.
TP: Yeah. I was very bad, except one day...
(Basauri and Park 2013).

Park challenged his very funny colleague’s claim that he was ‘really bad’ in the clown workshop, but laughed as he accepted Basauri’s explanation that he was a ‘very good clown in all the other workshops’. The inferred meaning here is that Basauri’s ‘very good clown’ was accidental, or wilfully rebellious, in the more serious workshops such as Tragedy and Melodrama, demonstrating that ‘badness’ is measured differently in the Clown course to the prior courses in the school. I imagine Basauri naughtily or unwittingly failing to deliver a monologue, and making his classmates laugh, but being unable to use the same tactics in the clown workshop. Both remember an overall experience of ‘badness’ in the clown workshop, with an exception romantically described as ‘one day’ on which they were funny. That these two were not funny in much of the workshop might be surprising given their subsequent success as clowns. However, Purcell Gates sees

the on-going experience of failure to be promoted by Gaulier's workshop structure as a deliberate strategy toward learning clown:

The dominant code in Gaulier's classroom was the distinction between success and failure, in which Gaulier deliberately structured exercises in the Clown workshop to promote failure, causing students to directly experience the perpetually-failing state of clown (Purcell Gates 2011a).

This observation is a useful one, showing that Gaulier facilitates moments where flops are likely, but I feel that understanding clowns to be in a 'perpetually-failing state' is too simple. Failure is understood as the basis of comedy according to certain theories, as will be explored below, but as Purcell Gates recognises, there are different levels on which a clown student can fail, some of which are more serious than funny. A failure to make an audience laugh, can itself, if recognised and responded to, have the effect of making an audience laugh. The recognised and addressed failure is what Gaulier calls 'playing with the flop'. A clown who perpetually flopped while attempting acts, who carefully and playfully responded to minor failures, and turned them into occasions for an audience to laugh, could be described as 'perpetually-flopping', a more useful description of Gaulier's clown approach. On the other hand, a professional clown who perpetually failed in their intention to make an audience laugh would eventually stop selling tickets. Similarly, an experience of perpetually failing in a clown classroom would be less valuable, and less enjoyable, than that of perpetually flopping.

Although failures turned to flops can make amusing and inspiring anecdotes in writing and conversation, my own experience of the workshop more closely resembled failure:

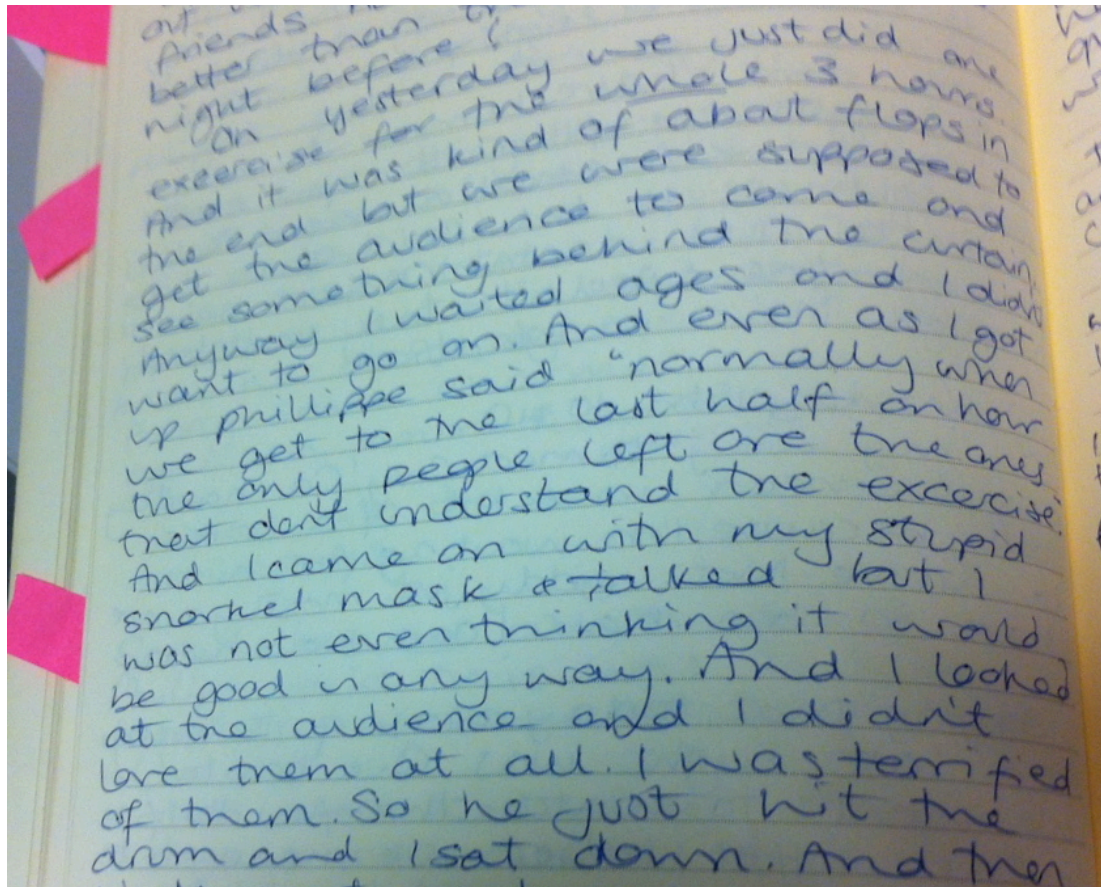


Figure 5: An experience of failure (2009: 24)

I experienced performing to non-amused classmates and teacher as painful and demoralizing, and felt that my feelings toward the audience created an impassible barrier to clowning. Feeling 'stupid' and 'terrified' of the audience, I did not make anybody laugh with my failure. This experience, and the excruciating moment that followed (where the classmate that followed me onstage pointed out to the whole class the fact I was crying) made me question my motivation and interest in being at the school, and I eventually decided to turn away from my performance aspirations, and on the following page of the journal I console myself by imagining the comparative emotional stability of a research student. This suggests that failing cannot always be turned into clown performance, and thus that perpetually-failing and perpetually-flopping are very different 'states'.

A recent Gaulier student, Mark Winstanley, shared his experiences on a daily blog, which gives a frank insight into the experience of failure that is not funny. Despite his professed understanding of the flop as a tool in the clown workshop, he describes genuine sadness about his progress at the school. After a day of attempts, he writes:

Feeling tired right now, especially tired of flopping in clown, There is no pleasure in me right now and that is the key to having fun on stage as clown [...] I'm swimming in the shit and I can't get used to it, but then maybe that's why I'm here, to get used to the shit. Just some days you need more than shit (Winstanley 15th November 2011).

However, Winstanley quickly corrects his attitude to understand these flops as generative. He goes on to say, 'Or maybe not, Don't flowers grow in shit? Roses from the manure? I got to grow' (2012 15th November 2011). He overrides his emotional response with determined language that allows the 'shit' that he feels to be a fertilizer, nourishing and improving his performance.⁷⁰ Winstanley's lack of 'pleasure' found in 'the shit' perhaps provides a clue to the difference between failure and the flop in clown - a clown is able to make mistakes, misunderstandings and errors with playful pleasure, creating an amusing flop; whereas if a clown student experiences and shares with the audience feelings of shame, guilt, displeasure or tiredness, the moment can be regarded as resembling the more concrete failure. Though students are not always able to make the transformation, a failure seems to become a flop when treated with amused disregard.

A few days later, Winstanley continues to brood on the subject:

To be bad and yet remain optimistic.
 To be bad and turn in a different direction.
 To be bad and find something new.
 Rather than to be bad and think yes, I am bad, I am terrible, I don't know why you would even want to look at me now, if I were you I would leave and ask for your money back on the way out.
 To be bad is good in this school, we are bad and by being bad we will discover something. As Philippe says, "To be bad is the secret of the school". I get that in my head but like several people I still don't want to be bad and yet here I can be, I need to embrace that and learn from my mistakes, they will surely shape me into a better performer (Winstanley 20th November 2011).

He re-performs his own failure, creating a caricature of how miserable he felt, with 'if I were you I would leave...', and this has something of the 'emergency clown hospital' to it, as the audience of his blog can laugh as they read.

⁷⁰ The image of 'roses from the manure' captures a Bakhtinian 'grotesque realism' in which the physical materiality of the body is simultaneously mocked and celebrated, including its 'vast excretions and appetites,' which compliment each other to create new birth or regeneration (1994: 21).

However, as well as creating a performance to explain the day, Winstanley is exploring the tension of the idea of failure and success, and wrestling with the notion of failure as success, or how 'to be bad' can be 'the secret of the school' when it feels so dismal. His optimistic conclusion seems to contradict the citation of Gaulier - he still looks to 'learn from' mistakes and be better afterwards, rather than to stay 'bad'. It seems that this particular student is spending a lot of time and effort on the question of the flop, and finding it paradoxical, if not impossible.

Failure and Flop as Teaching Tools

Close attention has already been paid to moments of failure and flops in Gaulier's classroom, to the extent that it seems as if the experience of failure is the dominant experience of the course. The notion of an accepted flop perhaps offers clues to Winstanley's dilemma of how to interpret the aphorism, 'to be bad is the secret of the school'. Badness, or failure, can be approached in three ways: something to be negated; something to reveal authentic humanity beyond performance; and as something to be presented as funny.

Murray and Keefe interpret Gaulier's strategy of feedback to flops as *via negativa*, which they describe as:

an approach which rejects prescription and illustration by example in favour of a search for the 'answer' through negation. Through the *via negativa* Gaulier offers no prescriptions and it is up to the student to continue proposing possibilities until the most effective receives some kind of acceptance or affirmation (Murray and Keefe 2007: 151).

According to Murray and Keefe, the experience of failure in the classroom is instructive, and students learn what not to do - they learn not to repeat their failures. This system suggests that by eliminating negated approaches, the student can find unsubscribed possibilities for performance success.

A summary of other writings on '*via negativa*' provide more details to explain it as a pedagogical process. On the subject of practitioner Jerzy Grotowski, who also used *via negativa*, James Slowiak describes the process:

the actor's psychophysical blocks are systematically eradicated through the rigours of physical and vocal training and through creative work on the role. Grotowski underlines here that this process takes many years and is not voluntary (Slowiak and Cuesta 2007: 60).

Slowiak and his co-author Jairo Cuesta refer to *via negativa* as a stripping of excess, or 'stripping away the non-essential to reach pure presence' (Slowiak and Cuesta 2007: 122). Murray and Keefe suggest that Gaulier offers a similar negation of what the student has presented, and thus a stripping of inappropriate habits or techniques learned elsewhere.

Tomaz Krpič, a cultural sociologist examining contemporary performance, succinctly explains the principle of *via negativa* as originating in negative theology. He describes it as 'the principle according to which one is well aware of what one does not want, but does not necessarily know what one really wants' (Krpič 2011: 168). Krpič's understanding of the approach correlates with Murray and Keefe's description of Gaulier's searching and exploratory tactics. Marcus Buning further explores the connection to negative theology in his textual analysis of Beckett's first play *Eleutheria*. He argues that, in performance and theology, the practice of *via negativa* ensures freedom of interpretation, 'since it is fundamentally an open-ended form of discourse that precludes closure, negativity never leads to any kind of essentialist or positivistic idea' (Buning 2000: 46). Buning discusses Wolfgang Iser's insight that speaking of something (a deity, for example) in terms of what it is *not* enables a consideration of an otherwise unreachable concept, which could never be discussed in terms of what it *is*. As such, negative theology is a mode of thinking and speaking about the ineffable. Buning's view on Beckett's writing is that it:

is neither absurdist nor nihilistic but, if anything, it belongs to that mode of meditative discourse that attempts to articulate the unsayable ("that which has no name"), however inadequate language will always turn out to be in the process of doing so (Buning 2000: 49).

This understanding of the technique resonates with Gaulier's feedback and stated intentions on the Clown workshop - he asserts on the back cover of his book that he does not impose a style but allows students to find their own style - it would make sense if this was done by negating rather than by asserting 'essentialist' ideas of what clown performance is. However, understanding

Gaulier's approach to be that of 'via negativa' rather simplifies the exchanges that take place around the flop. Murray and Keefe interpret Gaulier's dismissals to leave feedback open-ended:

...although there can be few teachers of contemporary theatre who are more direct, fearless and less equivocating than Gaulier in terms of comment, feedback and dismissal [...] he *never* tells students 'how to do it' (Murray and Keefe 2007: 151).

But exercises including 'Emergency Clown Hospital' encourage students to revisit and make use of their flops, to comic effect - a possibility that is ignored if all flops are considered failures. Furthermore, Gaulier's feedback does give individual students precise and even prescriptive feedback, though this is obfuscated in Gaulier's charismatic performance.

Participant-observers in Gaulier's classroom have understood Gaulier's feedback as being more deliberately structured in order to create particular experiences for the clown student. Purcell Gates sees a negation of previously acquired habits:

repeated failure forces the student to abandon techniques she has acquired to please both spectators and teachers, leaving her with whatever is left after these learned techniques have failed (Purcell Gates 2011a: 233).

However, as Murray and Keefe indicated, 'effective' attempts by students are received with 'some kind of acceptance or affirmation', meaning that the student can simultaneously learn new techniques 'to please spectators' under Gaulier's method. Kendrick examines Gaulier's feedback and rules in a way that does not use the concept of via negativa. As was explored in the previous chapter, Kendrick sees Gaulier's feedback as providing the rules for ludic play, rules which become unbearable or impossible to maintain adherence to, thus enabling a break of ludic play and an escape into the paidic. Kendrick explains Gaulier's tendency to change rules and offer directions, often interrupting a student on stage to add to the ludus already invoked. She suggests that the use of rule-changing early in the workshop shows the student that

all their choices will be up for scrutiny and that anything not deemed appropriate by Gaulier will result in dismissal from the exercise. Thus

the player quickly learns that adherence to the rules of the game is the only way to participate in Gaulier's training (Kendrick 2010: 153).

This idea is accompanied by a footnote, 'If a student doesn't comply with the rules Gaulier sometimes ignores them entirely until they demonstrate that they will co-operate' (Kendrick 2010: 153). However many of the rules are deliberately difficult to follow, suggesting that a student has to attempt to follow the rules, even when they are impossible. These observations complicate Murray and Keefe's application of *via negativa* to Gaulier's classroom - if he never tells students 'how to do it', what of the interrupting instructions and rules? Irving suggests ethical problems with the *via negativa* approach used by Gaulier and Wright (Irving 2012a). She considers the tactic 'disabling' because of the competition and retributions involved. This indicates a different experience to the stated intention of Gaulier, that the feedback be constructive and clear. In an interview with former student Erik Liberman, Gaulier was asked to discuss his use of insults, and replied:

First, it's not an insult. When what you did was a pile of shit, and we say, *That is a shit*, it means, *You can't do anything with that...* It doesn't mean, *Ah, it's bad, we don't love you, you are outside, you are outcast*. No! You are allowed to make a big shit every morning (*laughs*), but my job is to tell you, *With that, we can't do anything; with that, never you will get a contract*. ...when we say, *You are a little shit of a dog*, everyone understands better! And we say with a sort of humor, we don't say that in a nasty way. It's a good fun (Liberman, 28th August 2013).

The fact that Gaulier needs to clarify this distinction to his ex-pupil makes evident that this approach is ambiguous. For Irving and other students, they interpret statements such as 'you are a little shit of a dog' to be personal, and disabling insults despite Gaulier's stated intention. Nonetheless, some students do accept the insistence that what could be perceived as insults are in fact 'good fun', or a game the teacher expects students to be complicit in. Fairbairn describes the same understanding of the acerbic lines:

I remember that whole idea of the clown as play was very quickly installed for me because I think I understood... that when he insulted you, he wasn't being serious. It was part of the provocation. And a lot of people didn't seem to understand that and so we had a lot of tears (Fairbairn 2012).

He later says there was ‘a good deal of puncturing, people’s egos, and preconceptions about what performance was’ (Fairbairn 2012) - perhaps suggesting that for other students, with more ‘ego’, there was more at stake, leading to the ‘tears’ he mentions above. Fairbairn seems to use ‘serious’ to refer to the personal - the ‘insult’ is aimed at what the student just did, or is provoking a reaction in order to give the opportunity to be funny. When students take insults seriously, he suggests, they are emotionally affected and less able to understand the clown form. Deans recalls a similar variety of responses:

You wouldn’t be given the answer to anything [...] And, Philippe took that to extreme, and you know, there were lots of tears in Philippe’s classes, because he had no boundaries, and would provoke in any way that he thought might get a reaction that would reveal the real person (Deans and Saunders 2012).

To Deans, Lecoq didn’t give answers but gave starting points, whereas Gaulier ‘provoked’ to the point at which some students responded with tears, and others with laughter.⁷¹ This suggests Gaulier is doing something more active than saying no to propositions, instead offering interrogative provocations. Deans’ colleague Saunders agrees that despite the prevalence of humour in the class, the provocations ‘went beneath that, it was about the person’ (2012). This discrepancy between the ways in which Gaulier’s comments are understood indicates a slipperiness and uncertainty between the real, the playful and the personal, which reflects the teetering image and delicacy of the term ‘flop’. Deans describes having a clear understanding of Gaulier’s meaning despite his ambiguity:

sometimes you never knew what he was talking about [...] But you would know if it was a joke or not, but you would also know what was underneath, and you’d also know when it wasn’t a joke. I mean it was more often not a joke, in those days (2012).

Here Gaulier’s statements are either directly intended, or jokes with something else ‘underneath’ - feedback for the student, of aspects of performance that should be avoided, tried or remembered. This almost but not entirely contradicts Fairbairn’s assertion that Gaulier ‘wasn’t being serious’ - Deans and

⁷¹ Deans notes that when she worked with Gaulier years later, she felt that these provocations were softer than at the time she had been a student.

Saunders interpreted Gaulier's words as both serious and personal, and found these insightful and worthwhile, influencing their practice.

Deans and Saunders both describe the moments of provocation by Gaulier - and the failures that they indicate - as being revelatory of the 'real person' to whom they are aimed. Davison finds this concept to be prevalent in interpretations of Lecoq-based clown teaching. He examines failure and flop in Gaulier's approach, with a focus on the ways in which an apparent break in narrative or character 'produces the sensation we are watching something authentic' (2013: 198). Davison feels there is a misunderstanding caused by a slippage between the appearance of failure, the spontaneous and the sincere. This criticism is based on the realisation that although clown students experience real failure in the clown classroom, failures in clown performance can be, and often are, acted. He breaks down the possibilities of success and failure for a clown appearing on stage. The clown, he says, enters and does something. If the audience laugh it is success, if they don't, it is failure. In the case of the latter:

if I accept it, and the audience sees that I have accepted it, they will most probably laugh. In that case, I am in the same position as if my original action had made them laugh and I can continue or repeat my action in the full knowledge that my audience is with me. In other words I have converted my failure into a success (Davison 2013: 198).

This system of failure and success - or the flop which gets a laugh - takes place on stage, but also occurs throughout the Gaulier course, and students encounter all three situations - the audience laughing immediately, the audience not laughing at all, and the conversion of this quiet into a laugh through acknowledgement by the clown. Conversion of quiet to laughter can happen in more ways than indicated by Davison, but not all the ways involve the agency of the clown performer as he describes; often it is the teacher who points out the flop, and it is his intervention that changes the quiet to laughter.

The following flow chart attempts to apply Davison's breakdown of the systems of success and failure to a performance by a clown student. It shows some of the

potential moments for laughter and quiet - and thus clown success and failure on a small scale.⁷²

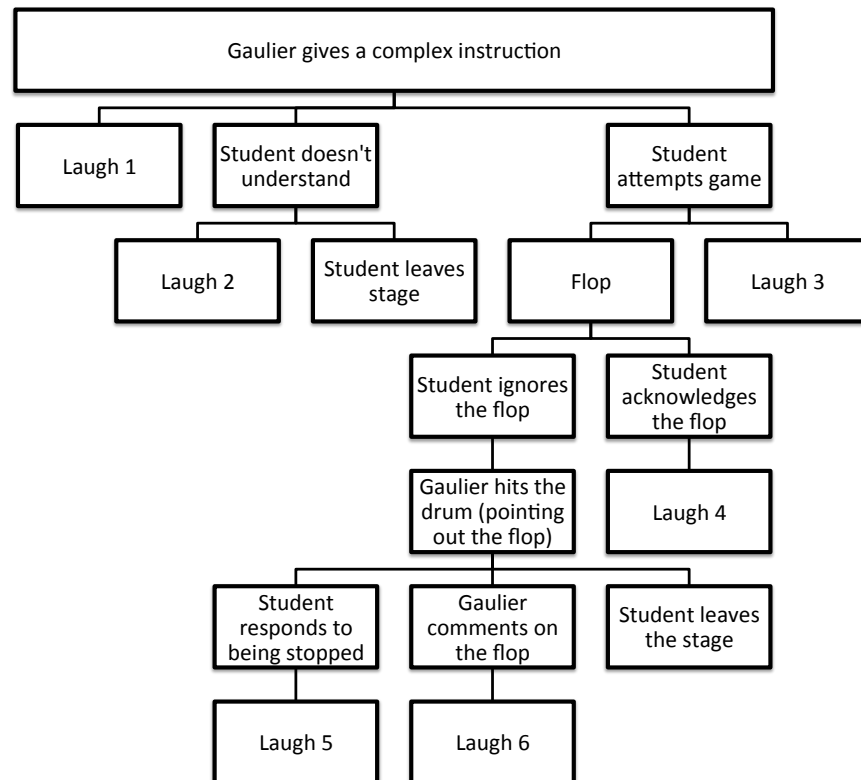


Figure 6: Flow chart of potential laughs and flops in a clown exercise

The flow chart shows six different moments at which the audience might laugh. It simplifies the distinction between the performances of Gaulier and the students', because it cannot describe the nuances of interaction. I have attempted to indicate moments when the teacher and student work together to acknowledge moments of failure, and in doing so make audiences laugh. It will help in a discussion of how acknowledged flops can be used to make clown success. It is important to remember that potential laughs are not the end of the encounter, as students are permitted to stay on stage as long as they are succeeding. Often, too, students are allowed to stay on stage when they are not succeeding, and are given additional instruction, opportunity, or exchange with the teacher. This allows a moment of partnership, where Gaulier provokes or encourages students individually, in front of the student spectators. The interplay between them provokes Laugh 6, but this may be experienced as an 'insult', since Gaulier creates the laugh and the student does not have agency

⁷² Despite the small scale of these moments, they do give a real sense of failure, particularly as, due to class sizes, each student may only get one chance per day to go on stage.

over it. Similarly, Laugh 1 ‘belongs’ to Gaulier. Laughs 2 and 5 occur in response to something the student does accidentally. Here, the student may not have agency in her performance, and may even be hurt or frustrated by the laughter. Gaulier describes this tension, with an example of a keen student who is confused by his feedback:

“Gregor, why do you think your classmates laugh when you simply don’t get it?”

“I don’t know, sir” (Everyone laughs).

“I’m going to tell you why, Gregor. They’re laughing because when you don’t understand, your face is full of comic foolishness”.

“I didn’t know, sir”. (Everyone laughs).

Gregor does the exercise. A catastrophe. He gets angry and even more angry. No one likes him. I stop him. I ask the class who liked Gregor. No one answers. I tell Gregor no one liked him. I ask him if he knows why.

“No”, he says. (Everyone laughs.)

Gregor doesn’t understand anything. Will he be able to sell his stupidity? (Gaulier 2007: 301 - 302).

The audience laugh three times in this excerpt, but not at the moment that Gregor hopes they will. Gaulier shows that his drum makes clear the audience reaction, when he says, ‘No one likes him. I stop him’. In this case, the classmates laugh at Gregor’s reaction to Gaulier’s difficult questions. In this story, his face, ‘full of comic foolishness’, is an honest, authentic and spontaneous reaction, and not feigned for the purpose of provoking laughter. This is the moment at which some critics find the ‘real person’ revealed by failure. Davison’s theory would suggest that if Gregor pays attention to these laughs, next time he enters the stage, he could gain agency over his performance, and not attempt the exercise, but instead show the audience that he doesn’t understand. Instead of getting Laugh 6, Gregor could have more agency, effectively winning Laugh 3. The student audience would realise that this had originally been an authentic failure, but a new audience might laugh at the expression on Gregor’s face, and believe in the authenticity of his failure to understand (they would think they are giving Laugh 2, although of course they would not name it as such). In the meantime, however, it is not unreasonable to imagine Gregor going home that day disappointed - he failed at the exercise, was told that ‘no one likes him’, and did not understand the teacher’s advice. In fact, in this excerpt, Gaulier depicts himself giving Gregor the opportunity to get the final laugh by following the ‘catastrophe’ with a further question, causing

Gregor to perform incomprehension for a third time. Similarly, one day I got some laughs when I tried to speak through a snorkel, which made me cough. Gaulier engaged me in conversation, and my inaudible attempt to talk through the snorkel and the coughing got more laughter from my peers. Gaulier is not explicit with this tactic - although here he does point out what is causing Gregor's laugh, and suggests that Gregor learn to 'sell his stupidity', he does not overtly teach students how to use the accidental laugh experiences to get deliberate ones later on.⁷³

Laughs 2, 4, 5 and 6 all come from flops, meaning that the pedagogy of *via negativa* does not fully explain how Gaulier teaches. Gaulier does not teach students not to have flops, but provides circumstances in which flops are likely to occur, in order that students learn how to deal with them and use them for comedy. Although Purcell Gates focuses on the revelatory power of mistakes, she makes an interesting distinction between mistakes in training and performance:

In a clown performance before an audience, it is a rehearsed mistake; in the clown classroom, it is genuine - the student truly messes up and faces a moment (often unbearable) of not knowing what to do next. The authoritarian structure of Gaulier's classroom facilitated frequent opportunities for flops; as students frantically attempted to please the teacher, an irony was that they were not performing these roles from a distance, they actually experienced themselves as fumbling fools grasping after praise (2011a: 237).

Though Purcell Gates explores the experience of truly 'not knowing what to do next', she does not explain how the repeated experience of foolishness or 'grasping after praise' allows students to create the 'rehearsed mistake' that makes up the clown act.

Davison also highlights the differences between training and performance when he engages with the question of authentic and feigned failure. He points out that, 'manipulation of failure is a learnable technique, though admittedly a subtle one' (Davison 2013: 199). Davison suggests that the acknowledgement of flop, or other moment of communicating and sharing failure with an audience

⁷³ Aitor Basauri, teacher for Spymonkey and visiting teacher at the Ecole Philippe Gaulier, takes a more direct approach with this lesson, explicitly telling one student to repeat a physical gag (miming washing a window) whenever he flopped.

(which I have shown as Laughs 4 and 2 respectively) may in fact be ‘theatrical truth-effect’ (Davison 2013: 199). Here he suggests that some part of the clown technique can remain hidden from the audience – the truth-effect (apparent failure) of the flop is enjoyable for the audience, but it does not necessarily have to be either spontaneous or sincere. This counters Lecoq’s observation that it was in the moment when routines flop that the students reveal an authentic reality of the performer, ‘everyone burst out laughing, not at the characters that they had been trying to show us, but at the person underneath, stripped bare for all to see’ (Lecoq 2002: 154). However, if as Davison suggests, clowns can manipulate flop and perform flops on demand, what appears to be Laugh 2 or 4 could in fact be Laugh 3. Wright provides tips for how such a moment might be created (although it is difficult to tell whether he understands these tactics as revealing truth or creating truth-effect). The tactics he describes are: ‘clocks’, where a clown turns her face toward the audience, sharing intention or reaction in the course of an action; ‘drops’, where the narrative or action is stopped and attention is drawn to the performer looking at the audience; and ‘separations’, where the performer stops, steps aside and comments on her own action. These three tactics, he assures us, ‘leave us in no doubt that you’re only playing and that what’s happening in front of us is real and in the moment’ (2006a: 202). By undermining the narrative action, the authenticity of the performer’s reactions is heightened. However, according to Davison, this could be truth-effect, convincing the audience of something feigned. Scripted comedies, jokes and comic narratives depend on deliberately crafted failures or flops, so an examination of some theoretical analyses of these comic genres could help elucidate this ambiguity in clown performance.

Failure in Humour Theory

In the journal *Comedy Studies*, Peter Marteinson surveys and synthesises a range of theoretical approaches to humour in an ambitious essay, ‘Thoughts on the current state of Humour Theory’. In this, he strives towards a concise, ‘robust, exhaustive theory of laughter’ (Marteinson 2010: 175). This is framed as a call to readers of comedy studies to make further progress in developing a theory, but Marteinson offers his own ‘hypothetical’ suggestions. He identifies epistemological failure as the root origin of comedy and of laughter, suggesting that comic moments have a basis in a person who misunderstands: ‘does the

object of our laughter appear to not to know something that we hold as evidently true?’ (Marteinson 2010: 175).⁷⁴ This theory offers to an understanding of clown performance the importance of what the clown appears to know or not know - for a clown to ‘appear not to know’, the mistake does not have to be authentic, but can be performed and still make audiences laugh. This explains how failure figures on two levels in the classroom and performance - the experience of a failure to understand, and the rehearsed pretence of failure to understand. When the student fails in the classroom, she has failed to find a way of fulfilling the demand to make the audience laugh, or she has not understood something that the audience ‘gets’. In the rehearsed, or repeated misunderstanding, the student appears to fail at the task, but succeeds in performing the funny routine. Gaulier refers to this rehearsed, or scripted mistake as a ‘stupid idea’. Marteinson’s insight does not suggest that the accidental laugh engineered by Gaulier is the same as the performed ‘stupid idea’, nor does it suggest how the former enables the learning of the latter.

Gaulier plays with apparent knowledge in his clown exercises, which he frames as ideas for clown scenes offered by M. Marcel and faithfully recreated by the clown. Marteinson’s theory offers a useful lens through which to view these exercises, as it understands comedy to be the product of ruptures between different truths, making particular use of the signifiers of social realities. In a clear example, a hypothetical student has visited M. Marcel for an idea that will convince an audience he is an electrician:

“What should I do, Monsieur Marcel?”

“Kid,” he replies, “an electrician always goes around with a screwdriver which lights or doesn’t light up inside a transparent casing. Sometimes the electrician says, “There’s juice”; other times “There’s no juice”.

“Stop, Monsieur Marcel, I’ve understood”.

You haven’t bought the screwdriver. You’ve thought a little bit of wood will do the trick. Show the pleasure of the imbecile who wants to make believe that he is an exceptional electrician (Gaulier 2007: 300).

⁷⁴ Marteinson highlights the connection of this theory to the Socratic notion that ‘the ridiculous often seems to result from a failure of self-knowledge’ (Socrates as recorded by his disciple Plato in *Philebus*, sections 48c-48d’, cited by (Marteinson 2010: 175). I explore Gaulier’s use of self-knowledge in pursuit of the ridiculous in the following chapter.

In this exercise, Gaulier (via M. Marcel) has supplied the clown student with an epistemological failure of social reality, a stupid idea to perform. Though an electrician might say 'there's juice' when using a light-up screwdriver, the advice given to the clown student is to present this obscure social signifier as though it will convince the audience that 'he is an exceptional electrician'. Gaulier offers a range of variations on signifiers, all based on plausible but incomplete signifiers associated with jobs:

Monsieur Marcel has said that a doctor would always say 'Take your clothes off'... a plumber would say 'the plumber you had before wasn't much good', a school teacher 'take out your dictation notebooks', a butcher 'my meat is even more tender than my wife', a policeman 'show me your documents' and a director of the Bank of France would get a lot of faxes (2007: 301).

These fictional misunderstandings, if not actually the 'rehearsed' mistakes Purcell Gates describes, are scripted failures to understand. The situations are crafted by Gaulier and performed by the students deliberately with the intention of making people laugh. Gaulier provides the way in which the clown has misunderstood the social reality, and the students find a way to perform this 'stupid idea' with which they have been supplied. If the student does not find a way to do this, they can only find laughter by dealing with this flop as described in Figure 6. Relying on an individual's ability get laughs by admitting flops is a riskier and more difficult strategy for clowns than successfully performing an apparent failure to understand social reality.

Martinson's analysis concentrates on figures that populate jokes or comic dramas. This figure is referred to as the 'comic subject', an active human being whose actions are designed to make the reader, viewer, or listener laugh.⁷⁵ The theory is based on a philosophical perspective on the function of laughter in human society, which stipulates that laughter occurs when we temporarily cannot understand social reality, which we otherwise understand to be as 'real' as the material world. Martinson's book *On the Problem of the Comic* (2006) offers the concept that laughter occurs in response to breaks in the 'social reality' which enables shared 'cultural perception' of the human world, or in the quote above, '*what we hold as evidently true*'. Though these social truths are

⁷⁵ He rejects the notion of a 'comic object', emphasizing the action of the figure in the laughter-making.

constructed and mythic, they are usually culturally accepted and useful to maintaining a social system. Marteinson understands laughter to be a signal that although the social reality has been broken, this breakage will not last, it is inconsequential, and will be forgotten: 'laughter is the physiological expression of an *intellectual impasse due to an epistemological problem*' (Marteinson 2006: 20). To apply this to the work of the clown, a clown as comic subject would need to misunderstand, mis-apply or mis-use the logic of social convention, and could thus make the audience laugh. The clown student can be seen to learn ways to break cultural perception, to misinterpret things, to perform with formally correct logic that is somehow materially or culturally false.⁷⁶ The impermanence of this failure resonates with the term 'flop', which we see used in the classroom and by practitioners. What we hold true has flopped, and become temporarily unstable, but will soon after right itself.

In *Squidboy*, (2013), Gaulier-trained Trygve Wakenshaw told and mimed a rambling tale about a man, his lover, his dog, and a squid.⁷⁷ The show was lighthearted and whimsical, with a narrative line that lent the piece pathos, but was often broken. At one point, Wakenshaw played a scene in which the man and the dog were stuck in a lift. After demarcating the space of the lift, he mimed watching the dog run to the other side of the stage. He reprimanded the dog, but then remembered, out loud, that the lift was imaginary, and, relieved, broke the spatial boundary he had created. The narrative temporarily flopped, drawing attention to my own complicit acceptance of the story, which made me (and several others) laugh. However, Wakenshaw returned to narrative, expressing relief at his escape. Throughout the piece, Wakenshaw created comedy and called attention to the imaginary by moments where he appeared not to understand the conventions of narrative and illusory mime. Dramaturgical analysts Turner and Behrndt (2008) define the technique as a 'dramaturgy of production'. Turner and Behrndt explain that the theatre-makers identified a paradoxical outcome of declaring pretence in storytelling - 'by revealing the mechanisms of the performance, they invite the audience's imaginative complicity' (2008: 190). In clown, a dramaturgy of production would work to state ambiguity and ineptitude as performance mechanisms, and by indicating

⁷⁶ See Marteinson 2006, Chapter 2.3

⁷⁷ Wakenshaw studied with Gaulier from 2008, and in 2013 taught on the Clown course.

the intention to make audiences laugh, clown signifiers can allow the audience to be complicit in the game.

Martinson finds that identity and disguise are a common source of humour in comic play texts. Cultural conceptions are how we make sense of the people we encounter, and so can be productively used to comic effect. He offers several examples of mistaken identity and disguise in neoclassical and modern comic texts, and finds sufficient evidence of this trope as to name it the most common source of humour. As an example, in the shorter article, he describes laughter at people going to a costume party, where the costume suggests a social identity, but laughter comes at the realisation that we were mistaken (Martinson 2010: 175). This helps with an understanding of the appearance of the students on Gaulier's Clown courses. Gaulier's description of the way the costumes contribute to the comic effect resembles Martinson's theory. Gaulier tells the reader that the purpose of the costume is to make the audience say, 'look at that idiot. They are trying to make us believe they're Zorro. How stupid! They really are thick. I love them' (Gaulier 2007: 293). Though Gaulier's explanation takes a less analytical tone, it matches Martinson's theory that laughter comes from witnessing a failure to understand social reality. The clown in question appears to believe that their costume could convince an audience that they are the masked swordsman, but we, the audience, understand the conventions of theatricality and are not fooled by the disguise. This moment describes a comic failure of the clown to realise the failure of the social identity they have constructed. An example from Spymonkey's *Moby Dick* (October 27, 2009) further illustrates the comedy to be found in disguise. At one point, performer Petra Massey operated a puppet, while wearing a full body suit complete with hat and veil, all of which had been painted with a pattern of floorboards to match the set. She appeared to think this camouflage suit made her invisible, and by playing with the failure of the disguise found several jokes in this ridiculous 'invisible' suit.

In an article entitled 'Failure as Success; Clowns and Laughing Bodies', Weitz points out the ambiguous social position held by clowns, who are 'agent[s] of cultural inscription' (Weitz 2012: 80), teaching children normative values by demonstrating 'failures to adopt or uphold them' as comic material; but who, simultaneously, suggest an attractive 'buoyant attitude toward setback [which

can be seen] as somehow liberating, shrugging off social expectation to shoulder the weight of the world playfully' (Weitz 2012: 80). Weitz uses an example sketch from Bill Irwin to demonstrate how a technically skilled trip is simultaneously a failure (to run in a circle) and a success (to make the audience laugh). In this sense, failure and success are almost indistinguishable; with laughter as his goal, Irwin must - humorously, and thus successfully - fail to walk. Weitz points out that while ambiguity abounds, the stated intention of clown performance to incite laughter results in a very clear and direct appraisal, 'a ruthless ultimatum that equates robust laughter with success and anything less with a sliding scale of failure' (Weitz 2012: 83). While he understands that failure and success jostle in performance, he argues that in evaluation there is no such ambiguity. When applied to the classroom, this complex relationship is made all the more indecipherable. The Clown course asks that students learn how to perform successful imitations of failures, by observing real failures. For Weitz, the jokes are competently performed imitations of failure, contrasted with an incongruously happy reaction. He does not consider the term 'flop', but his interest in competently performed failure might make my terminology appropriate to his study.

Philosopher William Desmond takes a contrasting approach to understanding comedy, seeing it as the embodiment of a particular philosophical approach to failure. He begins with the assertion that death represents ultimate 'failure of being' - when we die, we fail to be. Desmond finds the philosophical approach that best accepts failure to be Stoicism, where an individual's limits are recognised, and thus otherness, beyond their limits, can be contemplated. From his philosophical perspective, Desmond considers the functions of failure and the potential comparison to Stoic mindfulness in the field of 'dramatic art'. In a generalising and unsubstantiated but nonetheless insightful commentary, Desmond considers drama to explore human limits. Compared to an Aristotelean understanding of a tragic hero who 'suffers a dark limit that stretches, strains and eventually shatters him' (Desmond 1988: 302), Desmond offers that:

Comedy shows our absurdity as "coming to nothing", shows being human as risible [...] Failure is not ultimately serious; what is ultimate is the sheer energy of being that laughter discloses [...] What we treat as ultimate is not ultimate; laughter exposes its absurd, illusory character. It makes the failure inconsequential. It too is nothing. And

where failure cannot be healed, laughter at least makes us forget it. Comedy is a kind of metaphysical commentary on finiteness and failure. We will *always* and *inevitably* fail (1988: 302).

If humans will ‘always and inevitably’ fail, laughter at human failure is an energetic and alive acknowledgement of humanity, and as such transforms knowledge of ultimate failure into something that reaffirms being. Some approaches to clown training emphasise mindfulness and philosophical contemplation of humanity – at Red Noses Unlimited, Jaya Harlten offers workshops combining clown and meditation, and considers mindfulness and honesty to be more significant to clown practice than laughter (Harlten 2012). Desmond’s perspective on dramatic comedy suggests that in making audiences laugh, comic practitioners can provoke this healing energy, rendering failure impermanent. This argument then examines the social function of comic performance, rather than discussing its practice. All the comic performer (or clown) has to do to create this philosophical breakthrough is to make audiences laugh, which is of course the sole aim of Gaulier’s Clown course.

According to Desmond’s theory, any clown flop will comment on metaphysical failure, summoning to the spectator’s mind the inevitability of failure in human existence, and countering it with the ‘energy of being’ to be found in laughter. Interestingly, the ultimate epistemological failure – death – and indeed suicide – are perhaps surprisingly regular themes or tropes in clown acts in and beyond Gaulier’s school. Davison (2013: 51) explores McManus’ interpretation of a clown-based piece *Pierrot Assassin de sa Femme* made by Paul Margeuritte (1888), probably based on a lazzo from Commedia dell’Arte, in which Pierrot tickles his wife, and then himself, to death (McManus 2003: 20).⁷⁸ Louise Peacock describes two examples of clown shows using themes of suicide and death, from the opening of *Slava’s Snowshow* and a piece entitled *The Art of Dying*. In these examples Peacock identifies an existentialist philosophy, in which the impulses toward life outweigh considerations of death. I am reminded of a sketch in Vladimir Olshansky’s *Strange Games* (2006), where Olshansky’s clown tried to hang himself with a shower fitting. He approached the task morosely, but was repeatedly interrupted, in different ways, by a friend knocking on the door, calling on the phone (answered on the shower head). The clown and his unseen

⁷⁸ See Gordon (2007) for a discussion of lazzi as comic material

friend repeated a conversation; 'How's it going?', 'Fine, fine'. The final interruption and failure to achieve the task happened when the clown caught sight of the audience. He mimed opening a window, and leaned through it for a better look. He asked 'How's it going?' and several spectators answered, as a chorus, 'Fine, fine'. Though the scene had a moving ending, where people were compelled to join the dialogue, this came after laughs at the different repetitions of the clown's failure to fulfil his serious intention. Here, the acts of friendship from an unseen character and laughter from spectators prevented the clown's death - the (dramatic representation of) ultimate failure was eclipsed by what Desmond calls 'energy of being'.

In these examples, we appear to have lost the delicacy of the flop, and to be dealing with a comic failure to achieve the ultimate 'failure of being' - a double failure. However, it is significant to remember that in no circumstances are the clown performers really committing suicide - both failures are only representational. There were two clown deaths in the school's Clown Show (December, 2013). One clown was introduced to perform 'a tragedy in 60 seconds', stabbing himself with a plastic retractable knife. His serious performance of suicide flopped repeatedly, caused by his own proud smiles to the audience, and by M. Loyal's countdown of how many seconds he had remaining. The second clown death was presented as a world famous lion tamer. The clown dragged on a metal trunk, amateurishly labelled 'LION'. She attempted to build up an atmosphere of tension, but it was totally apparent that there was no lion. Unable to perform her big cat act, the trainer mimed being dragged into the box and being eaten.

As none of the clowns could ever fully represent death, comic failures to represent the un-representable do not remotely resemble serious failure, and are therefore temporary and inconsequential. Perhaps these inconsequential failures to represent the ultimate, and un-representable, failure contain what Desmond describes as flexible, reviveable energy of being. The impermanence of clown death means that in these examples there is no possibility of existential failure, instead we see a flexible and impermanent failure, at which we can laugh, which could be called an existential flop. Failure and Flop are not only apparent in the clown classroom but in the ways that clown performance is constructed, as a necessary part of comedy. As we have seen, the thematic

trope of death as failure is identified in several performance examples as well as in philosophical analysis of comedy. Comedy and death often abut and overlap one another in performance practices and dramatic writing that shares territory with clowning.

Unfunny Flops

The shows mentioned above use deliberately crafted flops to gain laughter, and enhance these with structural use of repetition. The question remains whether the authentic flop, unplanned and experienced in front of an audience and acknowledged ‘in the moment’ has any place in the clown performance to which Gaulier’s students are aspiring. In 1992, Compagnie Philippe Gaulier presented *The End of the Tunnel* at the Edinburgh Fringe and on a tour of the UK. The company was made up of Gaulier alumni McCrystal, Mick Barnfather, Toby Sedgwick, Anders Ohrn and Abigail Dulay. McCrystal remembers the show being received very differently between one night and the next:

[O]n a good night, it was the funniest thing that anyone had ever seen. And nobody could believe that we could ever have a bad night, ‘cause it was, we were all so hilarious... But on a bad night ... people would leave the theatre, and they’d deliberately slam their seats up and they’d stomp out... it made people absolutely furious (McCrystal 2013).

McCrystal compares his experience to that of a stand up comedian, ‘dying in the clubs’ as a rite of passage into becoming successful. However, it would seem that the repeated flops at the school are designed to provide this experience, where students can learn what audiences laugh at, and otherwise. *The End of the Tunnel* was a high-profile debut show for the company, which had come from the highly-regarded London school which had made Gaulier well known in the UK. Though McCrystal looks back on it as a learning opportunity, this is unlikely to have been Gaulier’s aim in staging the show. The story emphasises the fluidity and relativity of the flop at the scale of a whole show. *The End of the Tunnel* received different responses from one show to the other, though presumably it was based on predominantly the same material, characters and ideas. With hindsight, McCrystal describes the process of making the show as a prominent reason for the show’s variability, highlighting the importance of rehearsal (for which he notes the French term is ‘repetition’).

Philippe conducted the rehearsals very much like [...] he conducts his workshops. [...] The ideas went on and on and on and we weren't really fixing anything, we never really repeated anything.

Rehearsals [...] were enormous fun, whenever we were just free and we were playing, and I think Philippe thought, "this show's going to be so funny, these people are so funny". But whenever we came to repeat any of the things that we'd had success with in rehearsal, it always fell flat.

[...]there wasn't any particular priority given to *rehearsing*. All of it was about exploring and finding (McCrystal 2013).

McCrystal describes the failure to be reliably funny as a learning experience, and although he holds Gaulier in the highest regard, and maintains that the show was excellent 'on a good night', he now uses a different rehearsal strategy to that used on *The End of the Tunnel*. Here the show's flopping could be described as generative, because it provoked a new strategy for McCrystal to work as a clown director in a way that did not allow such potential for failure. McCrystal's strategy attempts to eliminate failure by removing the improvisation, but still makes maximum use of the repeatable flop as a dramaturgical tool. Basauri and Park, who have worked extensively with McCrystal, identify the director's skill in helping them to find repeatable comic actions, which was not part of Gaulier's teaching at the time they were there. Basauri suggests that the use of flop in the Clown course provides a base on which to build clown material, but that Gaulier does not include lessons on how to create a clown act:

the school, is an amazing journey to know the flop. Which is, which is, where the clown lives. If there is no flop, there is no clown, in my opinion... And the thing that is never told [at the school], or at least I don't remember anyone telling: now, you save the flop, and create something very funny. That is guaranteed, funny (Basauri and Park 2013).

Park also emphasised that this skill of McCrystal's is not the same as the initial discovery that Gaulier helps people with. The 'journey to know the flop' is an exploratory one, where students might not always find the correct balance between success and failure, but get to know how they might make funny material using flops. Basauri's observation fits the description of the clown as 'perpetually-flopping'. His preferred method is to find material that is 'guaranteed, funny' rather than to go on stage and rely on an ability to experience flops and not know how to convert them to laughter. In the classroom, Gaulier can identify points where he can offer ideas, instructions,

alternative strategies, and he can teach people to know when to look for alternative ideas. He can also terminate a student's failing attempt with his drum and invite a new student to try. On stage, this tactic is more dangerous, as a student continuing to improvise, or riff, in the manner of the Gaulier classroom is left without the overarching structure provided by the teacher, his tasks and judgement. A recent example of a Gaulier-trained performer using improvisational structures in his work, Burgers presents shows under the pseudonym 'Dr Brown'. In 2013, Burgers staged an experiment, in which he used improvisation and listening to an audience response, to build a show.

Bexperiments consisted of eight consecutive shows, from each of which he set out to find the funniest moments and use them cumulatively, to present a 'finished' eighth show (August, 2013). Burgers' approach suggests that while improvisation is a useful tactic, and flop is an essential part of this, the aim was to find, through improvisation, a series of actions that would make a predictably, even reliably, funny show. This suggests a dramaturgy that is less dependent on improvisation and its threat of failure to make an audience laugh. Instead, it uses repeated flops and gags in a structure that is more connected to a longer history of comic performance.

Conclusion

Failure has been recognised as valuable to comedy narratives and to comic performance, including the comic sub-genre of clown. However, understanding comic failure to be temporary, non-radical and flexible - or to consider instead the comic flop - helps draw a distinction between clown as a performance form aimed primarily at making the audience laugh, and the postmodern performance styles that draw on radical failure to challenge conventions of narrative structure and acting. Interestingly, images of clowns are used to signify the potential for failure, flop or the failure of representation. The term 'failure' is connected to a contemporary cultural moment in theatre and performance. It appears in writing by and about playwright Samuel Beckett, in writing on experimental theatre such as the work of Forced Entertainment, and is eloquently explored by Bailes and Halberstam. I have found these texts informative, but they position failure as generative and radical, whereas I have described the flop as a closely related but separate device, with a different

performance politics concerned primarily with the result of laughter (see Chapter 2).

Examining examples of death and suicide as comic material in clown performance has enabled a theoretical discussion of the absoluteness of failure in comparison with the flexible and temporary nature of flop. In a sketch in which a clown intends, but fails, to represent death, we see a failure to represent the ultimate (and non-representable) failure. In the sketch, and our laughter at it, there is no ultimate failure of being, but instead there is laughter from the audience, a vocal and enjoyable response that affirms life. While in clown or comedy, social reality may be upset or disturbed, this situation is only temporary - it is only a flop of social reality, and not a failure. Perhaps Beckett used the signifiers of clown to create the impression of the temporary flop, but then removed the potential for emotional satisfaction - laughter does not revive and so failure is the lasting impression and mood.

Genuine flops, which can always occur in performance, are the mainstay of the clown workshop. A buoyant and flexible attitude to the flop allows complicit play to continue and develop, and in turn allows students to learn what flops they can repeat to make audiences laugh. When learning clown, it is crucial that there is an audience - the students could not learn to use, create, or respond to flops without their audience of peers who either do or do not laugh. Gaulier creates opportunities for authentic flops, where students perform and are likely to be met by silence, in order that students experience the process by which a failed joke can be transformed into something that makes audiences laugh. Students experience a variety of situations where audiences are laughing, with the inferred aim that they observe how accidental flops cause laughter, gain agency over these processes, and build up a repertoire of ways in which audiences can be made to laugh deliberately. Gaulier-trained performers go on to use 'stupid ideas', or apparent flops, to create comic dramaturgies, which work with repetitive building structures, offering regular surprises in which the clowns appear not to understand social realities or dramatic conventions. Gaulier-trained clowns have learned to be aware of and responsive to the audience response. The laugh to be gained from acknowledging that something has really gone wrong is not so reliable as laughs to be gained at things which appear to have gone wrong but are at all times under the skilful control of the

clown performer. It is not clear at what stage Gaulier's students learn this skill of the created, apparent flop, as the teacher does not explicitly explain this process. Nonetheless, from witnessing Gaulier-trained professionals, it is clear that some students are able to develop this skill for themselves after some time at the school or after gaining performance experience. In the following chapter I will expand on the apparent failures a clown can perform with her body. I will also explore further how students listen to audience feedback to learn what about each of them can be deemed ridiculous.

Chapter 5. The clown body and concepts of self

'It is the hidden twin, ridiculous, comic, vulnerable and stupid' (2007: 302)

In this chapter I aim toward an understanding of what Gaulier's clown student learns to do with her body. Gaulier's clowning is an embodied performance genre and draws on certain somatic traditions. I will explicate Gaulier's writing on clown bodies, and offer my own experience of using my body to make my classmates laugh. My experience seems to contrast with Gaulier's writing, but both draw on two distinct traditions; firstly, Lecoq's use of the red nose in clown training, and the discourses of self and authenticity that surround it, and secondly, popular traditions of physical comedy. Using circus history and a contemporary case study of an act in Cirque du Soleil, directed by McCrystal, I demonstrate that both circus and mime traditions inform Gaulier's teaching. I argue that clown repertoire is built up by clowns who leave the school and perform in front of audiences, but I explain that the skills to do this can be learnt at Gaulier's school.

Clown Bodies in Gaulier's Writing

In a narrative chapter that introduces his work on clowning, entitled 'The Birth of Clowns', Gaulier locates this event in a circus.⁷⁹ The story goes that two men were hired to look after the horses:

The men had known each other since they were children. One was tall and thin, the other small and fat. Both were idiotic and very likeable. They worked hard and were cheerful company (Gaulier 2007: 276).

We can recognise this pair as the clowns to be born before the story continues. There are four elements in this description - a loose description of personality - 'idiotic and very likeable', their relationship to each other as long-term friends, their relationship to others - 'cheerful company', and the description of their physical bodies in contrast to one another - 'one tall and thin, the other small and fat'. In this description, the two men are in everyday working life, and not

⁷⁹ As mentioned in Chapter 1, it calls to mind Philip Astley's equestrian circus: see Stoddart (2000), Townsen (1976: 85-91) and Saxon (1975).

performing, but the description of a physical contrast in bodies is already somewhat comical. The men have contrasting bodies, but are lifelong friends and so are frequently seen together. The proximity of these two bodies creates the expectation of humour as we can see that the two men will move in different, perhaps incompatible ways. However, though we can sense that the clowns will arrive soon, there are more stages to the story:

One afternoon, Jim, the small one, began to look admiringly at Joe's costume, the way a child looks at its parent's clothes. Overcome by an irresistible urge, he gleefully pulled on his friend's clothes. Jim was so happy in his wide trousers which cork-screwed around his legs, in his big shoes, in the jacket which swallowed up his arms and in the hat which fell over his eyes (Gaulier 2007: 276).

Here, Jim enjoys playing with a costume that draws attention to his body, and simultaneously highlights the difference between the two bodies we have already seen described. Jim is dressed ridiculously, and enjoying himself. The show has begun, and Joe has arrived, chasing Jim until:

... wallop... Jim ran into the main ring while Andrew [the circus master] was performing a difficult feat of dressage. Overcome with embarrassment, Jim stopped. The audience roared with laughter. And the laughter redoubled when Joe, wearing his white long johns, entered a few seconds later (Gaulier 2007: 277).

The audience are shown the two men, the contrast in their bodies highlighted by their clothes, interrupting the equestrian's 'difficult feat'. The action of stopping might be caused by 'embarrassment', but it allows the audience a better look at his ridiculous, playing, body. The bodies are an integral part of the story, as two similar men swapping clothes would not necessarily be noticeable, so could not be funny. However, the glee with which Jim wears clothes that mismatch and highlight his body shape, the relationship of the two men, the reaction to the audience, and the contrast between the men and the performing horse, are all ingredients in this comic moment. The body is imagined by Gaulier as a base upon which clown acts can be built. Gaulier's story echoes those originary stories told by circus clowns (Davison 2013: 65-68), in which performers or members of the public 'accidentally' discover clown routines, and producers book them as a permanent act to repeat the mistake. It is significant, however, that Gaulier includes Jim's 'gleeful' enjoyment of the

ridiculous costume, and his response to the audience, stopping, embarrassed when he hears the laughter.

The clown body is not the most important thing in the following two chapters of Gaulier's book. Both these chapters do contain discussion of physical comedy, although they prioritise the clown's relationship with the audience over the physical gag:

The audience laughs at the absurdity and humanity of the numbskull, more than it laughs at the gag. A clown strives not to do a routine but to make people believe that they will do it.
Have they rehearsed it? Have they forgotten it?
Make Believe!
Save the Furniture!
The students who enjoy flirting with the ridiculous will enjoy this idea.
The others...Ah! The others... (2007: 280)

Gaulier indicates that although traditional physical gags have a useful place in clown, it is the approach of the student that turns this from a mechanical repetition of choreography into clowning. It is not the content, but the awareness of the audience's reaction, and the intention of inciting laughter, that is significant to a clown performance. The body described here is absurd and human, flirtatious and responsive.

Gaulier also writes about the bodies of some, perhaps hypothetical, clown students. Like his description of Joe and Jim, he uses blunt statements to describe example students and their bodies, which are 'big' (2007: 300), or have a 'fat arse' (2007: 295) - but he emphasises the humour, fantasy and pleasure of the actor over their physical body. These factors influence how each student's body is presented in the classroom:

Which costume to suggest? The one which suits the character glimpsed beneath the red nose. It depends on the student's humour.
...For example, would an apprentice clown whose physique reminds us of Dracula be happier in that costume, or in that of a boy taking first communion? (Gaulier 2007: 293)

Here, the 'physique' of the performer is less important than the pleasure of playing with that physique, and the disjunctions, contrasts and misunderstandings that a costume that opposes the body shape can create. My

own experience in Gaulier's classroom suggests that the performance, or display, of my own 'physique' and 'humour' was central to my learning, and that my costume aided that process.

The Clown Body in Gaulier's Classroom

Costumes are suggested on the first day of the workshop, and students wear the same costume all through the course, save for a few exceptions where individuals having little success asked permission to swap.



Figure 7: Clown Costume (2009)

I arrived in Paris too late to attend the first day of the course. On the second day, for an audience of strangers dressed in colourful and eccentric costumes, I did a very short exercise to determine what my own costume would be. I was to face the back, then turn around to say 'boo' and surprise my waiting classmates. I was then told to dress as a scuba diver, with flippers, a snorkel and a wetsuit. I found flippers and snorkel in a sports shop, and a pair of cyclists's bib shorts in a second hand shop. Through the month, I also acquired a floral swimsuit and plastic cap, and experimented with different pairs of goggles.

The costume exaggerated an authentic aspect of my own appearance for comic purpose. It highlighted the length of my limbs, and my height.

While these attributes could, in another circumstance, be made to fit with contemporary fashion ideals, the costume did not have that effect. One day, I wore the flippers and snorkel with a bikini. Before the class started, Gaulier told me it was 'too real', so I changed back into my suit and shorts. The costume gave me some clues about how to use my body in the exercises, which in turn gave me some opportunities to make my peers laugh. The above image was taken on the final day of the class, as we performed an exercise in which we said goodbye to

one another. Keeping the rest of my body still, I stretched upward, and waved just my hand, making a small rotation from the wrist. I remember this action getting a laugh, but only a small one, but I did not know how to extend the action to increase the laughter.⁸⁰

The audience had laughed more, earlier in the course, when I used the flippers according to an instruction. I had entered the stage, and been stopped immediately, told that I was too heavy, and made too much noise with the flippers slapping the floor. I left the stage, and re-entered, trying to tiptoe, placing the blue plastic 'toes' on the floor first, meaning that I had to lift my knees high. During the course, Gaulier had pointed out I had a tendency to move a lot, and in this example, the flippers allowed me to play with this, as a tiny movement of my foot resulted in a much larger movement of the flipper. I felt like I had learned a valuable lesson. A few days later, a group of us were on stage, and Gaulier put on a piece of music. The 'stupid idea' supplied was to dance to rock and roll music, but the clowns, he said, had only seen thirty seconds of rock and roll dancing, on an old black and white TV with a broken aerial. I thought of the tiptoeing, and the laugh it had got. I decided to move all my limbs, extend them fully and flail them around to the music. That way, I thought, I would be using the long limbs that my costume showed off. The flippers made a noise as they smacked the floor. Gaulier hit his drum. 'Horrible'. He told me to stand still, with my heels together and toes pointed neatly apart. My arms had to stay by my side, and my snorkel in my mouth. He gave me strict instructions for how to move to the music, making a tiny tapping movement with my toe, and when he pointed at me, I sung a single note, 'doo', into the snorkel. When I stood still, my body was visible as an elongated shape, emphasising my limbs more so than when I had been making lots of movement and noise.

The Masked Clown Body

As can be seen in the picture above, during the clown workshop we wore plastic red noses, secured with elastic, every time we performed. The red nose seems intended for use in performance, as well as being a teaching tool. In the end of term Clown Show (2013), the performers all wore red noses and costumes similar

⁸⁰ When I performed in this costume since, I remembered this day of the school very clearly. I tried to incorporate stillness and minimal movement into my act.

to the ones we had worn in the summer course. There is evidence that Gaulier wore a red nose in performance (Gaulier 2007: 296, 2010: 24, Leabhart 1983).

The interaction of the mask and the moving body has been a concern of mime practitioners through the 20th century, and clown, mime and mask are traditions that have historically intertwined, meaning that they are theorised together in European performance history.⁸¹ As we saw in Chapter 1, the words used among this tradition have connected histories (Ran 2007: 29). Etymological dictionaries suggest connections between ‘mask’ and mocking, buffoon, disguise and trickery, words that can also be associated with clowning. Mask is a significant part of 20th century mime and movement training for actors. If these words are caught up in each other, it suggests a historical blurring of what we might now separate into mask performance, mime and clown.

Lecoq’s pedagogy of clowns was developed around the idea of the red nose as a mask. For Murray, the neutral mask and red nose frame the school’s pedagogy. Leabhart illustrates the same point with the position of the clown workshop in the curriculum. He explains that students at Lecoq’s school work with neutral masks, expressive character masks derived from *Commedia dell’Arte*, larval masks, followed by:

[L]arge unpainted Basel carnival masks, grotesque masks, half masks (which permit speech) and finally the smallest mask, the red nose. The challenge in these exercises is to embody in form, speed, intention, rhythm and so on the shape and quality of the mask (Leabhart 1989: 98).

For Leabhart, the red nose is the final in a series of masks, offering a shape and quality in which the performer can find attributes which are possible to ‘embody’. The various masks are steps in a sequence, so essential performance skills should apply to all the masks used, differently nuanced according to their different appearances. To understand clown as a form of mask performance is to lend significance to the physicality of the performer, but also to suggest that all clowns who wear a red nose in training or performance have some common qualities, embodied in ‘form, speed, intention, rhythm’, which come from the

⁸¹ Perhaps less so in Asian performance history, where mask is more associated with dance. See Jenkins 1979 and 2007 on dance and clown mask performance in Bali.

mask itself. The position of the red nose in this sequence reflects its status, as the curriculum ends with ‘the experience considered by all to be the most difficult and rewarding in the Lecoq method, the search for “one’s own clown”’ (Leabhart 1989: 99). The red nose is the ‘smallest’, ‘most difficult’ and final mask to be studied at Lecoq’s school, it occupies a climactic place in the pedagogy which suggests that the previous mask work informs it.

Purcell Gates, following Leabhart in this reading of pedagogical progress, explains this placing of the red nose as the final course because it is ‘the most personal, idiosyncratic of the mask forms’ (2011b: 192). This is emphasised by the fact that the red nose is a very small mask, covering only a small portion of the student’s face, leaving the eyes and mouth visible. As a result, the faces of the students who wear it are mostly visible, and each student will look different while wearing the same mask. The discourse in the classrooms of Lecoq-influenced clown teachers is insightfully summarised by Purcell Gates. She suggests that students speak of wearing a red nose in order to expose:

[T]he student’s “true self”, a self that lies “beneath” the layers of persona built up over a lifetime of learning behaviours that help one function as an apparently competent member of society (2011b: 192).

The revelation of self is seen as a constituent part of clowning, ‘each performer is most lovable when we can see them in their most vulnerable state, the state of clown’ (Purcell Gates 2011b: 193). In the same way that flop has been regarded as a site of revelation, or of a moment where authentic connection can be made between performer and audience, a discourse involving the clown student’s ‘self’ revolves around the use of the material body and the costume and mask that covers it. Purcell Gates observes that students, struggling to articulate the form of ‘true self’ that they seek, use gesture and language that seems to connect this self to the physical body (2011b: 31). The natural self, and the body where it seems to be located, are both privileged over intellectual thought in the clown classroom. Winstanley’s blog journal ends suddenly when, towards the end of one course, he announces that he has been advised to stop blogging in order to improve his work in the classroom, ‘I have to learn to get more in my body and out of my head and all this reflection is keeping me stuck in there’ (Winstanley 6th December 2011). This suggests that the process of reflecting, writing, and self-editing is damaging to the authentic display of his

body in the classroom. Winstanley's decision affirms Purcell Gates' observation that long-standing Cartesian models of self in body and mind continue to be used in Gaulier's classroom.

Gaulier emphasises what is visible around the mask, when he echoes Lecoq's phrase:

This nose, the smallest mask in the world [...] reveals the student's face, their body, their dreams, their foolishness and their shyness (or arrogance) when they reached the age of seven (2007: 293).

He suggests that the small mask, by drawing attention to the student's face and body, can reveal the less tangible 'dreams' and 'foolishness' of the wearer.



Figure 8: Students on the Clown course (2009)

Purcell Gates argues that Gaulier's focus is weighted toward the search for pleasure and its beauty rather than for an authentic 'inner clown', but that nonetheless the language used in the classroom 'displays traces of a modernist conception of the "true self" that lies within the body' (2011b: 204).⁸² This is enhanced by the physical reality of masks, in which:

⁸² The origins of this modernist conception of self is traced in detail by Purcell Gates (2011b: 124-186)

[T]he strongest signifier of the performer's identity — her face — is located *behind* the mask, leading to a logical slippage that positions the presence of the performer's "true self" behind the mask of the character she is performing (Purcell Gates 2011b: 212).

The student has been present but hidden behind other masks thus far in the course, but is (almost completely) revealed by the red nose. Through this process of revelation, the clown is understood to be vulnerable. Leabhart understands that, 'one's "clown" is inextricably related to one's essential weakness' (Leabhart 1989: 99). Felner, who also considers the red nose to be the climactic mask in Lecoq's training series, states that in the red nose, 'the mime is more naked than ever before. The individual's clown is the repressed self, repressed because its expression would entail socially unacceptable behaviour' (Felner 1985: 164).⁸³ It is assumed that the student is psychologically or behaviourally liberated by the red nose mask. Purcell Gates concludes that the body of the clown student was read as displaying a self, even if it was one that the student did not recognise, 'the performer's body signified a self that caused the spectator to respond with laughter, even as the performer was unaware of this communication' (2011b: 241). I also witnessed discussions at the school involving the self, and was concerned with this question in my own journal. However, I now suggest that the audience also have a role to play in how clown students learn to use their body to perform a clown 'self', and I will develop Purcell Gates' suggestion that the clown self is externally negotiated.

Camilla, a student on the Clown course, struggled to reconcile the discussion of self with the clown that Gaulier had encouraged her to play. When she received critique from Gaulier, she became indignant, frustrated at her own failure to understand or achieve what she had set out to do. She expressed this frustration, early in the workshop, with a high-pitched sound, reminiscent of a horse, which might be phonetically written 'hnrhnrhnrgh'. Her costume was a schoolmistress, with a cane, glasses and formal, collared dress. Gaulier provoked Camilla to get frustrated after every exercise she attempted, but gave very strict instructions for when she should move or be still. This interaction repeatedly made students laugh for a long time, but she could not understand (and became ridiculously frustrated about) how this was supposed to connect to

⁸³ Note also that according to Felner, the student learning to perform clown with Lecoq continues to be a 'mime'.



her personality. To me, in the audience, the costume suggested that this emotional frustration was also in her body, and so the schoolmistress became a sexually frustrated, sadistic character trying to pretend she was a kind, gentle teacher. I think that this character began with the funny sound, but the contrast of this sound with the appearance meant that I interpreted the sound and costume into a character that made sense, and was funny, and it did not matter that Camilla was not performing her frustration with this intention, or even that she did not recognise the clown as herself.⁸⁴

Purcell Gates argues that disorientation and flops externalize, or make visible, the processes of clowning. She suggests that, unlike Lecoq, 'Gaulier's interest lay

Figure 9: Camilla (2009) not with evoking the student's inner self, but with encouraging a more nebulous sense of "beauty" or "pleasure" (2011b: 188-189). This terminology is significant; as I demonstrated in Chapter 3, 'pleasure' is to be found in complicit play with an audience. Furthermore, 'beauty' is something that requires an audience, being 'in the eye of' the proverbial 'beholder'. On occasion, students disagree with Gaulier's assessment of their own performance, and are confused because they 'initially believed they *were* being beautiful, vulnerable, "themselves" onstage, only to be told otherwise' (2011b: 191). Purcell Gates interprets this disagreement to be caused by different 'markers of vulnerability', held by the students according to their socio-geographical identity, but judged by Gaulier from a position of power. My own interpretation of Gaulier's pedagogy, presented in Chapter 2, in which he spectates, responds to and verbalizes the reaction of the heterogeneous group of students that surround him - offers an adjustment to Purcell Gates' conclusion. I agree that the identification of the 'hidden twin, ridiculous, comic, vulnerable and stupid' (Gaulier 2007: 302) is negotiated externally to the performing student, but I

⁸⁴ Camilla later took the longer Clown course, and appeared in the end-of-term Clown Show (December, 2013) as a very enthusiastic cleaner, who was delighted to get a short opportunity to come onstage when another clown spilled water. This character was very different to the schoolmistress, but also made me laugh, further demonstrating that the externally negotiated self does not have to correspond identically to the student's understanding of herself.

propose rather that it is the watching students, rather than the teacher, who identify these markers.

The red nose may have a more basic function in this exchange between clown and audience. Davison critiques the conception of the red nose as a mask like the others, due to its connection with circus clowns in the 19th century, as will be explored below. Davison, believing that ‘one can clown without a red nose’, seems to align himself with the teacher Mosche Cohen, who states on a blog that the nose is superfluous and misleading to the students, who may be tempted to rely on the nose ‘to do the clowning for them’ (Cohen 2012, cited by Davison 2013: 197). However, at no stage in the Gaulier course is it suggested that the mask, or costume, does ‘the work’ of the clown. I suggest that the ‘work’ of the red nose may be to signify that the performer is a clown, and that as such they intend to make the audience laugh. Frost and Yarrow describe an exemplar Lecoq clown arriving in front of his audience:

A clown emerges from behind a screen. He wears a red nose, but otherwise has no props. He looks at us. And for some reason we laugh. [...] The clown has done nothing - except *notice* us. And yet we are laughing (Frost and Yarrow 1990: 67, emphasis original).

Frost and Yarrow praise the clown’s ability to make the audience laugh simply by reacting to the audience, and point out that he does so without comic props or material apart from a red nose. Perhaps the red nose communicates the intention of the clown to make us laugh, and it is the knowledge of that intention, ‘for some reason’, that causes laughter in the audience. Felner describes the way that Decroux’s use of neutral mask ‘creates a degree of abstraction that removes mime from the literal realistic plane’ (Felner 1985: 61). The mask may serve not only as a signifier of clown, but as a way of abstracting the face, distorting and reimagining the face as a fantastic, or ridiculous, object.

Lisa Trahair notes that film theorists have a tendency to use ‘slapstick’ interchangeably with ‘physical comedy’ when discussing early cinematic comedy (Trahair 2002: 317). Trahair distinguishes slapstick from physical comedy by contesting that the former is a particular stylised performance mode, which ‘does not necessarily relate to violence, physicality, or action’ (2002: 317),

instead being a stylization of physical experience which can be communicated with the audience. Trahair examines Mack Sennett's use of slapstick, and so examines filmic stylization alongside the performance.⁸⁵ She draws attention to the origin of the term:

Larry Langman contends that a slapstick was a device used by a prompter to cue the audience to laugh and thus argues that while slapstick is a kind of physical comedy, not all physical comedy is slapstick (Trahair 2002: 316).

The use of this prompting device can tell us something about the slapstick body, and possibly the clown body as well. The slapstick was a signal to the audience, and was timed to punctuate a gag with an audible sound. This communicates the comic intention, helps us understand that this is not real violence or accident, but a physical joke. The slapstick body could also be said to telegraph its comic intention, using one or more of a range of conventions to do so. Perhaps this could be a bright or unusually shaped costume, sound effect, pausing narrative action to turn the face toward the audience, or a red nose. The exaggerating costume works, in the same way as the prop slapstick, to remind the audience that the clown's ineptitude is deliberate and being displayed for the purpose of laughter.

Ridiculous Self

Both Gaulier's vocabulary of the clown as a 'hidden twin' and Lecoq's depiction of an 'inner clown' suggest that something about clown performance is personal to each performer:

We are all clowns, we all think we are beautiful, clever and strong, whereas we all have our weaknesses, our ridiculous side, which can make people laugh when we allow it to express itself (Lecoq 2002: 154).

Both teachers use the word 'ridiculous' - meaning 'that which excites laughter' - to describe clowns and their appearance and actions. Murray connects the ridiculous with weakness when he suggests that clowning allows students to 'come to terms with the more ridiculous - and therefore vulnerable - dimensions

⁸⁵ Sennet was the founder of Keystone Studios, and a prolific director of comic films.

of our personality' (2003: 63). However, the ridiculous is defined by the laughter response of the audience. Immediately following the observation above, Lecoq provides an example of a student finding their ridiculous side, and it is located in presenting the body to other people:

[T]here were students with legs so thin that they hardly dared show them, but who found, in playing the clown, a way to exhibit their skinniness for the pleasure of the onlookers. At last they were free to be as they were, and to make people laugh (Lecoq 2002: 154).

Here the thin-legged body, previously experienced as embarrassingly imperfect, becomes ridiculous when it is demonstrated to onlookers. The term 'ridiculous' and the description of the student exhibiting their body both infer a laughing audience. The last sentence 'free to be as they were' potentially describes both dimensions of a personality, as Murray suggests, and the material reality of the skinny-legged body. Both suggest that it is only in exhibition to an audience that these things become clowning. Like beauty, ridiculousness is identified by spectators, and it is identified in the vocal response of laughter.

If Lecoq's statement is read alongside Purcell Gates' understanding of an externally negotiated self, we can understand the clown body as one that is presented as ridiculous, as identified by the response of other people. The 'weaknesses' that Lecoq sees in a clown student can be understood as her 'ridiculous side' - or, that about her that makes people laugh.⁸⁶ As a result, the 'personal weakness' that is understood as Lecoq's most important ingredient for clown is identified by the audience, the observers and laughers. While the ridiculousness of clowns is described as deep, personal and individual, on another level it is also superficial, trivial and led by generic convention. The clown presents their abnormality in order that it is laughed at. The previous chapter suggested that clown costumes function as markers of social misunderstanding, but there is something that seems more basic about laughing at the shape of a performer's body. The clown 'shows his weak points - thin legs, big chest, short arms - wearing clothes that draw attention to them, where most people use clothes to hide them' (Lecoq 2006: 115). My own clown costume, coincidentally with Lecoq's example student, showed off my skinny legs and

⁸⁶ Lecoq was not necessarily aware of this meaning, since he describes a flop as a moment when 'It was terrible, ridiculous. Nobody laughed' (Lecoq 2006: 115).

arms, and I learned to use this reality of my body to make people laugh. However, the experience of showing my legs in this way did make me feel vulnerable. This shape has always been a fact of my body, and one that, as a teenager, I was conscious of - like Lecoq's student I 'hardly dared show' my limbs, and stood slouched in attempt to hide my height. For Lecoq, the revealing power of a red nose is balanced by the fact that the student is 'partly protected' against discomfort by the small mask, which reminds him that the audience 'does not directly make fun of him' (Lecoq 2002: 159). On Gaulier's Clown course, in much the same way as I learnt to accept and acknowledge flops, I also learnt to acknowledge and even show off something I usually hide. The very fact of this hiding has meant that I experience this physical 'weakness' or abnormality as being intermingled with my concept of self.⁸⁷ At the same time, though bodies are individual, they can also be put into categories - all individuals with skinny or long legs can do the same things in order to show them off. One of the best ways to do so, for example, is to stand next to somebody with short, fat legs, making a clear contrast between the two bodies and exaggerating both, as was seen between Joe and Jim in Gaulier's story. There is a repertoire of body-based visual humour that clowns can draw on.

Circus Clown Bodies

Gaulier's origin story of clowning (2007: 275-277) is set in a newly established circus founded by an equestrian, who may remind the reader versed in English circus history of Philip Astley.⁸⁸ There exist similar origin stories set in a similar time and place, which Davison traces to a particular stooge act, 'The Tailor Riding to Brentford', in which it appeared that a drunk spectator invaded the ring and rode a horse, clumsily, which made audiences laugh. Davison suggests that stories describing the supposedly spontaneous 'birth' of this act describe a piece of clown repertoire popular in equestrian circuses, a 'clown number involving a plant: someone who the audience believes is a mere spectator, possibly drunk, stumbling into the ring' (Davison 2013: 68). Helen Stoddart

⁸⁷ The idea that audiences identify ridiculousness recalls the discussion of Pedagogy and Politics in Chapter 2. It can be very difficult and unpleasant to acknowledge a reality of the body, and as Irving noted, some students find this process painful rather than enjoyable or liberating.

⁸⁸ In the 1768, Astley converted a riding school in London to show trick-riding in a circular arena, and later gathered together popular acts into a formal, commercial organisation. See Stoddart (2000: 13-19).

(2000) in her study of circus history and representation describes the act as a 'defining instance of clowning in the circus' (2000: 98) that was repeated frequently in circuses around the world. In this act, the plant appears clumsy but is in fact skilled enough not to endanger the performer, horse or audience.⁸⁹

This Auguste clown emerged in Paris at the end of the 19th century.⁹⁰ This new type of clown had a particular relationship with the audience:

[T]he auguste is also one of us, one of the new circus audience, one of the masses. [...] He has another advantage: being an imposter, he is not called upon to master any of the skills of the circus. This new clown can be as bad at anything as he wants, as long as he is funny (Davison 2013: 70-71).

The Auguste has a failing body which resembles the bodies of ordinary people, or 'the masses', creating comedy in the circus by apparently failing at the skills of the circus. As the previous chapter argued, failure, or the flop, remains a key skill explored at Gaulier's school, and so an examination of the circus Auguste may help elucidate the clown practices taught there.

Stoddart seems to be describing Auguste clowns when she locates clown comedy in the bodies of the circus:

the display of superior levels of discipline and control over the body is the foundation of circus sensationalism. The 'Taylor riding to Brentford' sketch suggests that circus clowning is nothing but the flip side to this coin in its staging of bodies which are made the object of laughter precisely for their physical ineptitude and failures of social and physical perception (Stoddart 2000: 99).

Stoddart finds Bergson's humour theory instructive to an understanding of circus comedy.⁹¹ She points out the similarities between Bergson's vocabulary and the imagery of a circus; Bergson writes that the human soul has 'winged lightness' while the material body 'is obstinate and resists', and Stoddart suggests that aerialists and clowns provide a neat embodiment of this contrast (2000: 100).

⁸⁹ Stoddart explains that some of the resonance of this act may be created because of its parodying of a real political event (Stoddart 2000: 97-99). Townsen describes it as 'the earliest acrobatic clown act (1976: 112).

⁹⁰ See Davison (2013: 65-86).

⁹¹ Bergson, writing in the early 20th century was concerned with the same themes that were enacted in circuses at the time.

Bergson's analysis of physical humour concentrates on 'mechanical inelasticity' (Bergson 1999: 15), especially when it takes the place of adaptability and 'the living pliability of a human being'. Humans, he argues, seek to be imaginative, flexible and responsive, and they make us laugh when they are repetitive or limited by the physical world, which contrasts with this aspiration. Stoddart's suggestion is that the clowns demonstrate this inelasticity, while the aerialists and acrobats show an ideally light, flexible version of humanity to which the audience aspire.⁹² Gaulier's costumes, which highlight the realities of the body, do show the clowns as being restricted by material reality but do not depend on heaviness or inelasticity to do so.

The Auguste appeared alongside a clown partner, known as the Whiteface. This double act in circus clowning contrasted with one another in a comic partnership. Following the development of the Auguste soloist, this new clown began appearing alongside the clown of the former whiteface tradition, and the double act grew in popularity, 'The dramatic possibilities suddenly expanded: two clowns together can play longer scenes, take up more time and evolve more intricate gags' (Davison 2013: 71). For Davison, this dramatic possibility made the double acts more theatrical than the previous clown interludes, with drama being created by contrasting characters, which he considers to mean that turn of the century circus comedy relied on 'the personalities and relationships of clowns' (2013: 72).⁹³ It is not clear whether or not these are dramatic, acted personalities or authentic personalities found outside the ring, but he does offer a case study in which perhaps real life matches the performance dynamic when

⁹² An interesting corollary to this opposition can be seen in the display of trained animals in circuses. Peta Tait describes elephants being presented as "Gentle giant clowns" (Tait 2012: 75). She points out that elephants performing in circus had the capacity to resist and attack trainers, but were presented as comical simulations of human activity

the comic effect was achieved through the absurdity of having large elephant bodies appear to do everyday activities. While elephants displayed cleverness in using props, the comedy undermined an impression of dignity (Tait 2012: 75)

The elephant's body is incongruous to the tasks being performed, but also demonstrates contradictory cleverness and absurdity. Tait goes on to examine the potential for the audience to read similarity of emotional experience between themselves and the elephant performer. She notes an alternative argument, "Human-like action makes the elephant's body shape explicit" (Tait 2012: 101). In this case, the elephant's attempt at the human action draws attention to, and thus displays for our enjoyment, the elephant body. In this way, the demonstration of contrasts between bodies remains an important element of circus.

⁹³ Elsewhere in the book, Davison examines the contrast between the Auguste and Whiteface as being one of 'mis-match between fiction and reality' (2013: 92). The Whiteface tries to create a fiction, or perform an act, whilst the Auguste acknowledges and enjoys the presence of the audience.

he examines the ‘superstars of the turn of the century’, a double act named Footit and Chocolat. Cuban performer Chocolat (Raphael Padilla) was the former servant of an English clown performer, Tony Grice. Grice included his employee Padilla in clown numbers:

His performing debut was one half of a horse [...] which he followed with various servant roles which required him to be on the receiving end of multiple slaps, blows and kicks (Davison 2013: 71).

Later, when Padilla was sacked by Grice, he was employed by Geo Footit (2013: 71). Davison reveals an economic and power disparity between what we may otherwise consider to be a partnership. With this knowledge, the act now seems particularly violent, as the scenes played by the duet emphasise (or even justify) this imbalance, where ‘Chocolat was the perfect opposite to Footit: slow, stoic, clumsy and stupid, versus Footit’s intelligence, nervousness and lightness’ (2013: 71). The pair used slapstick violence and dialogue for comedy. Perhaps the subtlety of the double act has been lost in documentation or description, but it seems that Padilla’s low status is authentic, rather than performed, and the European audiences believe the servant to be ‘slow, stoic, clumsy and stupid’, a judgement that the performances reinforced.⁹⁴ Stoddart suggests that clowns create laughter by their bodies that contrast to the rest of the circus, displaying ‘physical ineptitude and failures of social and physical perception’ (2000: 99). It is reasonable to extend from this notion that a trained clown makes a conscious performance of these traits. The clown’s bodies look physically inept, clumsy and unskilled in a way that highlights the bodily perfection of the other acts; and they also appear to be socially ‘wrong’ in their context. Failures of social perception could be understood to match Gaulier’s ‘stupid ideas’, as explored in the previous chapter, whereas physical ineptitude describes clumsiness as well as a visually ridiculous body.

These two types of ineptitude are performed in a clown act in *Varekai*, by Cirque du Soleil, which I will examine at some length as an example of a high-profile contemporary clown act which can be compared to the Clown course at

⁹⁴ Images (unnumbered colour plates Towsen 1976) suggest that the hierarchy between the two was made more ambiguous by the smartness of Chocolat’s tailcoat and suit compared to the loose, colourful costume with hat and neck ruffle worn by Footit. Towsen suggests ‘if the auguste were meant to be on the receiving end of all the slaps and kicks, then these blows would be more amusing if the auguste were an impeccable gentleman’ (1976: 219).

Gaulier's school. Directed by the Gaulier-influenced McCrystal, this number was originally performed by Mooky Cornish and Claudio Carneiro. Lucy Bradridge, who has worked extensively as a designer with Spymonkey, designed the costumes. McCrystal, Bradridge and Spymonkey also collaborated with Cirque du Soleil on clown acts for their 'adult' show, *Zumanity*. In *Varekai*, the clowns attempt a magic act, with Carneiro as the magician and Cornish as the assistant. We could read Cornish's inept, unglamorous assistant to hold a genuinely lower status than Carneiro, but in performance we see the status relationship between them is more subtle than the relationship between Footit and Chocolat, and the comedy balanced between their different ineptitudes. Cornish performs physical ineptitude as she enters the scene. She jumps awkwardly from behind a table, revealing a hyper-feminine costume, with bright makeup and a bright blonde wig. Her costume is garish and emphasises her full figure, being a short and low-cut sheer dress trimmed with fluffy fur. In contrast, Carneiro is a tall, slim man, wearing a tall turban, brightly coloured harem trousers and a balloon-sleeved jacket with a naked chest and small beard. As he runs the trousers and sleeves flap around his legs and arms. Carneiro's costume parodies the idea of an imposing, mystical, oriental magician, but his presentation of tricks performs ineptitude. He makes a long magic wand appear in his hands. However, as he begins to wave the wand around, it collapses into several short tubes on a thread. The premise of a magic act provides the audience with a set of generic expectations, which are immediately broken by the failure of this trick, which exposes the technique used to create an illusion of appearance from nowhere. Cornish and Carneiro demonstrate physical ineptitude in a series of 'inept' actions. Carneiro cannot make anything appear or disappear, but can squeeze his slim body through the frame of a tennis racket. Cornish trips and falls as she runs, she cannot catch a tennis racket, she gets the racket stuck around her shoulders and breasts while trying to repeat Carneiro's trick, but seems to be deliberately and gleefully sabotaging the magic act. Ineptitude is presented alongside skill, even if it misplaced skill, indicating 'failures of social and physical perception'.

As well as performing physical ineptitude, Cornish and Carneiro demonstrate failure in social perception, or a stupid idea, since they contrast with the aesthetic of the circus in which they feature. Peta Tait (2005) explores the ways

in which bodies in circus perform cultural ideas, and can distort or fake their cultural identity. Tait describes Cirque du Soleil as presenting 'whimsical androgyny' through the combination of 'beautiful visual aesthetic with muscular action' (2005: 126). She suggests that the company seek to elide bodily identities:

With unisex costuming, the muscular gracefulness of male and female teams of acrobats and aerialists is indistinguishable [...] Although casts are international, this non-verbal new circus, unlike traditional circus, does not present national and ethnic identity, and while the stereotypical sexy female circus body is absent, not so sensuality or eroticism (Tait 2005: 127).

If the circus as a whole seeks to reject or blur gender demarcations, Carneiro's orientalised magician and Cornish's sexy female assistant contrast with their surroundings in their bluntly gendered and orientalised costumes. The presentation of these bodies is a social failure in comparison to the androgynous, undistinguished, skilled bodies beside them, adding a further layer of comical failure in the clowns' presentation of their bodies.⁹⁵ In *Varekai*, bodies are presented as harmonious and indistinct, which subverts the gender coding persistent in other contemporary circus.⁹⁶ In this context, Cornish and Carneiro's replaying of the gender and ethnicity divisions that *Varekai* deliberately avoids, Cornish's costume suggests a childish intention to be a 'glamorous' magician's assistant, and a failure to achieve this due to the poorly applied makeup, the inability to jump in her shoes, and the basic failure of her body to meet the expectations of this role. Cornish's jump, the hem of her dress and her body bouncing clumsily, is particularly comical when compared to the disciplined and controlled circus bodies. Stoddart describes the female aerialist's body as a site of attractive ambivalence:

[T]he female aerialist's performance of extreme femininity is shadowed by (or is perhaps, more accurately, the shadow for) a

⁹⁵ Tait briefly surveys the action in *Varekai*, describing winged costumes, mechanical apparatus and figures moving in a "metal forest" of poles. However, she makes no mention of the clown act described here.

⁹⁶ For example, in *Babushkin Secret*, by Moscow State Circus (January 10, 2013), bodies were costumed in a heavily gendered way, with men in tight trousers and showing bare, broad chests, and women in short skirts, cut-out-effect dresses and long flowing hair. In this case the clowns, a male-female duo named Pavlik and Klava, wore brightly coloured costumes covering all their skin, which enhanced the fact that both were tall and skinny. Contrasted to the gendered display of the other bodies, the clowns looked androgynous and non-sexual.

strength of force which might more widely be regarded as being of masculine proportions (Stoddart 2000: 177).

Cornish's costume is a 'performance of extreme femininity', which is starkly contrasted with her clumsiness and lack of bodily control, rather than subtly shadowed by masculine strength. Her performance of ineptitude can be seen as the 'flip side to the coin' of the extremely controlled and precise bodies that are presented in the other acts of this particular circus. These follow a comic dramaturgy that uses the performance of failure described in the previous chapter.

Physical and social ineptitudes performed by the clown bodies do not have to be authentic. In this act we can see that Cornish and Carneiro's bodies are in fact highly controlled, strong and skilled. There is a further comic embodiment of contradiction in the bodies of performers who we know have to be strong, controlled, skilled and flexible in their presentation of themselves as weak, clumsy, inept and wrongly shaped. The clown body is skilfully presented as inept - precisely clumsy, deliberately accidental. This act bears similarities to the approach to the ridiculous body in the Clown workshop at École Philippe Gaulier, and is connected to the school via the work of McCrystal. Bradridge's costumes exaggerate not only the shape of the performer's actual bodies, but also communicate a social misunderstanding. The clowns use a hierarchical relationship that can be traced through circus history to those of the whiteface and auguste.

In the school's Clown Show (2013), one particular act stands out for using circus figures and repertoire. Monsieur Loyal introduced them as world famous acrobats. A short woman in a dress with padded breasts and bum entered, followed by a very tall man in shorts and bare legs. Their acrobatic routine featured jumps, kicks and running, and the laughs came when the two performers attempted the same action, but because of their differences in size, could not do the same thing, and hit each other several times. Later in the show, the same couple performed another version of the same act - but like Joe and Jim in Gaulier's story, they had swapped costumes. The routine was choreographed with small changes from its previous version, so that the same accidental collisions took place despite the role reversal. This act drew on a

circus repertoire that sees bodies being ridiculous without the discourse of self and honesty as described by Lecoq.

Lecoq seems to have been uninterested in the clown tropes associated with the circus. He began looking at clown when ‘considering the relationship between the Commedia dell’Arte and circus clowns’ (Murray 2003: 61). Students in this class worked in a circle, ‘recalling the circus ring’ (Lecoq 2002: 152). However, Lecoq seems to have rejected circus repertoire:

The reference to circus, which is bound to surface as soon as clowns are mentioned, remains marginal, in my view. As a child, I saw the Fratellini brothers, Grock, the Cairoli trio, Portos and Carletos, all at the Médrano circus in Montmartre, but we were not after this kind of clown at the school. Apart from the comic register, we took no external models, either formal or stylistic, and the students themselves had no knowledge of the clowns I have mentioned (Lecoq 2002: 154).

Lecoq seems to suggest that his students’ clown ‘research’ was based on the individual, and thus it was different from circus clowning because it did not work from ‘external models’. However, he acknowledges that both the circus and his research use ‘the comic register,’ emphasising audience laughter. Murray explains that Lecoq’s clown teaching was rooted more in the quest for vulnerability and ridiculousness, than in repertoire that could be mimicked from existing clown styles, and thus considered there to be ‘limitations of the genre of circus clowning for theatre’ (Murray 2003: 61-62). This is interesting since Commedia dell’Arte also used repertoire in the form of (usually physical) *lazzi*, defined as ‘any discrete, or independent, comic and repeatable activity that guaranteed laughs’ (Gordon 2007: 80). Furthermore, examples of popular comedians performing externally modelled comic material can be found in Lecoq’s writing.

In the first two chapters of *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*, Lecoq introduces his approach to mime, illustrating his theories with examples of people moving. Many of these examples of movement are taken from life, such as a man walking down the street, people in a cafe, children at play. He also provides examples from performance, where performers use gait and costume to create characters physically, and the examples he chooses are Chaplin, Marceau as Bip, Groucho

Marx, and Harlequin. These clown figures are offered as clear examples of physicality on stage, suggesting that Lecoq understands clown as a performance style connected inextricably to mime, and perhaps even understands these clown performances as clear examples of mime practice.⁹⁷ While for Lecoq all acting has its roots in mime, I feel that it is significant that these examples of physical, comic acting are chosen to illustrate his writing, as this suggests that clown physicality conveys Lecoq's ideals of action, gesture and physicality most clearly. Lecoq acknowledged clowns and comic bodies as bodies that drew on playful, expressive physicality, and work with commedia and clown is significant in his school to this day.

Gaulier has a far closer relationship with the circus than did Lecoq. The circus - in the abstract - is evoked with some frequency in Gaulier's classroom, occasionally being provided as the setting for an improvisation. For example, an exercise in which the task could be described simply as 'entertain the audience', is presented under the title 'Panic at the Circus', in which the usual pair of clowns are absent:

'Give us our money back! Give us our money back!' Shout the public,
as they wait at the circus, without clowns.

A third, inexperienced clown enters the circus ring. Will they save the
show and save the circus all their takings? (Gaulier 2007: 304)

This setting serves to raise the stakes of the improvisation, as the clown imagines an angry audience that must be won over. However, it also conjures the setting of a big top and perhaps other associations of what the audience may have expected these missing clowns to do. Gaulier has also influenced contemporary circus: he taught a number of clowns that have worked at Cirque du Soleil, and this enormously successful commercial circus has also employed two advocates of Gaulier's teaching, Basauri and McCrystal.

Gaulier recommends only one text on clowning to his students - Tristan Rémy's (1962) compilation of clown 'entrées', a French text translated and used extensively by both Davison (2013) and Cuming (2011). Rémy's collection was based on real acts by working circus clowns, which 'had been passed from clown

⁹⁷ See Murray 2002 and Felner 1985 for nuanced discussion of Lecoq's relationship with the 'meaning and practice of mime' (Murray 2002: 79)

to clown and had not previously been documented in written form' (Cumming 2011: 20). Rémy described this as a 'collective repertoire' (translated in Cumming 2011: 20). The acts contain scenarios between small groups of clowns, arranged in a hierarchical relationship:

[T]he clever leader; the follower who thinks she's clever but isn't; and the fool who knows she is stupid. In circus parlance these are Clown (or Whiteface), Auguste, Droll, although there are a number of other identifiers for the third clown: Zany, Contre-Auguste, Pitre (Cumming 2011: 37).

Cumming identifies an additional member of this hierarchy, the (sometimes invisible) ringmaster, generically named 'Monsieur Loyal'. Davison explains that this name is given after 'the actual Loyal family, who produced several ringmasters, the most famous being Georges Loyal' (Davison 2013: 90). This visible or hidden authority keeps the status of all clowns, even the clever whiteface, among the lowest in the circus. In the school's Clown Show (December, 2013), at least one of Rémy's scene outlines was used - in which (using this terminology) an Auguste tricked a Droll into bending over to receive a kick in the bum. The Droll tried to repeat the trick, but invited a cleverer Clown or Whiteface to the stage, and was thus tricked again and received another kick. As mentioned in Chapter 2, 'Monsieur Loyal' - the role taken by a student of the course wearing a smart shirt and tie - introduced the Clown Show. His authority was undermined by the invisible power of the director, Gaulier with his telephone cue. These circus influences appeared amongst a variety of other acts, but were included as appropriate material for clown students, providing a 'stupid idea' and game that could be shared with the audience.

Gaulier's interest in flop suggests that the Auguste, who aspires to be clever but is not, is the most relevant clown role to this school. However, Davison pays particular attention to the work of the Fratellini trio, and credits Albert Fratellini, a Counter-auguste, with originating the red nose used in both circus and in Lecoq's mask-based practice. He credits Fratellini with beginning 'the vogue for the outlandishly sized prosthetic version that was copied the world over' (2013: 197). Fratellini's nose and the rest of his costume were, in comparison to the whiteface and auguste, 'grotesque' (Davison 2013: 89). The 'grotesqueness' described by Davison is visible in photos of the trio, where

Francois, the whiteface, wears a bright suit, elegant makeup and a small hat; Paul, the Auguste, wears a tailcoat and top hat with naturalistic makeup and a bald head; and Albert wears enormous shoes and has a colourfully painted face, with white around the eyes, red lips with a white outline, and a large foam red nose. This counter-auguste appearance is familiar from North American Circus.⁹⁸ On the other hand, Paul Fratellini's Auguste costume suggested he is trying to look smart, but his smart suit reveals his big chest and bald head. Though the clowns at Gaulier's school wear the counter-auguste's prosthetic nose, their costumes more resemble the auguste's, which emphasise their own ridiculous bodies, without distorting them.

During the short Clown workshop in 2009, we did work in pairs and small groups, but we did not tackle any written scenes such as those documented by Rémy. The scenes in the show at the end of the longer course suggest that the more advanced students did do some exploration of the relationships between clowns. Circus clowns, at different places and times, have had bodies that contrasted with the circus, and have been presented in pairs where status and character was opposed, as in the case of 'Footit and Chocolat' and *Varekai*. Gaulier's allusions to circus clowning bring with them the associations of material performed in this context, and his teaching supports students to experiment with it, to see if they can be funny. While the ridiculousness of each clown body is explored according to the students in the room, material can be successfully found in traditions including that of the circus.

Developing a Clown Repertoire

Lecoq's Clown course takes place after a long period of actor training and mask work, so the 'students are used to investing themselves fully in their playing, used to knowing and showing themselves in front of others' (2002: 159). He directly criticised short clown workshops for avoiding this necessary preparation. Gaulier, on the other hand, has experimented with the order of his shorter workshops (which last between a week and three months), and the clown workshop has not always been the final stage in his curriculum 'au menu'. Gibbons points out that in Gaulier's schedule in 2012, the teacher moved the

⁹⁸ See Davison (2013: 92-93) and Towsen (1976: 233-281).

Clown course from its place at the end of the second year. Clown is now placed at the end of the first year and the beginning of the second year. The fact that Gaulier is willing to rearrange courses in order to improve student experience, alongside the fact he offers short workshops for beginners in Clown and Bouffon, suggests that he sees prior physical exploration or extensive mask training as less essential to clown training than did Lecoq. However, students do not regard the clown workshop as completely separable from the rest of the courses. Several interviewees mentioned other courses when I asked about their experience of the clown workshop, conveying a sense that the learning is on going and developmental across the curriculum. There is the sense, created by the position of the Clown course in the pedagogies of Lecoq and Gaulier, that the clown body is prepared in a variety of theatrical skills. This connects to the tradition of circus clowns being trained in other disciplines. Popov's training was originally in acrobatics and slack-wire walking, but that after learning to execute this skill, he preferred to use it to make people laugh (1970: 15). He was not alone in this trajectory; in fact Towsen identifies this as a circus tradition:

some circus performers become clowns after injuring themselves in a fall, while others turn to clowning as an opportunity to exercise their talents in a more creative manner [...] The clown's comic "intuition" actually draws on years of training and experience (Towsen 1976: 83).

This method of recruiting circus clowns unsettles Stoddart's idea of clown bodies being contrasted to the rest of the bodies in the circus, as the clowns are likely to be ex-acrobats.⁹⁹ The clown body in Gaulier's school shares with the circus clown body the fact that it is trained in a variety of skills: circus, acrobatics, mask, tragedy, perhaps singing and dance. As a result, it is a body equipped with a broad range of skills that can be called upon, it can change quickly in emotional tone, skill level, or status by dipping into a metaphorical bag of tricks. The importance of a developed repertoire connects the clown that was once an acrobat, grown too old for the high wire, with the clown student that has taken lots of different courses, with the contemporary short-workshop structure in which experienced performers study clown workshops to continue professional development.

⁹⁹ Perhaps, though, costume plays a further part here. The bodies do not have to be physically different, but merely presented as such, using the conventions described above, along with costumes designed to exaggerate what ensemble costumes could usually lessen.

The costume may work as a more literal bag of tricks, with parts of the costume providing opportunities for play. For example, in 2009, a student in a vampire costume had a plastic set of fangs. One day when she was on stage, the teeth started to fall out of her mouth, and Gaulier encouraged her to acknowledge this fact, and use it as an opportunity to make the audience laugh. Instead of replacing the teeth with her hand, the student found several minutes of laughs when we responded to her trying to manoeuvre the teeth with only her lips and tongue. Gaulier describes the fun to be had with novelty props such as a plastic poo, itching powder, a whoopee cushion (2007: 291). If a clown body is well prepared and has a variety of skills to draw on, it can be more versatile, and thus able to attempt more strategies in order to elicit laughter. Experienced clowns have a larger repertoire, since they can add to it each time the audience laughs at something new. This might create the impression that they are improvising, since they can find a gag to perform in such a wide variety of situations.

As discussed under 'Professional Play' in Chapter 3, clowns repeating scenes must find games that they can replay with pleasure, and then depend on this pleasure for their work. This process of building a repertoire is individual, and each student has to take responsibility for their own memory, and find appropriate places where they can repeat existing games. I will examine a variety of examples where individual repertoires have been built, and where these cannot be passed from one clown to another, in order to argue that the development of embodied material is a skill learned in the classroom but put into practice throughout a performer's career.

Wakenshaw and Burgers have both received critical acclaim for their clown performances that use illusory mime as the basis of their material (August 22, 2014; August 14, 2013; August 22, 2012).¹⁰⁰ Inviting spectators to participate, and thus making their mime skills appear less virtuosic, these performers draw on physical movement as the material of their shows. Burgers mimes scenes where he creates the illusions of a bicycle, a beggar, a bullfight and a saga of heartbreak between the bull and his family. He wears dark clothes, a full beard

¹⁰⁰ The predominance of what is commonly considered 'mime' in a show which is sold and reviewed as 'clown', shows a continuation of these two forms being merged and conflated.

and fingerless gloves. This costume does not associate him visually with mime traditions; neither does it explicitly mark him as a clown. The opening of his show does not give us a clear view of Burgers' body, as it consists of an extended game with the curtains, where he hides from the audience, kicking people as they come in, making people jump and playing hide-and seek from where we cannot see him. Here Burgers emphasises the games over the performing body, and sets up a playful environment before his illusory mime skills are seen. In our interview, Burgers described leaving the school with five minutes of material that he had performed in the end of term show. He did not perform for a while but then tried this same material at open mic nights, trying new games and expanding his material gradually.

Gaulier does not explicitly teach the illusory mime that Burgers used, but he does teach students to be sensitive to audiences, which was how Burgers describes developing his material. In another interview, Deans highlighted that compared to most contemporary actor training, Gaulier does no focused movement training (2012). When I took part in the summer clown school, we had only Gaulier's class, in which we did no stretching or cardiovascular activity prior to the clown exercises, suggesting that a formally trained body was not important for the course. However, when I took *Le Jeu*, each class was preceded by a two-hour movement session with another teacher. Mostly these were acrobatics, in which we explored balance and weight (the other students, by the end of the four-week course, could do handsprings and back-flips, while I spent hours every week attempting, and failing, to support myself in a handstand). Once a week we were led in intense two-hour fitness sessions, with some high-energy games. Movement teachers rotate along with the courses, so that when I left and the students who stayed began studying Neutral Mask, they had a different teacher, and a different approach to the movement class before Gaulier's teaching. This follows the pattern established when Gaulier taught with Pagneux, who led separate movement classes. Discussing the difference between mime and acrobatics, Felner cites Lecoq, translating from a 1964 lecture:

Pantolon, in a rage, would make a dangerous somersault, without performing a demonstration of an acrobatic exercise. The somersault was not visible in itself, but it was part of the architecture of anger,

and the audience only felt the overwhelming rage of Pantalón (Lecoq 1964: 136, translated and cited by Felner 1985: 20).

Felner explains that in historical mime, acrobatics are subsumed into the narrative action, so losing the separate identity as a performance form - acrobatics disappears into mime. Felner's understanding of the relationship between acrobatics and mime is telling for my understanding of a clown body - the clown body becomes one that is physically skilled, but does not present these skills as feats, instead using them in the service of creating narrative, emotion, and comedy. So skills in acrobatics, mime or any other performance skills can be used alongside the audience-focussed clown practices of complicit play and sensitivity to flops.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, Basauri and Park separate their experience of learning how to be a clown from the later process of making clown shows. They identified a type of on-going physical instruction that takes place throughout Gaulier's school, where Gaulier points out and gives instructions on the performer's body on stage. Basauri described a few of these instructions:

"You move too much" [...] "too stiff", "stop moving your head", "Why do you shake?" [...] he's asking you to have your body open. He's asking you to be light on your feet (Basauri and Park 2013).

Park described a corollary sense of 'anti-technique', where mime training was something to be derided, and the above instructions were part of a goal to be 'normal' on stage. I believe there is something in the phrasing of these points which means they are experienced as personal feedback rather than as a physical training. There is no blanket instruction on tallness, stillness, lightness, but instead habits are pointed out to individuals. So students who are not told to 'be tall' do not stretch artificially, but students (like myself) who are given this instruction are made aware of their habitual slouch. However, these instructions do result in a certain type of physicality, bound up in ideas of neutrality and readiness, to be shared by Gaulier performers. As a result, a certain way of moving and standing (suggested by the above to be an easy, or relaxed stillness in the body) comes to be seen as a marker for an open, available and playing performer who is equipped to play as a clown. It also means that the performer does only the movements necessary to make people laugh, and does not hide the

funny movement among other unnecessary ones. The body is presented as it is - the height, size, proportions, especially if they are unusual - are displayed with a relaxed physical expression that seems to claim status for the body.

Spymonkey very clearly exploit the comic potential of the performer's own bodies, displayed in a ridiculous manner. I asked Basauri and Park about the effects of this, and they expressed the problems with making work based so closely on the performers and their bodies:

the material we've created is so inherently to do with who we are. So, to put replacements in is a difficult thing [...] we've been lucky to have been able to stay together for as long as we have as a quartet. [But within that] there's also a kernel of a real dilemma and a problem. Which is that the stuff that we make is wrapped up in our relationship on stage. The four of us, just the group of who we are (Park 2013).

The company have discussed the possibility of employing other actors to tour the shows that they have created, a process which would demand adapting the shows to the new performers.

AB: ...if the Spanish man is not fat, there will not be a fat joke. There will be other jokes, 'cause everybody...

TP: Yup, has certain things about them (2013)

The practitioners agree that some jokes must be based in the reality of the performer's body, and the thing 'about them' that makes audiences laugh. Though I asked about the bodies, Park and Basauri are describing the relationships between the people as well. Describing a physical stunt seen by the company as 'a banker', guaranteed to get a laugh (Basauri offers a sweet to a puppet horse, which responds by punching Basauri in the mouth), Park emphasises that an authentic part of Basauri's personality, made visible in the character, contributes to the joke.

Park: [...] part of it is, is Aitor - the bit of Aitor which is trying to defend-

Basauri: - Artistic integrity (2013)

Here, Basauri's attitude is also made ridiculous, and his physical actions and costume (including a toupee that falls off when he is punched) are made to conflict with his intention to be a sophisticated actor with artistic integrity.

Basauri agreed that this part of the character is authentic, a ridiculous side of his personality. When off-stage, Basauri is very knowledgeable, and speaks with confidence and insight into comic theory, actor training, and the experience of working in this field. This aspect of him thus appears ridiculous in the show, while it does not in conversation.

A return to my earlier case study, Cirque du Soleil's *Varekai*, illustrates the problem of replacing a clown performer. Joey Robinson-Holden took over Mooky Cornish's role in *Varekai* between 2004 and 2008. Robinson-Holden went on to study with Gaulier after working for Cirque du Soleil, and, in a 2011 interview with Davison, she looks back on the act with a critical eye that seems to be influenced by the teacher. Cast for her physical resemblance to Cornish, 'they were looking for a short fat-legged woman', Robinson-Holden was expected to 'learn and reproduce the routine in the same way as her predecessor' (Davison 2013: 117). The performer describes the rehearsal process as 'old-school' and short, with her time spent watching and mimicking Cornish, and considering costume. However, she describes a further development of the act as she went on performing in front of audiences:

I could see where the laughs were in Mooky's version, but mine wasn't funny in the same places. Mooky's wobbly legs and sliding around were her signature. I couldn't do that. But I'm good at falling over, so I used that. It took a whole year to nail the number (Robinson-Holden 2011, cited by Davison 2013: 117).

Despite the intention of her employer to create an exact reproduction of a successful act, Robinson-Holden took a year to get the performance to a standard she was happy with. The process described by Basauri and Park, where each performer 'has certain things about them' that can generate laughter could explain this phenomenon. As we have seen in the examples from the classroom, these 'things' are understood to originate in the body or character of the individual performer. Like Basauri's hypothetical replacement, Robinson-Holden found that physical similarity was not enough to find similar ridiculousness, if her legs weren't 'wobbly' in the same way, she had to change the gag to one that she was 'good at' - presumably this quality being measured by laughter. Robinson-Holden is acutely aware of 'where the laughs were' - or in other words, after what movements she elicited laughter, and thus how she was ridiculous. It

is surprising that she tells Davison there was no clown specialist, as McCrystal had directed the original number. Perhaps the company had hoped to replace the performer without making it a new version of the same routine. Davison asked Robinson-Holden what she believed Gaulier would say of her performance of the magician's assistant, and her answer, 'Not honest enough', seems to criticise the working practices of Cirque du Soleil, and to imply that since her training, Robinson-Holden would be more thorough with finding an authentic ridiculousness in performance, one that belonged more to her own body. Gaulier-trained performers can be seen in both these cases to be aware of the quality of laughter from their audiences, and to associate this with finding ridiculous aspects of individual bodies on stage.

Jos Houben, a Lecoq- and Gaulier-trained performer, established workshop teacher and director presents a lecture-performance, *The Art of Comedy* (2013) in which he discusses the body as a rich source of comic material, because audiences will recognise the ineptitudes that take the body away from its vertical stance. He demonstrates that to make people laugh, the performer must use their body precisely and remain aware of the audience and their reaction. Houben performs delicate and precise isolations, mimics animals, and demonstrates a sequence of slapstick accidents in slow motion, with each move isolated from the next. He performs a double take, and explains with words and movements how to perform one.¹⁰¹ This body can be used to make humans laugh, he argues, out of recognition, empathy and ridiculousness. On impersonating a chicken, Houben explains:

And it's important to get it so right that the audience laughs with two things. First with the clarity and the truth of your observation and the skill by which you're performing, (laughter), and the fact that you are a 40 year old man pretending to be a chicken (Laughter) (Houben 2013).

The audience admires the virtuosity with which Houben performs his chicken, and at the same time, see the ridiculousness of that act. The contrast between Houben the skilled performer, and the ridiculous things he chooses to do can be

¹⁰¹ Houben remains the expert, and performs things that most of the audience will be unable to perform. He also takes his own white male and not disabled body as normative. His lecture-demonstration does not share Gaulier's pedagogical approach, but mirrors the form of Lecoq's lecture-demonstration *Toute Bouge* (Murray 2013b).

seen as a point at which comedy is created, as he states that the audience laugh 'with' both sides of the performance. Slapstick is not taught as a physical skill in Gaulier's clown workshop, but clown practitioners use its signifiers and repertoire. In 2009, there was one particular exercise for which we were asked to save some banana peels. This archetypal gag prop immediately calls to mind a physical comic scenario. The students entered, placed the banana peel on the floor and shared with the audience our confidence in the inevitable ensuing hilarity. Here the traditions of slapstick and the physical trope of clowning are called to mind in the performance. Gaulier did not teach the students on that course to fall on the skin, but to take time developing the relationships around the gag. In the classroom it did not matter that nobody fell on the skin, as there were still laughs to be had at the 'absurdity and humanity' of the clown who thought it would be funny to trip her friend.

The examples above demonstrate a constant focus on the reaction of the audience to the action onstage, and an awareness of the performers to what they can do to excite laughter. Performers can develop routines which they are confident will be greeted by laughter, but only through a developmental process of listening to audiences, to find out what are the peculiarities of her body, voice, and expression that can make audiences laugh. While perhaps improvising or experimenting with different ideas, performers maintain an awareness of the audience's response. In Gaulier's writing, he discusses the bodies of clowns and clown students in relation to their audience. As I have shown, the clown body is presented as one that can use contrasts, and one that can perform ineptitude, as per circus tradition, but Gaulier emphasises that the clown body must be responsive to audiences. Each performer builds up her own repertoire of things they can do or show that they know, through experience, can make audiences laugh. This repertoire can draw from other classic acts or other individuals' material, but not all clown material will work for each performer, because of the material body and what personality or ridiculous self the audience identify in her. My own experience at the clown workshop was only four weeks. During that time I found a very small number of things that I could do with my body and costume that would make people laugh. Gaulier suggested some of them - moving my feet a tiny amount, and trying to speak through the snorkel. I also found a lot of pleasure imitating other clowns in the class. If I took time to show

this material to audiences, and developed it with audiences, I could try related material and extend this repertoire. The above case studies suggest that clown material, which can use apparent flops and physical skill, is developed with spectators rather than at Gaulier's Clown course.

Conclusion

There are a number of overlaps between Gaulier's clown and the tropes of circus clown, including the performance of social and physical ineptitude, highlighted by costume. Clowns contradict either their surroundings, such as the circus or drama in which they appear; their partner, in established traditions of costume; or their own character or body, where the clown or eccentric cannot control their own body. Contradiction, embodied in the clown, is less directly apparent in Gaulier's writing or teaching, but is identifiable in the work produced by Gaulier's students. Gaulier's clown, like the circus clown, is trained in a variety of dramatic and physical skills that can be put to use in service of comedy. There is also the sense that the clown is an experienced performer, with an embodied knowledge of what they can do which has made audiences laugh in the past.

Gaulier's clown students learn to communicate the intention of laughter-making. This has to do with physicality of eye contact, pace, and costume, including the meaning-laden plastic red nose. The red nose is considered a training mask, and learning to use it in performance is connected to learning to use other masks, neutral and character. In this way, Gaulier's clown body is masked, and so joins a tradition of thinking about acting and mime that separates the actor's presence from the character. However, the clown body is barely masked, with only the tip of the nose hidden. This means that compared to other masks studied in the mime tradition, the clown body is understood as being revealed by the mask, so that the weak, ridiculous performer is presented behind it. The red nose, since its use by Lecoq, has come to signify authenticity and revelation of 'self' in contemporary clowning, despite its origin in counter-auguste, 'grotesque' clown. Students of Gaulier's Clown course develop costumes and physically present themselves in a way that makes their colleagues laugh. Despite discourses of self and authenticity, it is the classmates and audience who discover this ridiculousness in the performer. The concepts of mime training

are pervasive, but in comparison to Lecoq, Gaulier seems more closely associated with circus themes of contrast and audience perception than with mime themes of authenticity and weakness. I have argued that rather than focusing on an internal search for personal weakness, Gaulier solicits an external search for the ridiculous, and students seek the thing about themselves that makes their classmates laugh.

Gaulier's clown body remains tied by many threads to mime, mask, and circus. I understand Gaulier's Clown students to seek authentic ways in which their own bodies can be displayed as ridiculous. The most important function for the body in this classroom is that it should excite laughter - and thus it is focussed on the audience, listening for and aiming toward increasing the laughter it excites.

Conclusion

‘Thank you for this horrible moment’ (2009)

My research questions sought to examine the realities of learning Clown at École Philippe Gaulier, by exploring the activities of the students and teacher. I was drawn to this enquiry by my personal experience of participating in the summer Clown workshop. I left the school feeling unsure of exactly what I had learned, or how I could apply this experience in a performance context. While Gaulier is connected with clowning by an increasing number of practitioners, and has been discussed alongside Lecoq in a number of publications and theses in the last thirty years, I found no text concentrating on this influential and distinctive teacher, and minimal theoretical discussion of his approach to clown. As a result, I sought to elucidate Gaulier’s key concepts of clowning, and to explore how these might be used in contemporary theatre and circus practice. A major part of my project has been an investigation of key terms, including *‘Le Jeu’* and *‘Flop’*. I have discovered that both rely on a particular engagement with a third participant in the pedagogical moment, actually a group, the audience of students who watch one another and provide the most important feedback a clown can have - laughter. I have termed this a *‘pedagogy of spectatorship’*, in which the teacher uses his authority to make the response of the student audience clear to the performer.

My thesis is that each student of Gaulier’s Clown course is invited to play with the intention of making her peers laugh, and it is her relationship with this audience that determines her success. She learns to develop a complicit relationship with the audience - *‘complicit’* being a term that I have used in line with the vocabulary of the school, translated from the French *complicité*, to refer to a shared, unfixed and multiplex play relationship. The student also learns to be aware when the audience are bored or otherwise not amused. Repeated experiences of the flop, when the audience does not laugh, give the student the opportunity to learn to play with failure, and in doing so convert it into successful clown performance. Gaulier’s personification of this moment as the friendly *‘Mr Flop’* makes the case that awareness of the flop reminds a clown to remain responsive to the audience. I have critically appropriated the term *‘ridiculous’* to refer to successful clowning, because of its definition as *‘that*

which elicits laughter'. By their laughter, it is the audience that determine the ridiculous aspects of each student, and she must listen to this response in order to find repeatable comic repertoire. I have shown that Gaulier, himself a skilled clown, performs the same skills that he teaches, using complicit play and an awareness of flops to offer his students precise observations about how they are ridiculous, whilst also making them laugh. This clown performance allows him to teach by example, but also by play and provocation.

In each of the clown practices explored in this thesis, ambiguity abounds. 'Play' and 'flop' are both terms that contain a multitude of meanings - and this ambiguity offers rich potential for each student to develop their own concepts. Drawing on Gaulier's own terminology, I have used 'complicit play' to describe play that contains multiple game types and multiple players in a colluding, flexible, manner. I have suggested that the term 'failure' is too absolute to be helpful in discussing what Gaulier and his students would call 'flops'. Flops can put an end to play, or they can be a rich source of laughter. They can form the structure of comic writing, and delicate treatment of flops can save an unfunny show. These ambiguities allow for a play of meanings in clown performances, and for the veracity of flops to remain pleasurably ambiguous. The use of a red nose mask as clown signifier helps to draw attention to each clown's own material body, while connecting her performance to a large existing repertoire and distorting her face. This means that the (usually embarrassing) realities of the body are shown off. In this way the embodied performance of clown can also contain an ambiguity between concepts of the self and the universal. Play, flop and the ridiculous body can be seen as generic skills, but also as personal, spontaneous expression of the self.

The learning at École Philippe Gaulier could not take place without the audience of peers, but it is led by Gaulier, who as a skilled spectator of the audience can identify and make clear to students what it is the audience finds ridiculous, and what it finds 'horrible'. He has a wide repertoire of games or potential 'stupid ideas' for his students to use to try and make audiences laugh. Gaulier's pedagogy of spectatorship is not prescriptive, but means that students can explore whatever the spectators seem to enjoy. For this reason, all students and Gaulier simultaneously play the roles of student, teacher, performer, and spectator. Significantly, performers must always be spectators of the audience,

and know whether they are flopping, what they are doing that is ridiculous and whether the audience are complicit in the clown game.

Gaulier's other courses still require research to build up a full picture of the school's practice and influence, and to contextualise his work on clown. I would be particularly interested to discover the politically complex comic genre of Bouffon, and to discover how this overlaps and differs from Clown. In my short experience with this genre, the audience seemed to be treated with more ambivalence and less reverence, so close analysis of the Bouffon's relationship with spectators might shed light on the potentially problematic aspects of clown as discussed in Chapter 5, or the politics of École Philippe Gaulier as discussed in Chapter 2. Although Clown is one of many genres taught by Gaulier, this course has been the focus of my writing since it is where my own experience lies. I have also been able to join a growing field of research exploring contemporary clown practice. A detailed demystification of Gaulier's practice in this genre is fitting at a time when there is increasing scholarly interest in clown, the subject appearing in recent publications by Davison and Peacock, a journal on *Comedy Studies* (launched in 2010) and a Centre for Comedy Studies Research at Brunel University (established in 2013) among others. My thesis also takes its place amongst an emergent interest in Gaulier's teaching and the clown practices in which his influence can be traced, as evidenced by the six PhD theses within the last seven years that refer to Gaulier's work. Where these theses provide useful discussion and reflection on the school, my focus on pedagogy and exploration of key skills and terminology has created a more thorough interrogation than any before it. I have expanded on ideas raised by Murray, Kendrick and Purcell Gates, and elucidated the concepts of play, complicité, flop and self.

Existing texts on Gaulier's school explicitly draw on the writers' own practical experience. With the exception of Irving, who responds to some ideas presented by Purcell Gates, the simultaneity of these PhD projects seems to have restricted them from addressing each other directly. These theses repeat a pattern seen in discussion of Lecoq - where Chamberlain and Yarrow note that the writers in their collection of essays raise the same questions that had already been raised by Frost and Yarrow in *Improvisation in Drama* (1990). They note that the contributors 'seem unaware' of the prior text (Chamberlain and Yarrow 2002: 10). Of course, I do not mean to imply lack of diligence among my

peers, and I know that it is possible to be aware of other researchers while being unable to cite them - for example, I know that Rodrigo Scalari is currently writing about Gaulier for his PhD at University of Paris, but he has not yet produced any conference papers or published material to which I can refer.¹⁰²

Perhaps, rather than being unaware of one another, these writers are consciously allocating more status to their own direct embodied knowledge than others' written knowledge. My own thesis also draws on my embodied knowledge as a recent student of the summer Clown workshop, but brings in additional student experiences, and is the first to compare existing published and doctoral works on Gaulier - though this may be due to fortuitous timing.

My discussion of politics in Gaulier's classroom offers a reason for the existence of the variation found in different individuals' reflection and analysis of the school. In Chapter 2, I argued that there is a deliberate openness of interpretation inherent in Gaulier's teaching. As each student learns how she can use the tools of the school to make audiences laugh, she also develops her own reasons for doing so. One result of this could be the differing foci of writers on this school - where Murray prioritises the spirit of 1968, Davison prioritises the connection to clown and circus history, Kendrick isolates play and Purcell Gates concentrates on how clown relates to concepts of self. Each is able to find evidence for their interpretation in Gaulier's words. My own discoveries are also personal, but my understanding that Gaulier prioritises laughter during his teaching allows space for these other possibilities to exist. I hope that as this area of study matures we can look forward to more comparison, collaboration and conversation amongst these authors.

Until now, Gaulier's school has largely been understood in the context of his own teacher, Lecoq, and as such has been used as a case study for 'Lecoq-based' practice. Murray's introduction to Gaulier, Pagneux and Lecoq concentrates on their shared interests and practices more than their differences. Purcell Gates discusses her experience with Gaulier at length but uses this fieldwork as evidence toward her conclusions on 'Lecoq-based' performance. I have

¹⁰² Scalari has the working title '*L'enfance comme un modèle dans des pédagogies théâtrales du XXème siècle*' or in English, *The childhood as a model in French pedagogies of theater in the 20th century* (Scalari. 29 October 2014, *Personal Communication*). We were introduced at the school's clown show in 2013, in which Scalari performed.

identified what appear to be small divergences between the two schools, based on existing literature and Lecoq's texts. These include an interest in circus clowns, play as complicity with the audience, a separation of his own teaching from movement work, and the flop as potentially deliberate performance material (in the form of M. Marcel's stupid ideas) rather than as pedagogical method. While Gaulier's practice and curriculum remain close to those of Lecoq, these differences suggest that Gaulier has, in some subtle ways, rejected the authority of his own revered pedagogue. In doing so, he has enacted his stated distrust for absolute authority, or 'killed the teacher'.

As the first comprehensive study of Clown teaching at École Philippe Gaulier, this thesis contributes primarily to the study of one particular teacher, but also to the wider fields of actor training and theatre and comedy studies. It offers a critical discussion of a pedagogue who has a widespread and still developing influence in clown practice, and thus provides discussion of his work that could be compared to other practitioners. I would hope that my findings prove to be of interest to clowns, or clown students, keen to develop a critical understanding of their own practice; this is a group who seem to be committed to on-going development of practice through workshops but also through listening to audiences. A detailed breakdown of Gaulier's clown practice might also be relevant to the increasing number of practitioners seeking to apply clowning in settings outside the theatre or circus, such as Clown Doctors. I have presented the school as an exploratory environment, and emphasised that it does not seek to provide all the necessarily vocational skills for clowning. It has been observed by practitioners that the school did not prepare them well for the crafting and repetition of reliable comic material, but I would add that neither does it teach students how to apply for work or funding, or any other business skills that performers need. What Gaulier teaches is not necessarily an induction to a workplace, and in fact the skills he teaches work in a variety of settings and genres. It falls to the individuals, once they leave the school, to continue playing with the intention of making audiences laugh. Each performer builds up a repertoire of reliable material by observing what they can do to create this result.

On this note, in the final weeks of writing my thesis, I have found the courage to attempt some clown performance in front of a public audience for the first time.

In rehearsal, I practically explored the skills detailed here; my ridiculous body, complicit play, recounting and creating flops, and above all my relationship with the audience. I found that, in the moment of performance, all of this theoretical knowledge became once again the fascinating, puzzling, jostling set of ambiguities that I had experienced as a clown student, trying to make an audience laugh at École Philippe Gaulier.

Appendix A

Participant Information Sheet

What is the project?

I am conducting research towards a PhD about clown and theatre teacher, Philippe Gaulier. I took part in two month-long courses with Gaulier in 2008/2009, *Le Jeu* and a summer course on clown, as well as short clown workshops with John Wright and Aitor Basauri. Although I enjoyed these courses, I found myself happiest watching and discussing what others did rather than performing, and have turned my interest into a fully funded research project at University of Glasgow. My research examines Gaulier's clown teaching and how this influential approach fits into theoretical and practical ways of understanding clown.

What is the role of these interviews in the research?

I am conducting interviews in the hope of gaining a wider perspective of clown training and its application. Your embodied knowledge as a participant in workshops and as a performer is something that literature cannot provide, and by talking to you about it I hope to enrich my study with accounts of practical experience.

I intend to speak to a variety of practitioners who have taken part in clown training in order to help me to understand the content and context of Gaulier's classes.

What will the interview be about?

The interviews will be held with a semi-structured format, I will ask you questions about your training, particularly your progress through the clown workshop, the role of the other students in the class and which lessons have stuck with you. I am also interested to hear anything that you would like to tell me about your experience of training and of making clown pieces, even if it falls outside of the questions. I am hoping that this process will open new avenues for me to explore, and to do this I will be paying particular attention to the way you describe and remember your training, and the aspects of this training that you feel have been particularly significant in your practice.

What will happen next?

I will record the interviews, and use these to make written transcripts of exactly what you say. I will then send you a copy of the transcript so that you will have the opportunity to indicate that you would like anything to be removed, changed or further clarified. The sound recordings and transcripts will remain password-protected in my computer, so I can refer back to them while writing, until I complete my PhD, when they will be destroyed.

If you would like your contribution to remain anonymous, I will ensure that there are no details in my research that will enable anybody to identify you, and send you a copy to check that I have fully done this. If you are happy to be named in the research, I will send you a copy of my writing before submission or any publication, so that you can make sure you are happy with the way you have been represented.

Any Questions?

I would be more than willing to answer any questions you have. You can contact me by email: l.amsden.1@research.gla.ac.uk or phone: 07787577279.

Please fill in the attached Consent Form if you are happy to be interviewed.

Many thanks for your contribution to my research project.

Yours Sincerely,

Lucy Amsden

PhD Candidate, Theatre, Film and Television Studies, College of Arts, University of Glasgow

Consent to the Use of Data

University of Glasgow
College of Arts
Ethics Committee

I understand that Lucy Amsden is collecting data in the form of recorded interviews for use in an academic research project at the University of Glasgow.

I have read the attached Participant Information Sheet.

I give my consent to the use of data for this purpose on the understanding that:

- Parts of the PhD projects may be published, in print or online.
- The material will be destroyed once the project is complete.
- I have the right to withdraw my contribution at any time.

(Please delete one of the following two statements:)

- I am happy to be named in this project
- I wish my contribution to be anonymous

Signed by the contributor: _____ Date: _____

Contributor Name (please print): _____

Researcher's name and email contact: Lucy Amsden -
l.amsden.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Supervisor's name and email contact: Deirdre Heddon -
deirdre.heddon@glasgow.ac.uk

Department address:

Theatre, Film and Television Studies,
University of Glasgow,
G12 8QQ

Appendix B: Interview with Phil Burgers

We spoke in the Assembly Garden, Edinburgh, after Phil's show Dr Brown Brown Brown Brown Brown and his Singing Tiger on 23rd August 2012

LA: When did you train with Gaulier and what courses did you do?

PB: I trained with Gaulier from September 2005 to April 2007. I did the full first year and then two thirds of the second year.

LA: And after finishing, did you go straight into making work?

PB: No, I toured a show with 8 people from 8 different countries from the school, which we brought to Edinburgh...that summer, that August, and aside from that I didn't do anything for a year. I was just very... blocked, you know, as a performer. I was very weak, and scared and somehow crippled by my time, there. I mean that was very difficult. I just walked out of the school extremely insecure and scared and not wanting to be a performer, kind of, 'cause I had such a hard time at school. I had many good moments but by the time I left it was a very difficult time. So, a year later I moved to London, 'cause my buddy Daniel Simonsen was living in London, and he told me about these stages in London that you could just - open mics, you know - you could go do stuff on the open mic circuit in London, and uh, and Philippe always said, the work that you do is with us, you know, with an audience. Maybe he was talking about more for clown, but I think he was also just meant in general, you need to spend time in front of an audience, you need stage time, so, the idea of an open mic, every night, was an opportunity for me to be in front of an audience, and practice, stage time.

And so, I moved to London, my brother was living in London, moved with him, and then I just started doing the stand-up circuit, mostly, and open mic nights everywhere around town. And then, basically I had five minutes of material from our clown workshop, which was the last workshop I did and basically I had a very difficult time in clown but in the last week I found like a little thing that made it into the clown show and it was five minutes of me telling really weird jokes and, it was kinda clowny... And so I basically took that five minutes that I had, a year earlier, which was in the show that I did in Edinburgh, that five minute bit

I just did that on stage and then five minutes, you know, every day I went, and I fucked with it, and, I had ten minutes and developed it and added things, and tried things, and ten minutes became, fifteen, and then, and then I did the Edinburgh festival again, that year, so the following year and I did 25 minutes on the free fringe. And again it was like every night, audience, audience, audience, and I was doing another cabaret thing went back to London, just audience, just spent time with audience, alllllll the time. And developed work from that experience, and then what slowly started to happen was - all the tools, and the tricks, and the craft, the skills and all that stuff that you learn with Philippe...

LA: Yeah

PB: ... Which is not a very technical school but um, you know, even the things he talks about with spirit, you know.... You start to put that into practice, and you start to... I was describing it yesterday to someone like, he basically gave me these tools, and I walked away from his school unable to handle his tools 'cause like my body was so weak my spirit was so weak but I had the tools still just from the experience of being there. But I couldn't practice them, I couldn't use the tools because I was so disheartened, stuff like that -

But! I still went on stage with these tools and even though I was very weak, I still put them into practice and I still put them into practice and then I built the muscle and I exercised, I exercised, I exercised. And then sl -slowly I was, I was carrying the tools with confidence, and using them, more with confidence and I was stronger, and these tools were actually helping to, um, strengthen my spirit, or something. And then, yeah, just came to a point where I - you start to know how to use the tools, you know? And you start to use them, and you start to create what it is that you wanna make.

LA: So a couple of things that you've mentioned there that I'd like to tease out a little bit more... You talked about getting in front of the audience at the open mic night being an important learning process,

PB: THE learning process.

LA: OK. And, but what about the audience that's there in Philippe's classroom? The classmates, the other people studying?

- PB: Well that's it, that's like your toughest audience, you know? 'cause first of all you got Philippe who's about to fall asleep, you know *(LA Laughs)* ...with everything you do, and then you have your peers, who you know, you're close with and, it's good, they've seen you in the shit, and they've seen you do great things, but they're just as hard as Philippe, because they know what he's talking about, you know?
- LA: Uh huh
- PB: I mean that was the work we did in school, there was no books or writing or classes, it was like, 'get up, OK who's next?' You know. Get on stage, and fucking do it. It's just, it's like purely about doing it. There's skill, that he talks about, like fixed point, and sensitivity to the audience and listening and um, but you know, no physical technical skills, I think that's more just fine-tuning your intuition or something. Your sensitivity of being onstage and he's just trying to have you access your sensitivity I think, and then with that sensitivity, you, start playing and have fun, be joyful and share it with the audience. 'Cause, there's nothing else that's...um, so important in theatre. From his perspective, and I think, you know, he kind of like brainwashed me into believing that too.
- LA: Yeah? Would that be the term that you would use?
- PB: Yeah man! I think that ultimately what he's doing is, he talks about pleasure you know he's like we want to see someone beautiful and open and vulnerable and, and having pleasure. And then *(clicks fingers)* WE get that pleasure and it's REAL pleasure you know it's not fake, and we get that pleasure and so theatre becomes about, joy and pleasure and transferring that to... to the people, you know, it's not about *(puts on deep pretentious voice)* 'oh it's a great show' or 'oh its very technical' or 'oh yeah means a lot ah-ah' *(LA laughs)* it's like no, we just want to experience joy. You know? And, uh, theatre... can do that... ideally. And I think that's what he teaches.
- LA: Did you ever, you used the term 'brainwashing' which is quite often used in a not positive...
- PB: I know yeah I know *(smiling)* I'm sorry, yeah, that's probably the wrong...
- LA: Don't ...would you say it's the wrong, or did you ever feel like it was being imposed on you?

PB: No. no. I don't feel it was being imposed I think...I think he just like shed light on things. It's always there but it's just been in the dark and he just helped like shed light on it. Or, he helped break down all these barriers and walls that we have that keep us from seeing, what - the true essence of - what theatre is, you know? So it's not really brainwashing but he helped, just kill those walls inside of us that keep us from accessing the true essence of it all. And approaching it with that intent to just be pure and playful and joyful and silly and whatever. It's not all about everything else that has been created around the world of theatre and art and performance and all that, which is like, success, fame, impressing people, being good, or being - smart or clever, you know? It's just about having a good time. I think. [...] It's not just about 'hey let's just have a good time' it's also about the imagination, and play and fantasy, and taking people on a journey, through something crazy and fun and wild through your madness, you know, your beauty; there's all these other things, but the vehicle that we're using is ultimately joy.

LA: Would you say that your vocabulary when you make practice since you've been at the school has taken on his terminology?

PB: I think so but also because the experience has um, materialized, it's that, I've experienced 'the joy' experienced the playfulness, the fun, the madness, the craziness the freedom, you know all the things that he, he talks about so...yeah, I'm not just using the vocabulary just from an intellectual thing and I think that's what you do, you leave the school and it's just in your head, and then you have the practice, practice it, practice it, practice it, and then you experience it, part of your body and then you see how it works and you're putting into practice... um... And that's when, it's not just about vocabulary or something. I'd like to think that I'm using these words also from experience. Whereas before I'd probably use these words from (naive hopeful voice) 'yeah I want to experience play I wanna have pleasure I wanna have freedom' but it's like (his voice changes suddenly to cross) 'I don't fucking have it'. You know but he's telling you, that's what you need to go for. That's what your goal is, in this work. And he's giving you tools but you don't leave school, or I didn't, even though you have moments in school where you experience it, I -I was very crippled, as I said. But then, more and more you do it it's like (clicks

fingers) ah yes, ok, good yeah, this IS freedom, you know, this is play, this is imagination this is fun; joy; pleasure, you know, all that stuff. But then at the same time, I don't wanna be totally (he makes a glottal noise, indicating being stuck) I also wanna go my own way, I don't want to be imprisoned by his vocabulary or his teachings, necessarily. But I think he's good 'cause he teaches you to go your own way. (A pause) You know?

LA: (uncertain) yeah...

PB: Ultimately you have to just like be 'fuck you Phillipe,' you know, 'I don't fucking care if you think like I'm being, I'm breaking your balls or, you know, I'm too uh, loud or I move too much or' (laughing) you know? It's like you have to just fuckin, go your own way. But ultimately it's just - joy. As long as you're experiencing pure joy and you're sharing it with the people and its being transferred then it's cool man, do whatever you want. Versus it being your intellectual wank, or you want to be good or you're trying to do stuff, it's like yeah, go your own way but if there is an element of, I don't know, it's a bit poisoned by your ego or something, and I think that's what maybe his work is about, it's like just throw your fucking ego away, for this.

LA: Oh ok. Um...maybe this is difficult but would you be able to give me an example of a time when you successfully did that, when you kind of managed to both reject something he was telling you and find that freedom and pleasure and...

PB: I don't know, mmhh...I, I don't know, maybe... you're watching every day and you're in the class and you're like 'ah' you go on stage you're trying to get it right, trying to get it right and then all of a sudden you go on stage and you're just like '(blows a raspberry) I don't care' you know, you just break the wall and scream, or do something totally impulsive and mad and he's like 'yeah, there you go. That's it.'

LA: (Laughs) yeah!

PB: And you're, 'well I was just breaking everything that you told me to do', but that, actually, came out, you know, so I don't know that's like his teaching, reverse psychology, stuff, or I don't know, exactly, but um...I mean I think his voice is a little bit in the back of your head all the time you're like (worried, uncomfortable) 'oooh', if I was doing this with Philippe he'd be like (puts on Philippe's voice) 'Do we totally hate him?'

(Laughs) 'Does he think he's funny?' you know... but, to a certain point, that's, those are the moments when you find something in the school when you're like 'fuck you, Philippe, I don't fucking care'. You know, I don't care if you're gonna say something bad about me, and so... and so you have to have an element of that. But still, you know, practice all that stuff.

LA: What do you think Gaulier would think of your shows?

PB: (Pause. Laughs) I don't know! (More serious) I don't know. Could be like (Philippe's voice) 'buh. S'ok'. Or he could be like 'bo 'e thinks 'e's so funny, walking around the stage, people love hiiiiim, you know so e thinks e's so goood now...'. (enthusiastically) Or he'd be like 'muh it's good. It's good.' I'd love him to say that! you know, but, fuck, I don't know...

LA: (laughs) In your devising process, is that a consideration? - 'what would Philippe say?'

PB: No... it's not really 'what would Philippe say' it's - what would, what does the audience tell you? You know? And so in the devising process, which is, for me it's in front of an audience it's not at home alone or something or in a room with a director, it's the audience. So it's like it doesn't matter - Philippe - if the audience is laughing, good.

LA: Yeah

PB: And so you keep going. So he's it's not, he's actually telling you - don't listen to me, listen to everyone. But he's helping you, he's still guiding you... so it's more listening - it's more hearing the audience than it is him.

LA: Ok, so you say that you devise in front of the audience - do you still use open mic and that kind of space to...

PB: Yeah sometimes, now I'm doing a kid's show, and I devised an entirely new show, and I've just been doing it for four or five years now, I'm just bored doing open mics. Right now just 'cause I'm a bit burnt out on it, you know? Just doing it for so long, I want to take a break, get, ingest things, experience things, versus give, give give, give, give. 'Cause it's been a couple of years now of just giving. And I have found things, my show's totally improvised, I started, I did the Adelaide fringe festival, the show you saw last night, and I started with an hour, with nothing. You know, and every day for four and a half, four weeks I just improvised. And then, all the best bits, pieced them together. And improvised around

that, and then it became a show. One hour of devising and audience members walking out, being like, - 'what the fuck's this?' - but it was good. But anyway, so, I'm just kinda tired, you know? And doing two shows a day, and all that. I don't know maybe I've done my time a little bit with performing a lot, but I also think you need to have time where you don't perform, you just live. And experience and have, have life happen, enrich yourself and then you can go perform.

LA: So you'll take some time out, do you think?

PB: Yeah yeah yeah. I'll take some time out. I do a tour in Australia, do a run in London, give some workshops, and then just take a couple of months or something. (pause) And then maybe never do it again, you know?

LA: Really?

PB: Maybe! See what happens in those couple of months, or maybe do a different version of it, or have, let it evolve into something else. I really like giving workshops. I really like teaching, and but, as far as creating work, I don't know what the next step is.

LA: In your teaching experience do you find yourself...drifting towards maybe Philippe's techniques?

PB: Absolutely, man. Yeah. Totally, it's totally inspired m- like, stolen from him.

LA: (Laughs)

PB: You know? But with my own spin, a little bit, but yeah. 'Cause it worked, what he was doing. It makes complete sense. And he basically cuts people down, so they don't take their shit seriously. So and it's fun, just cut people down so they don't take their shit seriously. And to do that you have to be a bit negative or something - playfully, and so I'm still finding that. It's a lot of fun, giving workshops, I really like it. I think, ultimately you just have to find your own spin, and I think when you leave Philippe's school, or only hearing his voice, but slowly you start to listen to your own voice. More and more. Even though it has been totally influenced by him, and enhanced and guided. But now he's like - 'ok, now you go'. So you just have to go. But he's opened a door, definitely. You have to kind of go through 'The Shit', you know? That's what he talks about - we want to see you in the shit. Or, want to see flop, you have to go through flop, you have to go to 'the kingdom of the bad'. And we don't want to go there, as

human beings, and initially it's a very dark place. I think that's why I was so crippled when I left school 'cause it was dark, it hurt

LA: On your everyday life, on your...

PB: Yeah maybe, or just on my confidence in general I was like 'hoh, man, like I'm just, I'm fuckin horrible'. (slight laugh) And you don't want to admit that to yourself. But then, once you do, you're like, oh ok, well it's actually pretty cool. (shruggy laugh)

LA: You had to admit you were horrible?

PB: Yeah!

LA: As a human being?

PB: Nooo, as an actor or something, you know? Or...no not as a human being... buuut...maybe a little bit, not like you're a horrible person but, you're just, a piece of shit, you know, just kinda worthless, who really cares about you? (Pause) I think there's a paradox, I think you're really important, you are everything, and you are nothing, also. And it's the You Are Nothing that people don't want to admit.

LA: Do you resolve the freedom and the opportunity and the open door with the feeling like you're horrible and a piece of shit? Do those connect? - for you?

PB: Yeah. Coz your freedom, 'cause the doors open when you don't put any pressure on it to be open, you know, to be good or need something, you don't need it, you're just like 'pff! Whatever man! I've got nothing, dude, I'm shit, and who cares!' And bsht! Every-, the whole world is open, you know, you're just free, you're alright, cool. That's like the door opener. Just whatever man, it's fucking going horribly, yeah love it. He would say that he would say you're in school to be bad, you're here to be bad you're not here to be good, you don't learn when you're good. You learn when you're bad. And just go on stage and fucking try everything, you know, risk everything. And then you'll find moments of beauty and madness [...] Because you realize you don't have anything to lose. And that's what I'm saying, place of nothing, your whatever, doesn't matter, but that's a hard place to get to and I don't even know if that's achievable or even something, an aim to have. I think his teachings go beyond theatre. I'm very interested in taking what I learn from him and just applying it to everything. And developing it further. Or maybe, I'm more interested in

like philosophy and stuff like that, he's just the world of theatre, but it informs a philosophical approach to life. It's not THE philosophical life but it informs an evolving one.

LA: Earlier you used the word 'spirit'...

PB: Yeah... he talks a lot about spirit, you know? 'do we see his spirit?', yeah. Spirit is just like the joy in your eyes, you know? Or the life in your eyes, or the, your life. Do we see you, alive, or are you hiding behind something? Is there something that's keeping us from seeing you? And so, that's your spirit, I think.

LA: Do you think that's something that you want to see in life as well as on the stage, in somebody? (pause) Or is it not that literal?

PB: (Pause.) No, maybe it is, you know? And society and all that you have to constantly protect yourself, and throw up barriers, and play games, you know. Also just 'cause our society's kinda stupid. But, in theatre, you don't want to have any - we don't want to see barriers. We don't want to see games we want to see humanity. Real humanity which is constantly being protected and masked, masqueraded, in everyday life, so that's why, maybe we come to the theatre, you know? To experience it, but yeah ultimately, with your friends, with your loved ones, in your life, you just want humanity, you want to see it, experience it and not play so many fucking stupid games or intellectual societal egotistical games. You know?

LA: Mm

PB: But, they're the source of inspiration at the same time. They're a source of material, they're things to fight and to play with. But yeah I would say, we could probably be nicer and more open to each other. In everyday life, and then that humanity would be... revealed more if it was like that and therefore our spirits would blossom, more so in everyday life.

LA: I don't think 'spiritual' is quite the word that you're saying but this kind of way of life maybe, do you think that's something that's present in the way that Philippe talks about it or do you think he is just in theatre?

PB: I don't know if - I think he's just in theatre. I don't know. I don't know: he could be in life also. I mean I think he does apply clown to life and all that, but the way I'm talking bout it's like: it's kinda deep and serious a little bit and he'd just be like (he impersonates Gaulier's voice) 'this is so

stupid'. (*Both laugh*) But it's cool man, he's just a good guy, you know? He's a good man who's just spreading humour. So, and that's not a bad thing.

Appendix C: Interview with Amy Gibbons

We spoke one evening during a week-long bouffon workshop taught by Gaulier and organised by Clown Lab. Amy has kindly allowed me to include extracts from this conversation, which documents her thoughts and ideas at the time in the process of development, mid-workshop. We were in a busy café in Manchester city centre, on 27th September 2012.

AG: I went originally to France in October 2011, it was originally to do the clown workshop which he runs from October to December. And I was advised to do the *Le Jeu* workshop. I signed up to do that, and then when I was there I discovered the opportunity to also do the two year diploma, and so while I was there I did 'Neutral Mask in Greek Tragedy'. So then I came back to England for a term, then I went back in Easter 2012, and I did 'Shakespeare and Chekov', 'Character', and 'Writing and Directing'. So, effectively I'm kind of halfway through, although I've still got to do another first year term and another couple of second year terms. That's where I'm at.

LA: It sounds like you've gone against the suggested order...

AG: Well when I found out about Philippe I was actually exploring clown, I was doing a workshop with Angela De Castro, a Brazilian clown and I heard his name being bandied around. So 'ah, who is this Philippe who's very hardcore?' And I like a challenge, and I looked into his works and saw, read a bit about his kind of philosophy on clown, well he might not like me to use that term, he'd say (does his voice) 'oh I'm not a philosopher...' So when I went it was to do clown with him. And I wasn't actually aware of the theatre school and that there was a two year diploma, so had I have known, I would have much preferred to have started with the first year and worked right through, which would've meant working with the same students, which is kind of nice, 'cause it gives you, you know you build up a relationship and sort of builds confidence. The students that I have worked more than one workshop with, it's been really nice to work with them. 'Cause it's sort of finding your feet, 'cause you're kind of exploring... areas in the theatre space that might be, you know you have to, it's quite vulnerable, you know, it's that kind of 'level', of work. And so I would have liked to have done the two-years in the sequence it's laid

out but I know that Philippe is chopping and changing it a little bit anyway [...] he's changed it around this year. I think he's trying to find, what people find most pleasure with and what people discover, them, the most beauty with their stage presence and being, you know? He talked about that a bit with us at the end of Neutral Mask/Greek Tragedy, 'cause the school moved from Sceaux and I think he was finding out, getting a little bit of feedback from the students about what they thought about the layout, and he was talking about the fact that that year people had really struggled in clown. Whereas in Greek Tragedy, people had found a lot of beauty and, you know, had really come up with some really, great work. I've noticed this year he's put in an extra, shorter, like, a month's, workshop of clown and bouffon in the first year, which is interesting. He's sort of playing around with what's good for his students I guess? Does that make sense?

LA: Yeah it does. And I think the clown is, certainly the clown and bouffon are a big part of his reputation as a teacher

AG: Massive, yeah

LA: So that is significant I think that he's putting it into the first year.

AG: All the other theatre study's fascinating; it's beautiful. I mean some people say, 'oh so you're at Clown School', and I think because he's famous for his clown and bouffon it's like [humouring the person who calls it clown school] 'ah yeah ha-a', but at the moment I'm just really loving everything, you know the whole thing, just playing on stage, having games and finding the pleasure to be there which is one of his famous lines [impersonates Philippe] 'you must have the pleasure to be there' and then putting text on top of that and discovering something, from yourself really, and then how can you, in that, enjoyable, kind of, um, human, honest moment, how can you put something on top, and then have fun with that? Like with text...

LA: So, for you in the workshops, the Chekhov and Shakespeare workshops and the tragedy ones that you studied, do - how much does the technique that the students are looking for connect to the, the clown and *le jeu* courses? Are they...

AG: The biggest thing is pleasure to be there. And that's, that's something of paramount importance really, that if you're happy to be there then the

audience are happy to watch you. You know? And that's really key, and I think with clown, cause it's not acting, it's bringing, maybe if I say bringing your ridiculous self to an audience, and being comfortable and, happy! And, optimistic, and, you know, embracing your kind of ridiculous side, your clown if you like. But when you're in that place, you're - it's kind of you're transparent really, everything's, you can see everything, and Philippe, obviously after his 40 years or more teaching, is, he just doesn't really miss a trick. So, I think, in terms of that relating to other, other parts of theatre study, it's such a great standing point to start with, because whatever you're doing, even, if you can... get a bit of the clown - I was going to say 'master clown' but that seems, you know, (laughs) it's like an ongoing journey I think 'til the day you die, you know that you're always learning and discovering cause it's about you, so it's not so much 'oh right, I'm gonna, oh I've got there now, I'm a clown, da-da-dah!' it's not really like that. It's an ongoing process where you're discovering new things all the time [...] if you can find a comfortable, happy, pleasurable place in clown, and, and when you fall down, when you "flop", or there's a few other words for it but if you flop and no one finds it funny, and you're in the shit, you know you have to bounce back, and you have to be ready to... and if you're with other people on the stage, other clowns, you know, and someone's flopping, you rush in to save them. And I think if you can grasp that and work with that then that's really a great grounding for other theatre performance work. [...] In clown, and I'm noticing in Bouffon as well, there's a really fine line. And I think Philippe's teaching method is on that fine line with you, you know. And so there's this, this incredible kind of dance on tightropes between the teacher and the student. And that's why I think it's so intense and so challenging for students. But because it's so challenging and intense, you know the stakes are higher, and you know when people are really in the shit in life, that's when, that's when you really, you know 'When the going gets tough the tough get going'

AG: But clowning for me it's like the gospel. And it's like life: you know it's not... For me it's a little bit too much like life, which I might have to humbly accept in terms of performance, cause it's that's a different matter altogether (laughs) Does that make sense? (laughs)

LA: That's quite an interesting statement, it's too - clown is too much like life?

AG: I'm saying, for me, personally, it's (pause) dunno. I find that my - where I could go and have fun on the stage in clown is, it's like a part of myself that's a little almost, kind of, maybe I haven't recognized how to, to be comfortable, with that place? Don't, know if this is making sense, and that it's, it's quite close to home, the kind of, like, (gives up) oh I dunno it's a bit kind of personal really, I'm trying to explain it without sounding awfully pretentious, haha. But it's weird

LA: I don't think it sounds pretentious

AG: But it is like that, isn't it, though? It's like the parallels between clown and for instance, the gospel, which resonates deeply with me and other people talk about it as a spiritual thing. I mean I know Philippe would, would not like that at all... But the thing about it is, if you look at the basic elements of clown, it isn't child but it is child-like; it's optimistic and hopeful, it falls down and it keeps going, there's a naivety. There's a kind of simplicity, you know, a pleasure to be there and kind of, and there isn't fear. Which for me, that's been a big thing, with fear. And the fact that when you fail you know its about being OK to fail. In fact when you fail, it's almost good because it means you get another chance to try! When you look at real life, these are things that we're kind of - like the failure thing is a massive thing and especially in our culture, and I don't know. It would be interesting to see how other people around the world work with this clown concept or understanding... The failure thing is massive, and then, kind of, capturing the fun to be silly and daft and enjoy yourself, in a sort of childlike way. All of those things, as an adult, in real life, are being compromised - life gets in the way, right?

LA: Are these thoughts that you've had, conversations that you've had, through the course? Has it connected to your personal life, while you've been studying?

AG: Oh very much so, yeah. Everyone's going through that journey. Philippe doesn't ever want to, you say 'oh, why do you think this?' or, 'oh, I feel like this' and he says 'I am not a psychologist! You got to see Sigmund Freud!' and I totally respect that, because it's almost over complicating it. Cause it's actually really simple. But it's so beautiful because it's so

simple; it's paradoxical isn't it? It's simple, that's like the gospel as well, which I can't stop noticing, the parallels, you know. Its like the salvation, the redemption, you know the fall and the, you know it's really interesting.

LA: How important were the other people in your class to your learning process?

AG: For me personally it was quite hard. But I think at the same time, the best of what I found with other people is that there's a real sense of support. And in clown, where people rescue one another, people are willing you to do well. [...] I think everyone's been so humiliated and kind of brought down to earth that there isn't much of this ego at play. And that's something I've been thinking about lately so I don't know. Everything I'm saying I don't **know**, they're just thoughts. But I've reflected a bit and I thought, well actually, even though I didn't, you know, 'gel' with everybody, and sometimes I felt a bit isolated, when we were in the performance room and training, mostly, people were willing you to be, to do well. And like, if Philippe was being harsh, there was a real sense of, sometimes they'd be like 'oh Philippe, you've pushed it too far.' And then he'll address that with the students and then address it with the student who's being grilled at the time. But because everyone's been through that process, you kind of feel on a level with everyone, there isn't this, you know you get a few people who seem to be generally really kind of competent at what they do. And you know, there's 'the golden child' of this year or that year. But the funny thing is everyone's so different, so you might have someone who's, sort of, competent in most workshops to a high standard, but then you get someone else who's you know, really a bit shit in a lot of them and suddenly they do a workshop and discover something, which is the best thing that you've seen in that workshop. I think because it's such an intense experience, it's like being on a boat in a storm, you know, you tend to help each other out a bit, you know.

Appendix D:

Interview with Joyce Deans and Mark Saunders

We met in Mark's office at the Royal Scottish Academy of Speech and Drama, on 4th December 2012.

MS: I attended the Lecoq school 1977 through to summer 1979

JD: I was the year after Mark. So he was in second year when I was in first year and I left in 1980.

LA: *Am I right in thinking that while you were at the Lecoq school, Gaulier taught the clown classes?*

JD: Gaulier was one of four improvisation teachers. And so he taught everything from Le Jeu, through to tragedy, melodrama,

MS: Mask

JD: And clown, bouffon. He taught the lot. At that time he had a clown act, with Pierre Byland, which is why I think that people think that he was mostly associated with clown but no, he taught everything.

LA: *Ok*

JD: In the improvisation. Not movement. At all!

MS: No.

JD: (laughs)

MS: He didn't do analysis of movement!

JD: He's an acting teacher and I think he could probably have been a fantastic director, given the right circumstances. But I don't think he's directed very much. Because he's mostly involved with teaching workshops, as far as I know. But he was an incredible acting teacher. In that he took everybody as an individual, and he would work, if he saw a glimmer of anything, he would work and work and try to find what the key to what he was looking for. What might unlock that thing. And you felt you were the only person in the room when he was working with you. And there would be thirty people in the room. And the most significant work he did for me was the work on Greek tragedy. With the protagonist and the chorus, which was amazing, which I still use. Well it's nothing extraordinary but it was an amazing experience. And I think because of that energy, and focus that he had. I think that's what I would say is the thing about Gaulier.

MS: He was very, extremely observant, and very direct in the way he talked to you. Which I think is about the sense of focus he seemed to give the individual. He was not afraid to sort of, say it as he thought it was. So if he thought it was crap, he said it was crap! And so you remembered what he said to you. Because of the way he said it.

JD: He would provoke. I think Lecoq talked about, generally, his ethos of the school was provocation, and being given something that would start the process of your own creativity. You wouldn't be given the answer to anything. And Philippe took that to extreme, and you know, there were lots of tears in Philippe's classes, because he had no boundaries and would provoke in any way that he thought might get a reaction that would reveal the real person.

LA: *Could you give me some examples of things he might do?*

JD: Ah. Well he would be quite cruel, he could be very cruel. Personally cruel because he could see right through

MS: Pretence

JD: Pretence. Right through, you know, any kind of exterior, any kind of social mask, whatever. And his real objective was to get to the real person underneath. Whether it's in, you know, *Le Jeu*, tragedy or clown. So examples, well he'd just be horrible! Very often he'd be... very cruel.

MS: Mm. If two people were improvising together, he might stop it and say to one of the people, 'Tu n'est pas un bon copin'. You're not a good friend. End of. Which is incredibly cutting, cause if you get that, it's not just about your performance, it's about you as a person, it's like, you know, that's what he's saying

JD: You're not a good friend.

MS: 'You're not a good friend!'

JD: Of course you can contextualize it and say you're not being generous in playing with your partner,

MS: But where does that come from? Where does that come from?

JD: Yeah - Why are you being selfish?

JD: The implication is that you, yourself. Are. Selfish. As opposed to just not able to be free in that moment.

MS: Mm

JD: But no, he would say, very, very cruel things.

- LA: *I think that's a very clear example, do you think there was space for people to take it as something playful, something that was only about the acting... Some people describe Gaulier's provocations as always being playful, as always being, there's a joke in there?*
- JD: No. I wouldn't say so
- MS: Well, I'm not sure, because - when he was working at Lecoq there wasn't.
- LA: *Ok. Ever?*
- MS: Oh No, no. There was lots of humour in the class, masses of humour, but, no it went beneath that, it was about the person. But, subsequently, I did go and do a workshop - or two probably - when he had a school in London, I did a couple and I just thought he had become a bit kinder, for want of a better word. He'd become more sort of avuncular, a slightly eccentric uncle character in the class. So it was less bracing I thought, when he was talking to people, yeah, it was more of a joke if you like. But it was still very direct you know.
- LA: *Ok, thank you. You described that when, when you studied, Gaulier taught in French, for you as coming from the UK did that have an effect on how you interpreted what he said or how much you could detect jokes or... the meaning of what he said, do you think? Or was your French amazing?*
- JD: My French was dreadful, my French is still pretty dreadful. Because as Mark says, he was so direct, you soon got to understand what he was saying. His jokes, sometimes you never knew what he was talking about. At all. And a few people would understand. But you would know if it was a joke or not, but you would also know what was underneath, and you'd also know when it wasn't a joke. I mean it was more often, not a joke, in those days, it was definitely not a joke.
- MS: An example is; at the end of our first, very first class we did with him. He, after he cut everyone down to size, except one Swiss boy called Pierre who he seemed to like, for some reason, everyone else got cut down to size and he said, 'right that's it, end of class' and he walked towards the door and he turned round and he said in French, 'by the way, this school doesn't have an arrangement with Interflora'. And walked out. (JD laughs) And so we're all going, you know with our feeble French going 'what did he say?' And the French people, even the French people are

going, 'er, he said, er something about there's no arrangement with interflora' and of course we all then worked out what he meant was they didn't give away bouquets of flowers in a very luvvie fashion (LA laughs). You see even you look puzzled?! So that's exactly what he meant but he had that kind of funny way of talking about it. So he was being serious, but he had a kind of

JD: There was a humour

MS: There was humour in the way he put it. You know?

LA: *Picking up what you just said about 'he liked the Swiss boy for some reason' - could you tell what it was that Gaulier was seeing? Did you ever watch a classmate and think, he's got it right, its brilliant, and then hear Gaulier say 'no that was shit'?*

MS: Oh yeah yeah yeah. Yeah, even in that class I understood what it was he liked about *that* improvisation and what it was he didn't like and he was very clear about why, whether we agreed with him or not was a different issue but I understood why he liked what, you know, I mean he just went "Yes. That's it." To, to this Swiss person and he might have said, "I saw him". You know, that's all. "I saw him".

JD: And that's what he was always looking for, the real truth of you underneath all the layers. And so of course you knew. Because of that intense examination that everybody was put under, one by one, then you would you would learn how to read individuals. And see beyond the surface, which is, I think that's something I began to learn there, and I think that's something that I definitely, would say that I actively use.

MS: Oh definitely.

JD: And I won't give up. Because people think that actors are putting stuff on, and it's about taking layers away. And I think that certainly here, in this school, that's what we are looking for all the time is taking away the layers, stripping away the layers to get to the truth. 'Cause acting is being more truthful than you can be in life. In life you can't be truthful, you've got social masks all the time for different situations, whatever that might be, you're very rarely, truly truthful. And acting permits, gives you license to be who you really are. And that's what Gaulier is looking for. And that, you know, regardless of the cruelty and all the rest, that's,

once you're near that, you're, you know, you're his, one of his. Once you see it, you get it. You understand what he's looking for.

LA: *That's fascinating, because there are points in Gaulier's book where he says 'Truth is for the salvation army. Lying is much more fun, and that's what you do in the theatre'. How, is that ok? Can both those things be true at once?*

JD: Yeah.

MS: Yeah he always said that -

JD: Of course!

MS: - he prefers to have dinner parties with people who lied a bit. Because they're more entertaining than earnest, truthful people, which would be a bit boring. But he, he turned things on their head a lot. Like that.

LA: *Joyce you mentioned, the other night, about working as a translator for Philippe. I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about that experience and what, um, you learned during that?*

JD: I can't quite remember when I did this, but, I certainly did it when he worked with some Graeae performers in the 80s or 90s. A bouffon workshop. And, so by that time I understood, I probably understood the way Philippe's mind worked at that particular time. With Philippe I had to work very very hard, to understand the jokes that he made, that are so much, part of his teaching. But that's like any translator, like Fay Lecoq said about translating for Jacques, you need to have done the work in order to understand what, what, you know, Philippe or Lecoq was talking about, and, and then there's the other thing - you need to be inside that person's head. And it was a fantastic experience. It's an extraordinary thing to do. And it's not about how well you speak French. It's about what Philippe's looking for, the person underneath everything, it's about the person underneath the words. So it's difficult because you have to translate jokes into jokes. And that's a very very hard thing to do. If you translated literally then you'd end up with 'Interflora'!

LA: *(laughs) On the evening where you were both speaking, you described your different reactions and different aptitudes for clown at the school.*

(JD and MS look at each other and giggle.)

JD: Surely not!

LA: *So I wondered, have either of you tried to perform as clowns since, have either of you taught clown?*

MS: Yes and yes.

JD: No and No! Oh absolutely not, no. no. If I'm ever directing anything, that is supposed to be funny, that relies on comic timing, or anything, then, I call on Mark. Because I can't do it. I know, I know what it needs, but I can't do it. I can't teach it, I can't do it, I can't direct it.

MS: Which is strange, isn't it, 'cause, you are funny. You can be funny.

JD: Yeah I am.

MS: You can be very funny.

JD: I am funny now. And I can be funny, but I can't, I can't get it.

MS: In performance terms.

JD: I can't do it, I can't help people get there. I know when it's not funny. And I know...and then Mark will come in and go 'oh you just need to do this this and this' and sorts it out.

MS: ..a little bit...Yeah its difficult, actually. It's yeah its really difficult, teaching that, to somebody.

LA: *How much does your teaching of it resemble the teaching that you had?*

MS: I'm not as cruel! If we're just talking about Gaulier? No I'm not as cruel. And actually I haven't, because of my present job, I don't get in there and do much clown. To be honest, I might do some commedia now and then, which is obviously related. But I don't teach so much clown, so it's a bit of a hard one to talk about. But yeah I did, most of my performing work, after I left was in that, it was in that kind of territory. 'Clownesque', for want of a better word. So I've used a lot of what, a lot of what soaked in, during those two years. I was recycling and trying to, you know, be inventive with it, develop, and be creative.

LA: *When you were, when you were devising work or performing, did Gaulier stay present in your rehearsal room or in your audience, did you imagine him there watching you?*

MS: Well, funnily enough, yeah, because after I left I met a guy called John and we started to create a little bit of a double act. And I told him - this guy Gaulier. And he went to Paris to do one of his, very early *stages* after he left Lecoq and he set up his own school. So he went over there, and it gave him the real bug. And we became a double act for about 7 years. So

of course we'd talk a lot because he hadn't been to Lecoq, he'd only been to Gaulier, and Monika Pagneux, and that was the important reference point, we often went 'ah! This whole section's not working, what would Gaulier say? Or how would he tear it apart?', and so it became a quite a good reference point actually.

LA: *I suppose as a last question, you talked about trying to be creative with, or, find your own thing within what it was that you learnt at the school, so as your practice and your teaching practice has developed, in what ways has that experience reinforced or challenged what you learnt at the Lecoq school and with Gaulier? And in what ways has your own practice departed from what you did at the school?*

MS: It's, there's so much emphasis on text, a lot more emphasis on text in this work than there was at Lecoq. I think that makes it really different for me.

JD: We've recently rewritten the undergraduate acting program. And in that, I have imported stuff that we did from the Lecoq school. The Lecoq School was an utterly life changing experience for me. So certainly, when I started directing - My history is that I performed when I came back from the Lecoq school for about ten years, and then I started teaching movement, then an assistant director, then started directing, then I started teaching. And certainly in directing, what you learn from Lecoq school is an eye. You absolutely learn how to read things on stage. Once you know how to do that, can't escape from it. And the Gaulier thing I think is this pursuit, for what is the real person underneath all the stuff. Within the acting programme we now have *autocours*, we have *enquête*, things that we, in the past we'd touched on, but never formally enshrined it in the acting programme. And I think it was, just when I was walking from the underground, one day I thought 'I know what I'm doing here, I'm trying to create my own little bit of Paris, in this conservatoire'. And I think it's impossible to reduce the effect of our training. To say 'specifically we did this, this and this'. But, certainly in the movement department we're really working on Lecoq underpinnings. I don't direct very much, any more, 'cause of my job, but Gaulier is certainly in my head when I'm working one-to-one with somebody.

- MS: And even in the MA course, there's not *autocours*, as such, and there's not an *enquête* as such, but there's an awful lot of them working together, negotiating with each other, and I know that is important so I have not a problem with starting to do this 'cause we can learn so much, from figuring that out, you know, learning in that way. It's in my programme but in a slightly different way, I would say.
- LA: *You've talked a lot about the direct working with one person, feeling like you're the only person in the room. At that point, what happens to the other people in the room? Or how does it feel to be one of the other people?*
- JD: They're watching. They're observing, and what I experienced was that when you were observing this work, you were as - well, I can't speak for everyone but - you were as focused as Gaulier was. Because you were trying to work out what it was that he was looking for in that person. At the Lecoq school there was an awful lot of, everybody sitting on a bench, and one person in the space or two people in the space, so we were we were trained to do that and a lot of the teaching was through observation of other people's work. So, and, you know, everybody would have the opportunity to be that one person in the space.
- LA: *Do you feel like the course needs there to be 30 people watching, for the one person on stage, did those people watching benefit the one person on stage as well? Or not?*
- MS: It certainly increases the -
- JD: Ups the ante
- MS: Ups the ante, bigtime.
- JD: No I mean the classes, pah, you never sat there feeling, 'why am I not doing something?' I mean, Never, I don't think in Gaulier's classes.
- MS: No, no. 'Cause you, you were wondering, what, what's it going to be like when I'm up there?! And dare I get up next? Or shall I wait for a few more people? You know always not quite the edge of your seat but not sleeping. But I also learnt that the longer you wait the harder it is to get up. First up was at least a brave thing to do!
- LA: *Thank you. Is there anything that you're like to tell me in addition to the questions I've asked?*
- JD: I just think that we were at the Lecoq school at a very particular time.

LA: Yeah

JD: And I think we were exceptionally lucky, with the teachers that we had. We had Monica Pagneux, who's still teaching, we had Philippe, we had other fantastic teachers, but it was a very specific moment in the evolution of the Lecoq school. I think.

MS: And I've no doubt, when Gaulier left, it was probably a bit of a blow to Lecoq, 'cause Lecoq had nurtured him as a teacher. Actually, when Gaulier started teaching at Lecoq, I don't think it went very well for him, talking to old students who were there before me. I remember one of them saying that when he was really new as a teacher, his classes weren't very good. And there was almost a bit of, which sounds really odd, to be thinking of that, with Lecoq there was almost a bit of a, not rebellion (lowers voice), but kind of a lot of mutterings and someone went to tell Jacques that they thought he wasn't doing a good job and he should know (normal volume) so it was, it was quite a rocky beginning, so it's quite interesting, it might have been quite tough for Philippe actually, at the beginning to be accepted as a teacher. 'Cause he was probably quite young when he started there, you know?

JD: Yeah he probably was.

MS: But Lecoq, I mean that says masses about Lecoq and we're not talking about Lecoq, but he had such an astute sense of who would be good to do the work in the school. And he knew that Gaulier was...

JD: And Lecoq loved clown. He absolutely loved clowns and that was the final thing, in our day that was the last thing that you did, was clown, because it was recognized as being the hardest,

MS: Yep.

JD: And, and THE THING, that Lecoq loved so I think probably the fact that Gaulier was a clown, was another reason why he was nurtured by Lecoq.

MS: And I think he liked his fearlessness and his irreverence and all those things, you know, 'cause that's a side of Lecoq probably in himself, but he didn't let it out.

JD: No.

MS: As much as he would have liked to so he thought oh well this guy can do it for me. A great example was when we were at the end of our first year you had to present twenty movements and it's a very technical movement

exercise, you know, and Lecoq's there, sitting in the middle of the room, and masses of students, and it's again, tremendous focus on this poor sod doing the movements, and Gaulier happened to be one day, the day that I was on and most of my colleagues were doing it, he was at the end of the row, so not sitting next to Lecoq, and he spent a lot of time just muttering but irreverently about what was going on! And Lecoq must have known this was going on. And I kind of thought, I wondered if Lecoq was angry, pissed off about this - mutterer, these irreverent cheeky comments or whether he just thought, yeah that's exactly what Gaulier's about. I remember, Lecoq really liked this Dutch guy, (to Joyce) Ted, and Ted did a very good twenty movements 'cause he worked his socks off, he was a great student, and so Lecoq was saying 'ah he's a very good student, such a lot of work' and I just remember this muttering like (stage whispers behind his hand) 'Teachers pet!'

LA and JD laugh

MS: He just said that! He was, you know, most people would be extremely pissed off if they were trying to, you know, conduct a class and someone says 'teacher's pet', you know, but somehow there was a relationship there which was really interesting for the school.

I had a further conversation with Mark, also in his office, 22nd January 2013

LA: *I'd like you to think of a time when you were successful in one of Gaulier's clown workshops.*

MS: I can think of a time, but I can't remember what the impro was. I can think of, it's that one, sort of being dragged into the space? As if you, you don't want to go on but you have to go on. That was the one that he went 'yeah. Ca marche'. C'était bien ca'. That was the one. But I can't, I can't think what the real content of it was. Except I remember unusually, cause usually I was half-petrified in Gaulier's classes, but I remember for some reason I threw caution to the wind and I felt unusually free and devil-may-care. And he seemed to pick up on that. And liked it.

LA: *Do you remember the point when you realized it was working? Did you realise it was working?*

MS: doing it, during it, while I was doing it. I mean, people were laughing. It's very instant, clowning. You know, if you're getting a response, then you know that you're on to something. You've got something to build on. Silence is terrible!

LA: *(laughs) In that moment, what do you remember being most aware of?*

MS: oh just enjoying it. And freedom. And a sense that, it could have gone on, longer. Rather than wanting it to end, 'As soon as possible, please can I go and sit down?'

LA: *The next day, or the next time you got up on stage, were you able to replicate that?*

MS: No. No. And a lot of the students, when it came to the clown stuff, there was that frustration of the hit and miss, getting it one day and then, just seeming to go, you know? And that's part of the lesson, you know, you need to fail, you need to fail, it's a bitter lesson. You can't assume you're going to be funny to start off with.

Appendix E:

Interview with Aitor Basauri and Toby Park

We met before a performance of *Cooped*, at Royal and Derngate Northampton, in the café area of the theatre, on 16th January 2013

- LA: As I understand it, all the members of Spymonkey trained at Gaulier's school. Am I right?
- TP: More or less, yes. I think Petra only did ...a week or two weeks?
- AB: No, I think Petra's done one clown workshop, and then she did clown, a week, in Middlesex University where Philippe first came to England.
- LA: So how did you first meet each other?
- TP: I met Aitor kind of through Gaulier. I was doing a workshop with Gabriel Chame Buendia, who was an Argentinian clown. And I did Gaulier with him. And he was doing a workshop in Madrid. He'd already done something with you in Seville, no?
- AB: Seville and Bilbao. Yeah.
- TP: And, so we met then in 1991. I was working for a company in Switzerland called Karl's Kuhne Gassenchau. An outdoor, action theatre, site specific company. And we were auditioning for a new show, Aitor came to the audition, 'cause he was studying with Philippe at the time in London, and Petra came, because she was interested in doing it, and so that's how the three of us started working together. Then when we were in Switzerland we came up with the idea of doing a show together. With Karl Weilenmann who was, sort of our boss really in the company there, so we did *Stiff* together in 1998, then Stephan joined us in 2000. And Stephan had been, Stephan did a year in Gaulier in 88, something like that. So I was there in 90 to 91, when were you there?
- AB: I was a bit longer, with Philippe in London, 95, 96...and that audition was '96. [They try to remember, and can't]
- LA: I wanted to ask some questions to start with about the clown workshops at Gaulier. To start with, what do you remember most about the course?
- AB: How difficult it was to be funny.
- TP: Yep. Terror.
- LA: Terror?

TP: (laughing) terror!

LA: And how real is that difficulty and terror?

AB: For me, it's as real as going up, on stage. It's the closest thing that I have felt in the workshop to what it means to go and do a play on stage. [A friend] was writing to me the other day and they were saying the clown goes to the stage with nothing or with everything. And when you go there, either: will be good, either: will be bad. I think, that's what you do in Philippe. And you learn to be happy there. And... I was really bad.

LA: Really?

AB: ssh-yeah

TP: I don't think you were. I think you were really good, weren't you?

AB: Clown? No.

TP: no?

AB: I was very good clown in all the other workshops

TP: Oh ok! (laughs)

AB: but that one I was really bad.

LA: Right

AB: Except, one day.

TP: Yeah. I was very bad, except one day. One thing I did with Gabriel, that we just, it was like, it was like a huge explosion of fun and all the things that had been really difficult, suddenly were - I mean he is a very very good clown so I was - I was (laughs) kind of coasting on his shirt tails. But we had a great time. We stole his stereo - cause you know when it's enough, he starts to play the music to tell you to stop (laughs) We went into his office and started dismantling all the (breaks into laughter) speakers and stuff! It was very funny. Very good.

AB: But also I think its important to point here that - for me at least - I do know why I was funny, now. I didn't know why I was funny the day I was funny. And I didn't know why I was funny when I was funny within the year. At all. I didn't understand anything whatsoever. Not one word. When I was there, I just created in my head, the mantra, of 'have fun. have fun. have fun. have fun.'

LA: But you didn't understand that?

AB: Yes, I understood that I had to have fun. But nothing else.

TP: You didn't understand why that made you funny?

AB: Not at all. (pause) but I am not the most clever person in the world. (LA laughs)

TP: But also you can't separate just the clown four weeks from everything else because you start on a journey at the beginning of it, and, you know, different people have different - some people start and they're just immediately fantastic and go through a dip later on or have a crisis. Most people have fairly large crises quite early and then, and then it's about kind of rebuilding yourself throughout the year so, I don't know how it is now? When we did it, I think clown was half way through the year

AB: Now it's in the second year.

LA: When I did the summer clown course, which is a couple of years ago, it was all on improvisation, so he'd give us an instruction, and we would improvise a response to that. Did you do any work on rehearsing clown numbers, and developing things?

TP: Yes. But not in the clown workshop. In the directing workshop some people chose to create some clown numbers in that.

AB: I didn't. In any.

LA: So was there a big change then when you started to decide to make a clown show, when you had to try and do something and then do it again the next day?

TP: Yes. Yeah. It's something that I don't think Philippe has really, my experience of watching stuff that he's directed was that he is of course a brilliant teacher, but as a director, to be able to help actors to rediscover what it was about what they did the first time, that's a completely different thing, and that's something that Cal is, is, very very very good at, he's very skilled at finding what the, guiding you through that thing of re-finding the pleasure.

AB: But I think also... I mean, the same thing that Toby says, but with other words, the way I say it is that the school, is an amazing journey to know the flop. Which is where the clown lives. If there is no flop, there is no clown. So you have to write a beautiful thing, for after the flop. And the thing that is never told, or at least I don't remember anyone telling: now, you save the flop, and create something very funny. That is guaranteed, funny. And that is when the show starts, really. I think Philippe is the best

I ever see to educate... There's no one else in the world to tell you be who you are, and you will be good.

TP: It's very important

AB: That's why I always said that we do Philippe, that's what we do. Philippe Gaulier's school is brilliant. Because you don't discuss what is is. You just play. That's what it is to be a clown.

TP: Also that's not part of what he's teaching really, he's teaching something more basic than how to make a good clown number. It's teaching you how to be a good clown. And the, the making a good clown number is, that's different, that's a completely different process I think.

LA: When other students made you laugh, could you see what it was they had done that made it funny?

AB: I couldn't.

TP: No not really. 'Cause usually the best bits were when it happened and took people kind of by surprise. You know?

AB: Yes. But also I was too occupied about myself. 'Cause that's one of the things in the school I think is very important, is that you spend one year learning about yourself. But whenever there was something there that was very good you are thinking, 'how can I do that? How can I do that?' So, I have to say I didn't understand anything, it was only when I went to do a show immediately after, that I started to understand the freedom,

TP: mm

AB: the fun,

TP: mm

AB: The pleasure, then focus, fixed point, all the things, suddenly, I was happy, I was in front of an audience, and it was easy to make people laugh. And then because I was repeating the same things I started to understand. But I have to say I didn't understand anything when I was there. But it was an amazing life experience, that I will never forget.

LA: What effect did it have that there were other students there watching you, while you tried being a clown?

TP: The class becomes a sort of crucible of, you know, everybody's - some more, some less - aware of the discovery that everybody's making,. You get to know people very well. So in a way there's nothing to hide behind, because within the first week, everybody kind of knows your tricks, you

know? So, I found it a very exposing thing. It was not a hugely pleasurable experience, doing it. But, what difference it makes having other people there? They're your peers, and they're sort of, they're there and everybody's kind of seeing it through the filter of watching Philippe watching it. I think that's quite a big thing. And he, the whole thing of opening up his observations, to check in with the rest of the audience, that he's right, that's a really good tool. Cause then its not just him that's saying it. It's everybody.

LA: Did you ever disagree with his judgments on somebody else's performance?

TP: yeah, well, (laughs)

AB: I didn't. I never did. No. But I don't...of course, I did. Some people I liked more, some people I liked less, but at the time, I didn't. Philippe says it's good, I say it's good.

TP: mm. yes.

AB: I have to say, I think there are other factors to what Toby was saying, which is that: I was twenty three years old. It was the first time I ever left Spain. I didn't speak the language properly. Philippe was - God. And I'm from Spain so he was the holy trinity. In one person. I never disagreed with Philippe. I might have tried to ask him a question a couple of times until I understood that there are no questions.

LA: (laughs)

AB: And then, I just, I don't know what I did, just survived. And tried to have as much fun while I was trying to survive. It might sound like a very painful experience, but, on the contrary, for me every day was a dare. Like, daring. Do you dare me? I will go. I will do it. You don't think I will? I will. I did things which I never did before in my entire life, ever. Not just on the stage, but, my life, it was very fun, completely new.

LA: When I asked that question, you smiled and laughed at each other. Can I gather from that that you had different experiences with disagreeing with Philippe?

TP: No I mean, its, no, well I was just thinking about a time when, when I got really upset, 'cause, (laughs) cause we were doing Neutral Mask, and when it was over, I just got really embarrassed 'cause Philippe said 'Now, one of the students has done some mime training. (laughs) Which one is

it?’ and there were like, you know, six people there. And nobody, you know, ‘not me’, ‘not me’ and I hadn’t done any mime training. And he called me ‘Menteur!’, called me a liar! I was so, so embarrassed. I’m blushing even now thinking about it!

LA: (laughs)

TP: No but I think Aitor’s right: one of the things that, when you’re watching other people doing stuff, you’re trying to understand. You’re sort of trying to understand what it is that he’s looking for. And by watching him, and what he says about what he’s seeing, you’re trying to reinterpret that in looking inwards. I think part of the work is trying to understand these things which are really elusive.

AB: But the point is also, I think - now, this is looking backwards - finding your own method. And you can only find it, just looking at yourself. And also looking at the other people as well. I think I understood one thing: that I didn’t have to try to understand anything. I just had to experience it. And, again, looking backwards, ‘cause I had my degree in drama and I had worked as an actor for a while before I went to the school, there were many things that I knew. And I had to forget about them. And to learn, and I can say this now, to learn how to be bad, and to be happy being bad. And it was, horrible many, many times. But always very, very exciting.

LA: One of the things that I’m looking at is clown physicality. Were you taught to consider your bodies in a particular way at the school?

TP: I was doing Monica Pagneux at the same time as I was doing it, and that was a very good experience. There’s an anti-technique thing to what Philippe, you know, he’s completely not interested in that kind of technique, and at that stage it was something that he, didn’t want to see.

LA: That’s why he laughed at you for having mime training?

TP: Yeah. Yeah. That’s sort of like (gestures, then explains to the recorder) that was a wanking sign, by the way. What was the wording of the question?

LA: Were you taught to perform your body in a certain way?

AB: well I wasn’t. But I think Philippe: ‘You move too much’,

LA and TP: mm.

AB: er, ‘too stiff’, ‘stop moving your head’,

TP: yeah.

AB: 'Why do you shake?'

TP: Stuff about fixed point

AB: I think he's asking you, he's asking you to have your body open. He's asking you to be light on your feet, he's asking you certain things that makes you be,

TP: To be normal on stage. I remember the street performers who came had a terrible time, because their default thing is not to be normal. It's to be something weird, and, you know they've all got their quirks and leaving that, to some people that was a very difficult thing to, just to be normal and to be open, like Aitor said.

AB: And to be tall. I think that's what we learned. And in a way that's why you sometimes realise - and I say this is looking backwards - I realised that after that, we have done yoga, we train ourselves, we do warm-ups, we run, we do exercise, 'cause we know, the better our bodies are, the better we will be on stage. We are not athletes. We are not. We are performers.

LA: When I saw Moby Dick, it seemed to me that you found a lot of humour in the appearance of your own bodies. And a lot of the jokes came from your real bodies.

TP: mm hmm.

LA: So I wondered, what would happen if one of you couldn't go on stage tonight, would another actor be able to go into you place?

TP: Well this is something that we've had to deal with, quite recently, to start to find replacements. We visited the idea of training up other people to do the stuff at various intervals in our development. But it's actually very difficult, now. Because the material we've created is so inherently to do with who we are. So, to put replacements in is a difficult thing. I think it's an interesting thing; it's something that we're interested in exploring. But it's quite difficult. We just had an experience where the promoter was absolutely not willing to have a replacement because, in his eyes, what we do is inherently the four of us. We've been lucky to have been able to stay together for as long as we have as a quartet. But the success of that, there's also a kernel of a real dilemma and a problem. Which is

that the stuff that we make is wrapped up in our relationship on stage.
The four of us, just the group of who we are.

AB: But I do think, based on that, the core of the idea of that, could be applied to another four people. Similar to us. Physically speaking, and a German actor, and a Spanish actor and two English, a woman and a man. It could be applied, it will need, it will be, let's say the same show, but different.

AB: So I would suggest, to get four people and teach them Cooped and adapt Cooped to them, and they will take it on tour. And of course they will have the name of our characters, but if the Spanish man is not fat, there will not be a fat joke. There will be other jokes, 'cause everybody,

TP: Yup, has certain things about them.

AB: Exactly.

LA: You're casting would have to get very specific

TP: It becomes completely impossible. I mean actually there's a guy that we worked with last year for Jekyll and Hyde in Battersea, Pablo, he's brilliant! He look almost exactly like Aitor.

AB: But he's completely different.

LA: So the same jokes don't work with that actor, even though he looks like you?

AB: I think they could work. But for example, I think for him, it will be difficult to play the part that I play here.

TP: Different shows, I think Oedipussy for instance would be, because it's better, it's a well written play, you know, it's easier to imagine somebody else doing the part but Cooped, its so specific to who we are and...it becomes very difficult.

LA: From one night to the next, when you're performing a show, how much does the response from the spectators change?

TP: It's quite consistent really. Quite surprisingly consistent. I mean as the shows bed in, we get to know what the response of the audience is. The shows become quite consistent, in what they are, how they're played. Erm, surprisingly. I mean obviously there are some audiences who don't laugh very much. Other audiences who, who laugh too much. It's horrible when you get people who, who are just sitting in the front row and just laughing like drains, the rest of the audience (he mimes) you can see the

rest of the audience, kind of, crossing their arms, (laughs) 'must be the best friend of the company...' and we don't know who the fuck they are! And it, that can be difficult. But no, it tends to be quite consistent.

AB: I agree with that. I think, when I look at it as an actor, and it's difficult because in a way we are the artistic directors but we're also performers and we try to find out exactly what do we do, how do we do it, in order to sell it. But as an actor, I always think, 'I don't know what it's gonna be tonight.' Well it's true what Toby says, it's pretty consistent. But there's something that I think the four of us do before we go on the stage, which is fundamental to the work that we do, is that we don't know what's gonna happen, you know? And Cooped is probably the show that we have done the most, though it is not the oldest. Yesterday the reaction was amazing, for example. But: for me it was a surprise. I was surprised. And that show has one laugh every twenty seconds. Or every ten seconds, no? We can say that. There is a possible laugh, sometimes we don't get them but there are, there are written laughs all over the play.

LA: Ah. So you could show me a script, and say, 'they laugh here, here, here'?

AB: Yeah.

TP: I mean actually I was really surprised last night, remembering how dense it is, in terms of laughter. It's like, every other line. Some places it's like, you know, you hit the marks, the audience just kind of bubbles along on a wave of laughter. And that's something that Cal talks about, sort of getting this wave, that just keeps rolling and keeps rolling and sort of carries everybody, everybody through. I think that's, if we achieve that, that's a great thing.

AB: I don't think we say it in a pretentious way. It's not like 'We Are Funny'. There's a certain way that we will create funny things, people, to a certain extent, will always laugh. But. And it's the same thing Philippe teaches you, no? If you have fun, you have pleasure being on the stage, you are yourself, people will laugh. And that is guaranteed. [...] But, it is only guaranteed when the performer, the person, the company, the material that you do is done with lots of pleasure and with lots of fun, and lots of honesty and vulnerability. And then, yes. You will create something very funny. But, the amount of factors that it can have...they all have to (makes click sound and gestures with his hands towards each

other) and then anything can be funny. That's what I believe. And I choose the word 'believe', 'cause it's like a kind of faith, that anything can be funny. But sometimes, some things I cannot make them funny.

LA: So, if you didn't hold on to this fundamental idea that you don't know how it's gonna go, then something that has been funny for the last week, could flop.

TP: It can always flop. But once we've done the show a while, it's they're all, pretty much, more or less, everything's a fixed laugh. Because everything becomes a written thing. I mean it starts off from, either something that happens by accident in a rehearsal, or, something delicious, an idea for a costume or for a visual gag, or you know, for a particular line, planned and unplanned stuff. Once it's made, it all, in a way, they're all bankers. You know? I come on in my riding outfit, and I look to the window, and then a horse's head appears at the window, and then there's a little neigh: it's a banker. There's gonna be a laugh. Aitor comes and gives it a sweet, and the horse punches him: absolutely 100%: banker. You know. But, the way that it's got created is, well in that instance, it's Cal thinking that would be a funny thing to do with you. But also part of it is, is Aitor - the bit of Aitor which is trying to defend,

AB: Artistic integrity

TP: Both being sophisticated and playing the English Lawyer.

AB: Sorry, that's a difficult question in a way, because you can see, always, people in the audience that - there were some people in the audience last night that, could not get it. It was too stupid. And we haven't done enough, (beckons) 'come with me, come with me'. So they come, they go little by little in the world of being an idiot. 'Cause we are idiots. We invite people to come into our world and when you come into the world of an idiot, you have to look into the idiot inside yourself. And we didn't do that very well I think. But that's a very important thing. And I believe, and I think we believe this, the four of us can have different tastes, of what we like. I think the four of us, also we think, anything can be funny. And though we talk in the language 'that was a bad idea', 'that was a good idea', I also believe there's no such things as bad ideas. It's just that you make them work or you don't make them work. If you don't like them very much, you are not gonna use lots of effort to make them work. But if

Toby likes something very much, he will convince us to spend time, if I like something very much, I will convince them, or Stephan or Petra. And maybe it could be very very funny.

TP: And, its often the interaction of, what I want to do, and how the others either help that or destroy it, becomes, quite a lot to do with the show, and same with Aitor's ideas, you know, we each have certain tastes, directions that we like to go in, and the others, it's how the others respond to that, and amplify it, or subtract from it that becomes the, lots of material. That really generates lots of stuff.

LA: When you're rehearsing, do you consider what Gaulier's reaction to your ideas would be?

TP : (laughs) Well we were very very very pleased when he came to see our first show, Stiff. Very early on in its life. It was at the Tristan Bates Theatre in the Actors Studio in the heart of London's glittering theatreland. It was the 5th time we'd done the show, or something. And he really, really, laughed all the way through. And that was a wonderful thing. Cause you know, I had a difficult time at Philippe's, I was just very nervous around him, and sort of never knew what to say. If we met on the metro on the way to class, 'oh no, it's Philippe! What am I going to, have to think of something to say to him!'. Whereas Aitor and Cal are very good friends of his, so for me that was a lovely, lovely result, of you know, ten years of work, getting him to laugh at what I was doing! But the rest of it I don't know, not really? No.

AB: I mean I don't know if Philippe would understand this, but um, we, I think we killed the teacher.

LA: You killed the teacher?

AB: No, not so much, I mean, ...how can I say this? (pause) I always think of doing another workshop. And I think, who will I do another workshop with? And I realise the only person I can do workshops with is Philippe. Until he dies. When he dies, then I will have to look for another master. Clowns, we need a master. We need a 'Monsieur Marcel'. Philippe of course is our Monsieur Marcel. But Spymonkey, my theory, every time we do a new show and we get a new director, cha, he is our monsieur Marcel. That director is our Monsieur Marcel, we believe, like idiots, what that director says, and then we kill them.

- TP: Ha, we kill them! [...] It's fundamental to the process. That it's going to be the person who can solve everything. And each show becomes that dialogue.
- AB: And that's why we always try to choose directors that we admire. Or, I admire and I introduce them to them, or Toby or Petra or Stephan, and we also have reactions to that, and that's part of the show too. So, of course Philippe is always there. Because he's the link between the four of us, but know we have other, other people. And we try to be our own Monsieur Marcel. But it doesn't really work. You know. We need to have someone.
- TP: I think it's on the cards that we, because we're kind of running out of Monsieur Marcells, now. I think we have a much clearer idea of what it is that we like, our own style. But also I think we've got more confidence in our ability to create work amongst ourselves. So the natural progression is to use that creative unit to make shows, and put other people in them, for instance. In which case we will be our own Monsieur Marcells. 'Cause we can't carry on slinging our bodies around. Cause think of what we'd be doing in our sixties. It would be better to be making shows for other people and sending them off to do all the hard work!
- AB: It's important that Cal McCrystal has been a big influence.
- TP: He's been the main Monsieur Marcel.
- AB: In the interpretation of what Philippe taught us.
- TP: Philippe's influence on us as a company is in a way more to do with what, how Cal has interpreted his practice, than it has to do with what we experienced ourselves there. You know, we all understand and have a common vocabulary that we understand because we worked with Philippe, but it's particularly Cal's way of using those tools, and, what he's seen in us that has created our relationship on stage really.
- AB: And it's curious - because I went to be a teacher in the school, for 2010, It was very nice to hear what Philippe said. And of course I honour Philippe when we create our own things inspired by what he said. Doesn't mean 'he will agree' or 'he will like it', but that is not the most important thing. For me at least. Because I would love him to like it, but I know why I do it. Because I want to inspire the audience, by what he taught me.

Appendix F: Interview with Cal McCrystal

Cal spoke to me in the garden of his home in London, Saturday 29th June 2013

LA: What is your strongest memory about Gaulier's clown course? Or the story that you most often tell?

CM: It was a real revelation to me when I started working with Gaulier. I went to a very traditional drama school, Royal Scottish Academy, in Glasgow. And everything that they'd said I was doing wrong, he said, 'this is what we need'. And everything that they didn't like about me in drama school, he loved about me. I think that was, it's more than OK to be a show off, it's actually essential. When you're performing. It doesn't mean you can't play a character. But that character must reveal yourself, rather than hide yourself.

LA: When you were working in the workshop, what role did your classmates play in your own learning?

CM: One of the wonderful things about Gaulier's school is that he doesn't audition anyone, you just, whoever just turns up, if you've got the 500 quid, they get in.

So there's a broad range of experience, and I was probably one of the most experienced actors in the workshop that I did. And, in most of the workshops I was one of the most experienced people. And I remember saying to Philippe, after one absolutely clueless, bewildered, seventeen year old, had been trying to play Medvedenko in *The Seagull* - and it was so funny, we were all laughing, he didn't know why we were laughing but he carried on. And I remember saying to Philippe afterwards, 'how can I be that funny? How can I be as funny as the guy that just doesn't know anything?'

LA: (laughs)

CM: Because, you know, if you have experience and you're in command of yourself a little bit, it can be very hard to access your clown, initially. And you actually need to go back to 'I know nothing'. And you need to get rid of all the things that you've trained, all the things you've always tried to prove about yourself. And go back to 'I know nothing' - and it's terribly difficult. Because we're all show-offs, so you want to use what you have to show off, but it doesn't really help you in clown. You have to

find just that stupidity and vulnerability. In fact I had great success working with Philippe in the workshops and I'm not saying I wasn't funny in my own way, but there was something about the purity and the bewildered innocence of this youngster that I just thought, wow, you just can't fake that. And that was a big influence on me, just seeing somebody being funny without knowing why. In a situation where that was supported. So, we were laughing *at* him, yes. But, um, but in - in a place where 'laughing at' is good. Rather than 'laughing with'.

LA: ... and so, I imagine he didn't answer, 'well Cal, you do it like this. This is how to look like you don't know anything...'

CM: No, he just, made some strange face and moved on. You know. But he knew what I meant, absolutely.

LA: How did you know that that student was succeeding in the school? And when do you see that in the exercise?

CM: Some people go to the school and they come out the other end exactly the same and they haven't learnt anything. I mean people who have success and people who don't have success, they can come to the school and kind of plateau their way through the course and not actually really learn anything. I think a lot of people do Gaulier to tick a box or because they're curious, and they don't take to the work. But one of the most rewarding things about being in class and watching other people is for those wonderful breakthrough moments that you get. And they happen with every workshop he does, there are breakthrough moments. And sometimes people have a breakthrough: and then they go back and they won't recognise that it's a breakthrough and go back, but sometimes they go, 'crikey, something happened there, I *think* I know what I did'. And you see them working towards trying to find it again. So the wisdom is in knowing that you have to work to find it again. Not in necessarily finding it, because sometimes you won't find it on a course, but if you know you need it, you know that you need to look for it, then you've got all the rest of your life to try and find it.

LA: Did you ever watch somebody perform a clown act, and think it was absolutely hilarious, and Philippe said, 'No, that was horrible'? Or vice-versa?

CM: Yes, yes. Sometimes.

LA: And was that OK? Or was that...

CM: No, it was bloody annoying! But it's his class. And, you know, I'm not a teacher, so I don't know what it's like to sit there every day and watch people, and maybe he's seen that person do something before. But there isn't always an obvious reason why Philippe gets bored. And often, I think if he says he doesn't like something, and I'm thinking 'well actually that was going ok', it's 'cause he's just bored of it.

LA: Ah so he's seen it, that person do that already?

CM: Or (*whispers*) he just doesn't like it. Because, I mean it's all very personal, I mean I go and see lots of clown work and things and I get bored. The audience are all laughing, but I don't like it. Because my own particular something that I'm looking for isn't there, and therefore, I'm bored. So Philippe will, I *think*, indulge people who he likes - I think he's done that with me a few times. I think he's done that with me, I think probably he might laugh a bit harder than I deserve, sometimes...!

LA: (laughs) ok

CM: But that's one of the kind of mystical things about his training, that, you try to please him, and you don't really know what he wants. And that's part of the training because you, that's exactly what a clown going out in front of an audience is looking for.

LA: Was there anything, at the time, which you didn't 'get' about the clown course?

CM: No, it was right up my street, I felt I'd arrived, home where I belonged.

La: Were you taught physicality, or a certain way of using your body at the school?

CM: No. Not at all. Because of the way a lot of the improvisations tend to launch themselves, and because of the range of different nationalities in any course, language will not necessarily - will probably not be your first way of expressing yourself. Some people, and I think this is very interesting, many people, many very good clowns who are silent can't be funny when they speak. Because they lose their stupidity when they speak. And that was slightly true of me as well, because, you know, I don't sound stupid in my accent and... I think it's easier to be stupid without speaking, initially.

- LA: So because language is more difficult, physicality will be more likely to come through?
- CM: Yeah, but we don't get taught that as such, it's just you discover other ways to be funny than saying funny things. Because, Philippe, his English, certainly when I was working with him, wasn't great, so there's no point saying something witty cause he probably wouldn't understand.
- LA: Right, yeah.
- CM: Um, A lot of the other people in the class, from Germany or wherever, they won't understand your witticism, so you find something just in your body to do. You know that main exercise, which I call The Torture, you know, 'Come on and be funny',
- LA: Yes
- CM: You can't come in and say (*mimics standup comic*) "Well now ladies and gentlemen, on my way here today", you know you can't, that doesn't work, no one will laugh at that. Very few people say very much at all, if anything in that particular exercise and that exercise is, that's the kind of crux, of clown. It's cruel.
- LA: Yeah! When I did the summer clown course, which was 2009, the workshop consisted of games and improvisations or tasks performed in front of classmates. And one of the things that I see as a gap between my workshop experience and shows produced by people who've finished the Gaulier school and started making work, is that they've moved from improvisation to creating numbers, and having something that is rehearsed, is fixed and repeatable. In that transition from being in the school to being in a show with Gaulier, where did you start working on rehearsal of clown numbers?
- CM: Um, the rehearsal - it was a long time ago. And it was torture that show... Philippe conducted the rehearsals very much like he conducts his workshops. But obviously we were trying to find material for a show. He had one very small idea. Because the channel tunnel was about to open. And he wanted to make his clown show about the channel tunnel. He knew that he wanted to start with a ping-pong table, with a lot of boxes underneath, and that was going to represent the tunnel. So we had, there were two French people, I was one of them, and Toby Sedgwick was the other French. And Mick Barnfather and Anders Ohrn, a Swedish clown,

were the English side. Then there was Abigail Dulay who was a kind of neutral figure. And so it was about clowns puzzling about how to take the boxes out from under the table. And they would do it, you know, the rule with clown is if someone says 'could you move that box', you'll never just take it, there always has to be a plan to find a different way to do it... and then there were all kinds of other things around the idea of the channel tunnel, like um, security guards, I mean there was just a big exploration of ideas. The ideas went on and on and on and we weren't really fixing anything, we never really repeated anything. Philippe knew that he wanted me to play The Specialist, which is the most high status clown character. The Specialist is really difficult. So, um, rehearsals were enormous fun, whenever we were just free and we were playing, and I think Philippe thought 'god, this show's going to be so funny, these people are so funny'. But whenever we came to repeat any of the things that we'd had success with in rehearsal, it always fell flat. And it was very difficult, and it was a *really* difficult process actually.

LA: Mmm

CM: I didn't know this at the time but I say it now because I've made so many clown shows myself, there wasn't any particular priority given to *rehearsing*. All of it was about exploring and finding. And the actual, you know, to use the French word for rehearsal, repetition; we did not have.

LA: right.

CM: There was a bit of that in the following week, Philippe said 'oh what about that bit, that was good, lets try this bit again', and we kind of threw the show together.

LA: And would you say that is an area of your practice that you have, in making these clown shows since, is that an area where you have maybe, diverted in your...

CM: Yes, most definitely. I mean, as torture as that show was, I will say that we played that show at the Edinburgh Festival, and we took it on a national tour, and on a good night, it was the funniest thing that anyone had ever seen. And nobody could believe that we could ever have a bad night, 'cause it was, we were all so hilarious.

LA: yeah?

CM: But on a bad night, people were waiting to beat us up afterwards. I mean, not quite, but in Edinburgh, we used to sneak down the fire escape at the back of the Assembly Rooms so no one would see us. Because we flopped every single night. People hated us. People said ‘that was 10 minutes of material stretched out to a fucking hour’, and, ‘you people are ghastly’, and people would leave the theatre, and they’d deliberately slam their seats up and they’d stomp out, it made people absolutely furious. But as I said, on a good night, people were just screaming, all the way through, screaming with laughter. I have to say we had a lot more bad nights than good nights, sadly. But, to answer your question, I couldn’t have become a director if it hadn’t been for that show, because I learned so much doing it. Northern comedians will talk to you about dying in the clubs. This was, we died, in the clown show, on the national tour, and (*laughs slightly*) that was my version of - that’s the harshest training. And, I mean probably I’d have done this anyway, but, as a result, my shows are full of set pieces, full of routines, choreography. All kinds of things that work absolutely independently as sketches, really. And I call those little scenes ‘life rafts’, because it means that we can still clown in the way that we were clowning with Gaulier, which is just kind of free-falling, because we had very little material, and we were just kind of relying on, just coming out from the wings and standing and looking at the audience to get really big laughs. I will never do another show when we’re relying so much on just that kind of thing.

LA: mm

CM: Good clowns can make people laugh with nothing, and we were doing that on a good night. But you can’t rely on it being a good night every night. And I don’t want the inconsistency of people seeing my show one night, going ‘they weren’t on form, it was terrible’. So I have these life rafts, so you can clown, but you’ve got these solid things, it’s hilarious choreography, or it’s a really funny idea, or whatever, and its rehearsed, and timed, right down to the second. I mean I tell people when to breathe. And, you know, I’m quite dictatorial about that, which annoys some people, the longer they work with me the more they find it a bit frustrating. But yeah I suppose, I don’t know if that’s a result of doing that Gaulier show. But certainly, I don’t want to do a clown show like that

one again, it relied too much on us finding our pleasure on that night, and there wasn't good material.

LA: I see. Do you mind if I ask about these life rafts? Are they, maybe; go on stage with nothing, until you're in trouble, and then get a life raft?

CM: No no no, the life rafts are about - none of my shows contain any improvisational elements at all.

LA: Right? OK.

CM: They're all absolutely set. But, while all the material is set, I'm still relying, completely, because my material is kind of terrible, really,

LA (laughs and shakes head)

CM: I'm not saying it's not funny, it IS funny, but, it's kind of, it's ridiculous and stupid. And in order to make it work, I absolutely rely on the pleasure of the performers and the spirit of play, and the spirit of mischief, and the greed for the audience's affection, and that, you know, unashamed desire to show off.

LA: yeah.

CM: All of those things, and trust as well, and the performers to trust the audience. So I rely on all those things to make my, all my bad material work. But, the material is set.

LA OK. Thank you, that's very helpful. In January, just before *Cooped* opened again, I interviewed Toby and Aitor, and they talked about working with you, when they'd found funny moments in improvisation, and that repetition, finding them again, so that you can be consistently funny. I wondered if you could tell me, how you might give, what feedback you might give... how would you help them to find it again?

CM: I acknowledge that it is my job to help them find it again. It's my job. And... what helps me in my job is... that I have a very good memory. And, I never forget if something's funny and I never forget *why* it's funny. And I can go and see one of my shows, and the next day, without writing anything down, I can say every single thing that got a laugh, and didn't get a laugh, and did all right, you know. And in rehearsal... my relationship with Spymonkey, you know, we've worked together for such a long time and I think the fourth show we did together, I think they were finding me quite frustrating, because I was being so dictatorial and coming up with a lot of material myself, as I've always done with them,

but they were starting to develop and they wanted to... but, so, apart from those pullings of personality, they really trust me. And if I say, 'Aitor, do this. And do it like that, and count to three before you say your next word, and then turn around, and then, blink', he won't ask why, he knows that it will be funny.

LA: wow.

CM: And he just goes, 'oh, good'. And he can't wait to show it to the audience. Because he knows it'll get a laugh and it does.

LA: Yeah.

CM: So I know their clowns very well, I've worked with them more intensively than any other company, and I love them more than any other performers I've ever worked with, I mean I just, you know, as a company. And we have a very good dynamic together. And in rehearsal, if they do something, then we have to find it again, I think I probably explain to them what it was that was funny about what they did, ...I'm able to, I don't know. I can't explain how I'm able to help them. A lot of the improvisations I do with Spymonkey are because I want a particular thing to come out of it. And I set it up in order to happen that way. And then of course, there are the happy accidents where things don't go the way you initially wanted them to go because there was a misunderstanding, or the clowns had a better idea, and it goes off at a tangent. So the work gets made out of a combination of what I create for them in my head and help them find, and what they fall upon themselves in rehearsal. What they just accidentally come up with, what they improvise. But this issue of trust is very very important, because even the first show, *Stiff*, they trusted me completely on that one as well, and I don't know why they did, but they decided they were going to throw their lot in with me, and it's proved to be one of the most joyful and fulfilling clown partnerships, in my experience. Because we have a lot of fun working together.

LA: So, I know that, those clowns and other people, some of the other people that you've worked with are also Gaulier-trained. Does Philippe's voice have a presence in those rehearsal rooms?

CM: Yes. Definitely. I think most obviously in just some key words. I mean, if you say to an actor, or a performer who's done Gaulier, 'yes but where was your pleasure?' they understand. And if you say that to anybody that

hasn't done Gaulier, they look at you as if you were off your trolley. And so one of the difficult things that I find, going to rehearsals at the National Theatre, or with more traditional actors, is communicating this thing about pleasure, they're very suspicious of it. The other thing about Gaulier is that, because he's so brutally honest,

LA: Yup.

CM: And he will just say 'mmm that was shit', or you know, 'sit down', or say to somebody 'are you bored?' or 'let's have a one-way ticket to the bench' or whatever his funny put-down of the day is, people who've done Gaulier, generally speaking, aren't scared of getting very very honest criticism. And one of the last things I did when I was an actor was a play which was on in the West End, it was directed by Geoffrey Rush, and it was absolute rubbish. It was a development of the rude mechanicals from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and it was a full-length play about them and I was playing Francis Flute. And this production had been very successful in Australia, and Geoffrey had directed it over there, and it was coming to the West End, and I thought it was gonna be good, but it was the worst kind of clowning, I felt, was going on. And um, I'd started directing, but I hadn't done very much at that point, but I knew that it was bad. And, I kept saying to the other actors, 'oh do you know, this clowning's, like, 20 years old. You know, this is really bad, people are gonna hate this'. They're going, 'oh, no, it'll be fine'. So, I invited Aitor to come to one of the previews. And, I met him afterwards, and I said, 'it's terrible, isn't it?' and he said 'Oh, it's terrible, terrible'. And I said 'What was I like?', and he said, 'you were terrible'. So we went to the pub with the actors. And I said to Aitor, 'tell everyone what you thought of it'. And Aitor said to this group of people from the Royal Shakespeare Company, 'You insult the audience. Just by appearing on the stage'. And they were horrified. Horrified! 'You can't say that to an actor at previews!'

LA: (laughs)

CM: But, you do, if you're a Gaulier person; I mean I went to see the last Cirque du Soleil show, at the Albert Hall. It was directed by a clown, incidentally, David Shiner. But the clowning was horrible. And the clowns wanted to see me afterwards, so we went for a drink and I said to them 'Do you have any idea how bad you are?', and they just said, 'Yes! We do!'

We do, yes, we know!’ Clowns want that feedback, they don’t want, (*high apologetic voice*) ‘Well, you know’, because it’s either funny or it’s not. You can’t get, ‘well it was almost right’. If it’s not funny, it’s not funny. And in fact I operate in an atmosphere of encouragement, all the time, I’m not a brutal person at all. But, you can say to people that they were bad. You just say, ‘that was bad’. As long as most of the time you’re saying ‘that was really good’, you know - if it is. And with other actors you have to be a lot more tactful and careful. And, so there’s a shorthand with Gaulier people. And they know that being told they’re bad is a step towards getting it right.

LA: As you’ve worked with more and more clown performers, and made more and more of your own things, has your practice reinforced or challenged what you learned in Philippe’s workshops?

CM: I’m very much my own person. My work is definitely inspired by what I learnt from Philippe, and was encouraged by Philippe. But, I have my own practice, and I always did. I’ve never set out to do something that obeyed all Philippe’s rules. Because I have my own way of doing things. And some things that Philippe likes to see, I don’t particularly like to see. I’m sure there’s some things I do that Philippe, will just go, ‘oh, god, there goes Cal again’. For instance, Philippe always says, ‘if you have to show your arse, there’s something wrong’. I always have arses in my shows! I always have them. (*deadpan*) And in the case of Spymonkey; actual sphincters.

LA: (laughs)

CM: Philippe finds that stuff terribly funny, he laughs, when he sees it, he loves it. He loves the mischief and stupidity of my shows. A lot of the people that started with Gaulier, and started doing a bit of clown, they kind of turned into storytellers. Told by an Idiot, or Complicité, and I’ve never done that, for better or worse I’ve absolutely stuck to just doing clowning, that’s what I love. Or applying clowning to the written texts that I have directed, Aykbourn, or Joe Orton, or Feydeau. I apply those clowning rules to it. I took a lot from Philippe, but I have my own version of what he did.

LA: When you’ve been talking about Spymonkey you’ve talked about knowing the clown, those individuals’ clowns. I saw, last year, *One Man Two Guvnors*, and I wondered how, for instance in that show, how much are

you working to create material with those individuals? If you're working with actors who don't already feel they have their own sense of their clown?

CM: At the National Theatre, with *One Man, Two Guvnors*, I didn't talk about Philippe. Because, I thought, mentioning some 'clown guru' would put everyone off and terrify everyone. So, what I tried to do was put the things that I like to see into a language that was much more, of the Stanislavski thing. There is a very convenient crossover with Stanislavski; because it's about revealing yourself and it's about not covering up, and all this kind of stuff, so I talked about things in quite a traditional way. I did talk about pleasure. I mean the reason I was there initially was to create the physical sequences. But Nick Hytner also wanted me to help create the comic vocabulary for the whole show. And that was basically, me just sitting, watching the actors, getting funny ideas, and saying 'try this, try this, try this'.

LA: yeah.

CM: And it worked. That piece lent itself very much to my way of thinking. One of the things that I insisted on, and Nick Hytner was very suspicious of, was the actors playing *to* the audience, not just in front of them, but playing *to* them. And that's not something that you see in the National Theatre very often - but, it's not something I invented, the ancient Greeks did that. You don't see it very much in the theatre now, because the fourth wall came down. And I'm very anti-fourth wall. For anything.

LA: Have you worked to develop a clown piece or a comedy play, with some performers, and then replaced performers?

CM: Yes. It's difficult, that. Because I make the material bespoke for the people I'm working with. And if you have to replace someone, it's an absolute nightmare. And the replacement is almost never as good. And also there isn't the amount of time. If there was a decent amount of time, you would rework it. It's very important that, obviously, that the new performer isn't trying to copy the old one. But there isn't always time to spend with that person, for them to really find it. Spymonkey are always talking about, 'oh let's get replacements for ourselves so we can do this, that and the other', and it's a good idea, but what a nightmare! I mean there are some actors that I know, there's an actress called Claire

Thompson, who was in *One Man, Two Guvnors*, who I've worked with a lot. Petra's gonna have a baby, and if they're doing *Cooped*, Claire will take the role, and she'll be extremely good. But that's an exception, it's very hard to find people to replace characters that you've created for particular actors. It's very difficult. And at Cirque du Soleil, you get these awful facsimile performances, because the clowns normally only stay a couple of years, but the clown routines go on for 15 years. And so if you don't see the show in the first couple of years, you're not going to see those routines at their best.

LA: I've been looking at the magic act from *Varekai*. And I'd read about somebody trying to go into that role, and finding that really difficult. The actress coming in was saying, 'well, Mooky Cornish has got wobbly legs, and that's hilarious, and I can't do that'.

CM: Yeah. It wasn't just the wobbly legs, I mean that was Joey Holden, and she's a very sweet actress, and I've worked with her before. But she's not a clown, and she found clowning very difficult. She's a character actress. So she was always *acting* stupid, rather than being a clown. That was her downfall, not the fact that she couldn't fall over. Because that routine is *not about* a clown who keeps falling over, that's incidental to it. The routine is about the relationship between an idiot fat girl who thinks she's beautiful and a bad magician. Yeah that was difficult. Joey's a very good actress, but she's not really a clown.

LA: My last question, I think needs a bit of explaining how I've got to it. I was thinking about audience interaction in *One Man, Two Guvnors*, that was playing really interesting games with representation of character, sort of presentation of the actor's self, breaking up the fiction, and playing with those conventions and authenticity of improvisation. And that struck me as similar to the things that Spymonkey are doing with their double-layered characters of the soap actor who wants to be a serious actor. I wanted to pick up on those strands, and ask you about the interplay, in your approach, between dramatic fiction and clown.

CM: I know what you're after, and it's certainly something that bothered Nicholas Hytner. The think that I insist on seeing, is that you don't just see the character on stage, you want to see the actor having fun, playing. It's like when children play 'Cowboys and Indians'. The entertaining thing

about it is not, 'they're an authentic Indian'. It's their spirit of play, in the pretence of it. And it's exactly the same; this is what I want to see. So therefore, coming out of character is the most natural thing in the world. In *One Man, Two Guvnors*, fortunately, some of it was absolutely written in. That a couple of the actors spoke to the audience, the Francis Henshall part in particular. And because it was James Corden, that stuff got developed. It's clearly not the character Francis Henshall, saying 'is that a hummus sandwich?' it's clearly the actor having fun. And that allowed me to try to get more of the show to be like that. Because if one actor's aware of the audience, then why aren't all of them?

But I think the most important thing, and I tried to explain this at the time, is that; it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter; the audience will turn on a dime. If one minute, you're sobbing your heart out, your character's sobbing your heart out, and the next minute you turn to the audience, and say 'I do this awfully well, don't I?' it doesn't matter. The audience will be heartbroken watching you sob, and then you'll say something like that, and they'll laugh. And it's important to break it, because otherwise I feel it's a bit wanky, like, 'oh, oh look how good we're being, look how convincing we're being', and I'm not interested in that. I am interested in it being done well, there's a little bit of pathos towards the end of Spymonkey's *Cooped*, when Aitor declared for the last time his love for Laura and says 'please, I've loved you all my life, be my wife', and people, as I want them to, stop laughing, and they're (*mimes still, open-mouthed, moved face*). By that time Aitor's been totally humiliated, he's got bird shit on his head, he's got lipstick on his face, he's sweating, and it catches the audience there. But then we break it 'cause I don't want the end of the show to go into 'oh they're being all serious now'. We're being serious for a moment, and then we break it, with Petra saying 'only kidding', or, when Toby's crying about his brother, she says 'such good acting!' under her breath. And that breaks it, and the audience go with it. And if in the next second you want to do something pathetic, in the traditional sense of the word, you can do that and they'll go with it. And the audience, you can just pull them about, and they'll just go, and they love that. And they love to be surprised. And by keeping them surprised, you're keeping them in a position to laugh their hardest. Brecht said 'I

like the audience to think'. And I'm the opposite; I like the audience to stop thinking. So that they can just let whatever's happening wash over them and just laugh. And sometimes they don't know why they're laughing and those are the best laughs. 'Why am I laughing at this? I hate this kind of thing.' You know, but they can't stop. I like it when reviewers say 'this is the kind of theatre that people who don't like the theatre should come to, or people who've never been to the theatre'. Because there's no pretention, it's just fun. And it uses the fact that we're in a theatre as part of the whole entertainment, part of the story of the evening is that we're in a theatre. And so it makes it interactive. Even if you don't go into it on a very deep level, like you know, *One Man, Two Guvnors*, obviously there was that very, very elaborate element of actual audience participation, but even if you're not doing that, you can still make the audience feel that that one night was unique. You know, because it wouldn't have been exactly the same if they hadn't been there. Because they were a different audience. And the audience are part of the show. They are the other character. The other character that comments, or stays silent. And if they stay silent, that's a very strong comment also. And it *affects* what the actors do. It affects the way the actors tell their story, and why not develop that?

Appendix G: Interview with Mark Jarmuz

I met Mark in Étampes, in my hotel, the afternoon before seeing the end of term clown show, on 16th December 2013. Mark is a recent student of the school, completing the whole 2-year programme between 2008 and 2012.

LA: When you then came back to clown in your second year, to what extent does the Clown workshop develop the others, or how does it stand out from the others?

MJ: I would say absolutely that I learned more about theatre from doing Clown than from doing any other module. Because throughout the course Philippe talks about 'have good pleasure', and you know, have fun, when you're doing it. The process when you walk out on stage, it's a sort of creative process between you and the audience. So you have to listen to the audience and respond to them. Which is what you work on very very precisely with Clown. And what you're trying to discover is a way for you to play so that the audience - as Philippe would say in virtually every other module - so that they *dream around you*. And for Philippe it is not how good the actor is, in any kind of technical sense, you know, you have to walk on well, you have to have a good voice and all those kind of basics, but how we as the audience, as we watch you, we dream. And then we love you, as an audience. So a great actor is essentially one, not so much who is technically good, although obviously you need to be in order to have the skills, but someone around whom the audience can dream. So you've always got those two aspects and I think in Clown, the aspect around really listening to the audience, it comes to the fore. What I found was in first year, that was the time where I was very much learning the technique, experimenting with voice, with fixed point, with looking out to the gallery, to the gods, you know, clear gestures, all this kind of stuff, working with masks; and the second year was much more about working on this internal process. So in Clown, that's the first of the second year modules, oh lord, you spend so much time being upset and frustrated, because you're right on the toughest edge. Because, what do you do? And it's really tough. Because you know the number of sort of 'tumbleweed' moments that there are you stand there and you freeze, and you don't know what to do, or you try and to something that you

think is really funny but ... its not. And so it's a torture, you know for your ego, you're getting battered day after day by nobody laughing, or 'I tried it on Monday and you all laughed'. How do I make this work so that every time I do it, you laugh? Very often, because what you're trying to do is to discover *your* clown - you're essentially coming out and doing the same thing, in front of the same people. All of whom are frustrated because they went up and nobody laughed, so they're tired, because it's 8pm on a Thursday evening, they're exhausted, and yet, it's astounding, that when clown happens, and that's probably the best way I can say it, when clown happens, that laugh! Completely spontaneous. And it's like magic. In some ways it's my favourite way of playing because you get feedback. You know you try doing some tragic thing, or some melodrama, and the audience stays in stunned dutiful silence for hours, unless you have some psychic skills then you can't say 'oh yes the audience loved me'... But with laughter, it's immediate. But that cutting edge is so tough. Because most of the time you walk out, and - it's death. Your instinct as a performer is, you don't want to flop, you're really scared, 'cause you think of it as failure and being bad. But actually you need the flop, it's a bit like a rollercoaster, where you go up, and suddenly its dropping its dropping its dropping and 'save it!' And the audience delights in that flop, and as a clown if you don't allow that gap, where the flop starts to happen, where the drop starts, and then pick it up, the audience will get bored, and you, 99% guaranteed are just shovelling out shit that you pre-prepared. That you think is funny. I think that for me clown is not about what you do, it's about how you are. Very often people find that there's a little ripple of laughter when they do something completely unexpected - like they accidentally trip over, and then there's a laugh. So the pre-prepared shit doesn't work. Avoiding the flop doesn't work, because what you're doing is chucking re-hashed old rubbish at the audience to try to cover yourself. But at best that's comedy. Which is not clown. But you find clown, at first you find clown in almost unexpected moments.

LA: So you've performed in an end of term clown show like the one we're going to see tonight. Could you talk about the difference between the experience of performing for the same people you've been trying to make

laugh for the last three months and when the new audience comes in, is that a different experience or do you still feel the same?

MJ: Well, it's always a relief when there's new people in. Always. One of the great things about the school now, which has changed since five years ago is that generally the norm now that on a Friday, second years can come in to watch the first year class and first years can come in to watch the second year class. Which means that, you quite look forward to Fridays because it's the opportunity to present something and to a fresh audience. And immediately it's different. Cause they haven't seen you doing this thing. It was always a real pleasure and it was often frustrating if Friday was such a busy day in class that you didn't get to present your piece and it had to get deferred to the Monday, and then you're back to just your own group again, its like 'oh I don't want to do it now'. So Friday's a good day. When it came to the end of term, doing the show, which is normally Monday to Friday, you'd have a real audience, as it were, which was always interesting. The thing is you never knew quite how many you would get. I think the smallest number we had was probably about 8 or 10, but on the last night of the show you'll always have, absolutely jam packed full, 'cause all the ex-students from Paris come down, all the friends, family who come specially, so there's a real party atmosphere on the last night.

LA: Were you taught to use your body and physicality in a certain way at the school?

MJ: Not in the clown course because Philippe is essentially working with everyone as an individual. Their clown. But physicality is important. If you can find the physical form of your clown it carries you a lot of the way, I suppose. My clown was a boxer. But I was a really bad boxer, I was too stingy to go and buy the kit - I had a pair of old trainers that I just had for school anyway, I went to c&a, and bought red underwear, just really cheap, for a pair of baggy shorts, I splashed out on a pair of boxing gloves, cause I sort of needed those, and I had an old cycle helmet, and then I had a plaster and bruisey makeup... and the red nose of course, the Smallest Mask in the World. And, you know, I'm 50, so you know, my body's not bad but it's not amazing. So you know if I'd gone on and I had an amazing beautiful physical body, it wouldn't work so well. But because

you know I wasn't wearing a shirt, stuff like that, it was quite, it was funny. I think always in performance there is about, there's an interplay between showing and hiding because one of the things that works all the way through Philippe's training is about mask. You relax behind the mask, because the mask is doing the work. Smallest mask in the world is the clown nose so when you put on the clown nose, relax, the mask is doing the work. So you're just playing and have fun. So all those things that Philippe teaches you anyway, whether you're wearing a suit or whether you're wearing a tutu: Play and have fun. Because the mask is doing its work. I think the great thing with Philippe is that in that moment when you turn round and he says [Philippe's voice] 'ah, boxer', 'what?! With my body?!?! Boxer?!?!', and then you dress up, and the costume supports the clown that you're playing. But it doesn't define it. I think this is, somehow in that moment when you turn round, Philippe's trying to catch how your energy is. It sounds a bit mystical, so, it's hard to describe. But he tries to catch something in that immediacy that tells him, yes; this person could go this way or this way. And then you put a costume on. It's not like you then 'play a boxer'. Because the costume is doing the work. You don't have to play a boxer, because you're a boxer! So you can explore your clown. As I say, the art of clown, for me, is not about what you do, its not about doing funny things, it's about how you are. And I think the thing I remember from doing that three months of clown was the number of times Philippe said things like 'ah, who is the biggest idiot here?' things along that theme, 'ah you're such an idiot', stuff like that, which some people took as a thing to shut them down, but other people would stop and play with it. Certainly when I started to discover something in clown, I started discovering it with Philippe, I couldn't find it in working with other people, but when I was on my own, me on stage, him in front of me, was when it started to come. I think the first time I was really tired, as I am a lot (he shows me his face, trying to listen but eyes drooping) and he was trying to explain something to me, and I was like 'ah, what? what?' you know, leaning forwards and I was like (his voice mimics/performs what he describes) dozy and I was like this, trying to listen to him. And people started to laugh. And I was like (sleepily) 'oh, alright'. Oh I was also in a mood where I didn't want to do anything to

please him. 'cause I'm too much of a people pleaser, I want to please the audience or something. And I was really selfish, I was like 'fuck off everyone. I want to do it for me, I want to have fun for me, not for you!'. So there was a kind of 'fuck you' in me as well. um, so, you know, when I realised that people were laughing a bit, and (does sleepy face and voice goes to a mumble) I thought fuck you, I'm going to carry on like this. And then I started playing games with it, you know, I'd get distracted by something else! But Philippe was so clever and so sharp, that he seized the game immediately, so he knew I wasn't being rude to him, or anything like that, he knew I was playing a game. So, I'm going like this, and he goes 'I'm speaking to you, I'm speaking to you'. So I ignore him for a bit, and then he goes 'you, you!' so I slowly turn back towards him, which took it back to square one. And we just played like that for twenty-five minutes! So I started to discover that for my clown - not for everyone's clown, because everyone's finding their own, but for my clown, it is like I can do as little as possible for as long as possible.

LA: (laughs)

MJ: and that's where I get my pleasure. So the scenes that [I] got into the show were scenes about nothing. And the first one happened because we were all ready to do a scene that Philippe proposed about dropping an apple and getting kicked in the arse. The three of us walked on stage, wrong music, and so the girl in front, whose role in the scene is to keep us organised, she stops the music, so she told me to stand there, went to the front, sorting out the music, and came back and she said 'now turn around and we'll start again'. And I thought, 'hm. I'm going to get you now'. So I just stood there like an idiot. And she said 'no no, we have to go back, I just stood there, and so we started to play that game. Which was that I just stood there, not understanding anything, or I'd occasionally look at the audience, and look back at her. And so the game was about how to do absolutely nothing for as long as possible. And we had a scene - it got cut, because, again it was this problem of sustaining it, time after time and people got more bored, after we played it more times. But, originally it probably ran as about a 15 minute scene! With nothing happening.

LA: How did you learn to go from those kind of spontaneous games into something which you could repeat?

MJ: ... just thinking in terms of clown... I know that Philippe told us that we had to come in and run round in a circle to some clown music, and then stop, and then we had to do something. You, know, its like suddenly you're there and its like '(strangled gasp) Do something!' rather than nothing. And the question is what will you do in that spontaneous moment? I cannot remember a time when Philippe said 'This is what you do in order to be a clown'. It's about listening. It's always about listening to the audience. So if you do something accidental or intentional, and they laugh - so, listen, Philippe always says 'write a little message to yourself in your head - ah, they like this' and then do it again. See if they laugh again. And, so that essentially what happens is that the clown has this little notepad in his head that goes 'oh, they like this, they like this', and that starts to help you to find your bearings as a performer. But for each person it will be different. And so there isn't a formula.

LA: No

MJ: Of course, there is this process of standing there, doing something in the moment, if people laugh they say 'oh that's interesting, quick, make a note in your head, right, do it again, see if they laugh again'. If they don't, do something different. 'oh they didn't laugh at that one, oh shit'. And sometimes, people do the most wonderful face when their face goes to 'oh shit, now what do I do?' and then the audience will laugh. So 'ok, they're laughing at my 'oh shit' face now... (laughs) so what do I do now? Do I do something or do I do my 'oh shit face'?' you know. It's very live. My recollection of clown is that, after the first week or so when you're getting your bearings, then you're into this process of exploring, with Philippe, with other people, whatever, he's just constantly stimulating you towards stuff. You discover things, perhaps accidentally, people are laughing about something you didn't expect them to laugh about, they don't laugh at the thing you expected them to, so then you can try developing what they were laughing about, which might be you trying to get your equipment ready, rather than the scene you'd prepared. And then, at some point, Philippe might say 'yeah, this is ok, for the show'. Oh shit, when that happens! Because then it's like "OK, so now we've got

to do it for the show, and the show might be 4 weeks away still. So you might not show this again for another three! Unless it needs more development you might not show it again for weeks, and then you show it to Philippe and then Philippe says 'oh that was horrible'. 'But you said it was good'. 'It was good, 3, 4 weeks ago'. It's a huge question. And it's about, as a clown, when you walk into the space, to what extent is what you're doing prepared and rehearsed, and to what extent is it absolutely spontaneous because you're listening to the audience? And the answer is, in a sense, I can't tell you. Because it depends absolutely on that moment. You don't walk onto the stage in the show (laughs a little) with nothing prepared! You have the scene, you've rehearsed it and stuff like that. But, in the live moment... but essentially what Philippe's trying to get us to understand is that it doesn't matter whether you're a clown or whether you're a tragic actor, this question would be exactly the same. It's that you come in with something that's rehearsed, but it's an insult to - *Theatre* probably! - but to the audience, to just churn out what you rehearsed whether they sit there in silence or not. Because it's boring for you, because it means that every night you're doing the same stuff, it's not alive, it's not there in the moment. So every performance, every moment you're out in front of an audience there has to be this listening, and this capacity to play with the audience. So you are doing the same routine, but it's different. And these are questions that can drive you bonkers. It's like being a professional. Consistency is the mark of a professional. A trapeze artist doesn't do something different every night, they always do precisely the same routine, and it's to an extremely high standard. Same with an actor, same with a clown. But, always, when you're in front of people there is this something different that is happening that changes what you're doing in that particular moment with this particular audience. You find games to keep you interested and alive, with your friends, with the audience. One time I just, it was a really clumsy game, but there was this little boy, right in the front row, he was 7 years old, snuggled into his mother, and, like, scared but amazed at the show, and I was standing in front of him and he was (gasps) looking at me, and I just gently stared waving at him with my boxing glove, a little hello, and he was like (squeals) and the whole audience laughed, because, you

know, and so I just found a little game just playing, it was a simple thing to do just because the child was there. But it's those alive things that sort of makes the performance worth while. Otherwise it's just mechanical. [...] Students are very concerned about, you know, I want to be good, I want Philippe to like me, I want to know how to do it, all that sort of stuff. We're always caught on that thing of wanting to, I suppose you have to say it, please Philippe. Because of course we trust his judgement. And so we want to be good every time we stand up and we get really frustrated and upset when we're not. But being at school is not about being good. We're here to learn and failing is the best learning you can have. Philippe understands that, in failing, we are open to discovering something new, rather than the 'same old, same old', and he wants to help us find that something new, something which delights us, and the audience. He talks about the crisis that quite often we have to have. Because basically, if we succeed, and we've just succeeded because we're fine, we're not going anywhere new. We're just working within what we already know. Whereas, when we fail, and we discover something different through failing, then, it's alive, its special, its unique. It has life to it, in a different kind of way.

LA: What role did the other people you were studying with play in your learning?

MJ: As I say when I first started the only person I could really play with was Philippe. So he was my anchor, it was like, focus on him, just me and him, and we find some clown. And that was great and we could sustain it for, as I say, about 25 minutes. But that was working directly with Philippe. So then the challenge for me was to start to play with other people. Which was always an issue for me, it's an area I always have struggled with. [...] I like to be intelligent and articulate, and creative and whatever, well my clown was slow, stupid, barely moved, didn't talk. I virtually had a clown who could stand up. We tried talking, talking didn't work, we tried, I think we tried singing, didn't work, we tried various movements, but most of them didn't work. (laughs) But if I just stood there, and looked, gave my idiot face, they loved me. You know. And maybe it's the paradox of somebody who, you know, gets up pretty intelligent, but actually it's such a relief to go to somewhere where you're not 'being' intelligent. You're

just being an idiot. And I love that. And we hide behind a mask of prestige, nice clothes, intelligence, money, whatever because we want to be accepted by people societally and its tedious. And yet the clown is so human. What essentially comes through is the human, the ridiculous, the idiotic, you, utterly useless, can't do a single thing without making a mess of it, not because he's trying to be funny but just because. So you know something I love more than anything else about the clown is the humanity. I think in some ways I think its more important than anything.

LA: Do you think it's more important that a clown is human than that a clown is funny?

MJ: I'm not sure. I don't think that a clown could be funny if we don't see the humanity. You know when I was doing other kinds of stuff with Philippe around being an actor, about doing King Lear or melodrama or whatever, is that as an audience we need to engage with the humanity of this figure in front of us. And then we will love them, hate them, laugh, cry, whatever. But if they're not human to us, we won't relate to them, even if it's a puppet, we humanise them, in order to relate to it.

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