

University of Alberta

# DO THAT FUNNY THING YOU DO!

by

Tara Brodin

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Practice

Department of Drama

©Tara Brodin

Fall 2013

Edmonton, Alberta

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Libraries to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only. Where the thesis is converted to, or otherwise made available in digital form, the University of Alberta will advise potential users of the thesis of these terms.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis and, except as herein before provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatsoever without the author's prior written permission.

***“In life, we do not want to be the odd ball out, but, in clown, we must embrace that part of ourselves.”***

***This work is dedicated to my first clown teacher, Jan Henderson, who challenged my beliefs about clowns and set me on this journey***

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis has been created for novice or experienced teachers and directors of clown and physical comedy who are seeking practical techniques and new or reliable exercises to unlock the comedic potential in their students or actors.

## ABOUT THIS THESIS

There are numerous books and articles that examine the art of physical comedy and clown through a theoretical lens, including Louise Peacock's *Serious Play* and Stephen Nachmanovitch's *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art* and Jacques Lecoq's *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*. These three in particular are important to practitioners who seek to understand the history, the philosophy, the theories, the terminology and the movements within clown, play and physical comedy. However, there are few books that explore how to take that theory into practice. This thesis has been created for novice or experienced teachers and directors of clown and physical comedy who are seeking practical techniques and new or reliable exercises to unlock the comedic potential in their students or actors.

This thesis aims to practically explore the teaching methodologies and philosophies held by both renowned Canadian clown teacher Richard Pochinko and French clown teacher Jacques Lecoq. While their approaches to teaching clown are quite different, both have much to offer students looking for ways to access the clown. Generally, for Lecoq, the clown is discovered from the outside in and for Pochinko from the inside out. Lecoq believed it is the audience who guides the performer in discovering the clown while Pochinko believed the performer must go on a spiritual quest to uncover the clown. As a clown teacher for the past decade, I have had the most success

using a combination of both methods; thus this thesis is the marriage of both of these methodologies.

This thesis does not delve into the mask work practices of Pochinko or Lecoq. Although I find some mask work very effective, I am more excited by the possibilities that are found in the clown's red nose. Lecoq believed that mask work unleashes the body and Pochinko believed that mask work thrusts the student on a quest of self-knowledge that is in turn to be integrated into his clown. I believe that all of this can be accomplished through exercises in play, impulse, complicité, learning to connect to an audience and physical comedy.

This thesis is structured like a workshop/lesson plan or a plan for a series of workshops/lessons with each progressing chapter building upon the skills of the previous chapter. I start with *Building the Ensemble* because teaching my students to trust one another allows them to move toward the vulnerability and risk-taking that is essential in clown. Next is *Warm Ups and Play* because students' bodies, minds and spirits must rediscover the playfulness required of them in clown. *Impulse and Complicité* builds on the first two chapters and asks students to listen to and to trust an impulse without judgement and to discover the delight of what it means to be in complicité (togetherness). Connection with an audience is dependent on the skills explored in the first three chapters therefore *Connecting* is next. Following that, students explore the comedic potential of movement and gesture in *Physical Comedy*. After students have built their courage muscles

through the prior chapters' exercises, they are ready to explore the possibilities offered by the red nose. Each chapter moves students towards more complex and vulnerable work and building their skills and their confidence. Each chapter has an introduction that grounds the purpose of the exercises.

Likewise, the individual chapters also reflect scope and sequence. Each chapter begins with easier, less complex exercises that are emotionally safe and do not require high technical skills. Thus, they are appropriate for beginning students or for a new group of students who do not yet know one another and have not yet developed trust of the group. Moving through the chapter, the exercises become more complex and more risky both technically and emotionally. Therefore, after evaluating the level of the group of students/participants, teachers and directors may create a workshop/lesson plan by selecting exercises from each chapter that would be most effective to meet the needs of the group. I have intentionally not assigned a time limit to each exercise because duration is dependent on the size of the group, the level of the students and the desire of the teacher.

It is my hope that the exercises in this thesis will be as helpful to teachers and directors as they have been in my own practice. My advice to my fellow practitioners is to remember that we teach through who we are in all our flawed glory. Show your students you can "walk the talk." Use these exercises as impulses rather than scripts, experiment with them and make them your own. Think of your classroom as an action research lab and know

that finding out what doesn't work is just as important as discovering what does. Use what works and discard what does not. And remember that what works beautifully with one group may flop with a different group. These exercises are not "precious" so change them, adapt them or let them inspire you to create new ones. Like the clown, we must experiment, play and when a lesson flops, we must embrace it, own it and continue playing. It's all nonsense anyway!

NOTE: English presents challenges with gendered pronouns; in this thesis I have chosen to alternate between the use of the masculine and feminine pronouns.

## **MY CLOWN JOURNEY**

I am passionate about understanding comedy and figuring out how to unleash an actor's sense of honest and spontaneous play. As a theatre artist and workshop leader, my practice was first influenced by the work of improvisation icon Keith Johnstone when I began reading his books at the start of my teaching career in 1991. I further delved into studying improvisation and comedy in Edmonton with Rapid Fire Theatre Company in 2000-2005 and in New York City with the Upright Citizens Brigade in 2008.

Always harshly critical of the art of clowning and not able to see its importance as a theatrical genre, I decided to take a workshop from Jan Henderson in 2004 to see if my belief system could be shaken. It was; and, Henderson's course set me on the path to explore the world of clown. This exploration has informed my work as a theatre artist and teacher.

The exercises in this thesis have been influenced or inspired by my studies with the following teachers over the past decade: Mick Barnfather (Complicite - originally Théâtre de Complicité) taught me how to be a provocateur in the classroom, how to never be too "precious" with the work because improvisation is "a disposable art form" that exists but for a moment in time and how to embrace failure; Christopher Bayes (Yale School of Drama) taught me how to have fun and play, to not take the art form so seriously and the importance of the body in this work; Shannan Calcutt (I Am Izzy) helped me learn how to go to the extreme of an emotion and how funny



incongruity can be; Eric Davis (The Red Bastard) took me to the world of bouffon where the audience, not the clown, is the joke and I learned to explore the underbelly of clown; Jan Henderson (University of Alberta) showed me how to embrace my foibles and taught me that my flaws are perfect for clown; Michael Kennard (Mump & Smoot) showed me how to teach through questioning and how to oblige students to dig deeper and find their own answers; finally, Sue Morrison (The Theatre Resource Centre) taught me how to be simple, to be vulnerable. My students and I are the beneficiaries of the lessons, activities and insights I have gained in my work with these practitioners and hopefully, the reader will be as well.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

*I would like to thank Kathleen Weiss for her vision and for guiding me through the many creative routes it has taken to obtain a Master of Fine Arts degree. Also, very special thanks go to Dr. Piet Defraeye for his unwavering support and belief in my work. His masterful teaching, towering intellect and vast knowledge of theatre were most inspirational over the past two years. Thank you to my wonderful thesis committee (Lin Snelling, Natalie Loveless and David Barnet) for lending me your time and expertise. Thank you to Michael Kennard for sharing the Pochinko method with me and for pushing me to reflect deeply on my teaching practice. Thank you to all my instructors at the University of Alberta, my fellow MFA candidates and all my clown teachers over the years - you all helped shape my philosophy and practice. Finally, thank you to my editor and very good friend, Judith Boyle, who spent countless hours reading my thesis and helped me catch and correct grammar gaffes.*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b><i>Introduction</i></b>	I
<b><i>Chapter One: Building the Ensemble</i></b>	
WHOA, YES!	1
TA-DA	2
I SUCK AND I LOVE TO FAIL & I AM ENOUGH!	3
THE PLEDGE	4
HEART CHAKRA ... OPEN FOR BUSINESS	4
STANDING OVATIONS & OPEN APPRECIATIONS	5
BRAIN BURSTS	5
CHECKING IN	6
BREAK OUT OF YOUR BAGGAGE & DROP KICK YOUR CRITIC	6
SONGS ABOUT ANXIETY	7
RHYTHMIC NAME GAME	8
SNAPPY NAMES	8
NAME ALLITERATION	9
NAME HITMAN	9
NAME BANG	10
ATOM & COMMONATOR	10
THREE TRUTHS & A LIE	11
DROWNING HANDS	12
PARTNERS	12
MOO!	13
<b><i>Chapter Two: Warm-ups and Play</i></b>	
SHAKE THAT BODY	15
GO!	16
BOMB & SHIELD	16
BUM TO BLACK	17
BODY BALL	17
STOP, GO, SQUAT, JUMP	18
WHO KILLED KING JOHN?	19
3-WAY BALL TOSS	20
CATCH THE FLY	21
THREE CLAPS	22

SIMON SAYS	23
JUST A SIMPLE GAME OF TAG	24
THE ROYAL KINGDOM	28
CATCH THE BACON	30
GRANDMA'S FOOTSTEPS	31
<b><i>Chapter Three: Impulse and Complicité</i></b>	
TOUCH & GO	33
CIRQUE TRAIN	34
BAMBOO	35
ONE TO FIVE	36
COUNTING TO 20	37
RHYTHM BREATHE	37
IMPULSE WORK	38
WALKING AND STOPPING	40
<b><i>Chapter Four: Connecting</i></b>	
TOILET PAPER TAG	41
GRAB THE TAIL	42
RELAY STOP & START	42
DREAM DATE	43
APPLAUSE	44
DO THAT FUNNY THING YOU DO!	45
CLAP & CHEER FOR CHARM	47
HEY, LOOKY!	48
<b><i>Chapter Five: Physical Comedy</i></b>	
SYNCHRONICITY	50
WAITING ROOM	51
HAMSTER FUNERAL	52
INSIDE JOKE	54
THE BOARD OF GOVENORS	54
FANTASY/NIGHTMARE PARTNER	55
STEALING FOCUS/NO FOCUS	57
PULLING A FACE	58
STATES OF TENSION	58
LOVE CONFESSIONS	60
SKIPPING REHEARSAL	61

HUNTING DUCKS	62
IT'S A BIG-SMALL WORLD	64
FOUR-LEGGED LOVE	65
UNCONVENTIONAL IMPROVISATIONS	65
<b><i>Chapter Six: Clown</i></b>	
SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT	72
MY BIG STUPID FUN	73
THE TOUR OF WHAT THIS ISN'T	75
CHILDHOOD PHOTO	76
GREATEST FANTASY	76
GUIDED IMAGERY	76
THE NOSE RITUAL	77
CHILD'S PLAY	79
UNCONVENTIONAL CLOWNING	80
CARMINA BURANA COW	81
SAVING THE SHOW	83
CANADA'S NEXT TOP DANCER	83
CLOWN CAT WALK	84
TITANIC GOODBYE	84
EMOTIONAL ROLLER COASTER	85
GROUP THERAPY	87
GREATEST TRICK IN THE WORLD	89
THE RODEO OF CHAOS	90
CLOWN NAMES	91
CLOWN CHARACTERS	92
<b><i>Conclusion</i></b>	94
<b><i>Notes</i></b>	98
<b><i>Glossary of Terms</i></b>	99
<b><i>Bibliography</i></b>	101
<b><i>Exercise Inspirations</i></b>	104

# INTRODUCTION

## *CLOWNS AND THEIR REPUTATIONS*

It was a humid and mosquito-plagued night at an outside 'Bring Your Own Venue' at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival in July, 2009. I watched a show filled with blood-curdling, high-pitched squeals and enough girly-girl cuteness for an entire squad of prepubescent cheerleaders. I left the show scratching my mosquito bites and thinking "Why clown?" I failed to see the point of the show other than to see two clowns having fun paddling on their boat, riding on tricycles and experimenting with a dildo rather than engaging with us, the audience. I was bored and agitated because I felt that the clowns went on a self-indulgent journey and had completely forgotten to invite the audience to the show. It was everything I have ever disliked about clown shows.

Clowns often make us cringe. They are frequently too squeaky, too cute and entirely too annoying. Clowns have a bad reputation made worse by authors such as Stephen King who made them downright terrifying as murderous psychopaths and the reality of serial killer John Wayne Gacy who performed as a clown when he wasn't murdering children. And, we have all encountered clowns in movies and television and other media or met the intrusive roving or street clowns with the teardrop perfectly sketched on their faces to make it clear to us what they are feeling, or the birthday clowns with the big shoes and the balloon animals. Who isn't a little anxious around those characters?

Yet, some of my most profound and transformational theatre experiences have been with clowns. Most of the clowns that intrigue and engage me are found in the world of theatrical clown<sup>1</sup>. Although, it is a world that can be fraught with disingenuous acting, it also may encompass authentic generosity and a true spirit of play. In a great clown show, the ordinary becomes extraordinary and that which at first appears simple becomes profound.

Sometimes in theatrical clown we get a sense that the show is entirely improvised and although this improvisational quality can be wonderful, I am often left wondering if the editors skipped town in their two sizes too small clown car. At times, as in my early experience, audiences are left feeling confused or even worse, bored, while watching a clown performance. There is no real connection between the clowns and their audience. Having said that, I recognize that the truth is...comedy is hard and clowning is harder.

Clown is undeniably one of the most difficult art forms to master which is partly my fascination and frustration with it. I have seen thoughtful, provocative and hilarious clown shows as well as those that left me bored and apathetic. Yet, I keep going to the theatre in pursuit of that fierce, unpredictable clown show that will rivet me. I long for a theatre experience that is packed with surprises. I want to be provoked! I want to weep until I am laughing with reckless abandon. I want the clown to shake me up inside and take me on an unapologetically emotional ride.

## WHAT IS CLOWN?

### *IN SEARCH OF A DEFINITION*

In a New York City clown intensive led by Christopher Bayes in 2008, I remember asking him for a succinct definition of clown. Bayes, an Associate Professor and Head of Physical Acting at the Yale School of Drama, responded, “Stop trying to pin down the wings of the butterfly.” And when I looked unsatisfied with his answer, he laughed, “It’s simply YOU uncensored - YOU without a filter. The clown is the merry, the squirrely, the silly, the stupid you. And you find this clown with the audience.” In his classes, Bayes tries to uncover what is uniquely funny about each of his students. When the audience gives the performer the compliment of laughter, the student knows she is on the path to unleashing her clown.

Unlike acting training, in clown, there is no character to be developed or understood. Master teacher John Wright maintains that “Clown has nothing to do with character. A clown is a credibly stupid version of you, and we want to see you caught up in a situation that’s actually happening before our very eyes” (Wright 193).

In his classes at the University of Alberta, Mike Kennard of comedy duo Mump and Smoot professes that “everyone has *one* clown and from that clown spring thousands of characters” (2012). Kennard links the clown’s ever-changing character to our own human evolution. United Kingdom director and co-founder of Trestle Theatre, John Wright, holds a similar view. He believes there are as many clowns as there are emotions and, like



emotions, they are just as variable. He says, “There are as many different clown qualities as there are people because we all respond to being put ‘in the shit’ in our different ways. The clown is *you*, as you are now - warts and all...Clown isn’t fixed; it changes and develops just as you change and develop” (Wright 190).

One of the leading teachers of the Pochinko method, Jan Henderson of the University of Alberta describes how we know we are in clown. Her

Clowning isn’t something we need to learn so much as something we become aware of in ourselves. Any time that we are curious, playful, or creative, we are in clown mode. When we are in a state of wonder or awe, surprise or amazement, we are in clown. Whenever we have hunches, act on impulse, or digress - we are in clown. Whenever we have strong emotions, we are in clown (Henderson, Philosophy of Clown, foolmoon.org).

definition of clown on her website includes the following:

The clown takes pleasure in all of the emotions. The clown lives in the place of laughing and crying at the same time. As Bayes explains in his workshops, “In clown, the difference between the ha-ha (happy) and the wah-wah (sad) are very close. There is no grey zone. All emotion is mixed together.” For example, a clown might say, “Ice cream... I love it! Oh no, it’s melting. What’s that? A squirrel? Yeah!!!”

It is difficult to capture the full meaning of clown in words. Ultimately, clowns should be funny; paradoxically, they don't have to be. Clowns can explore the world of the abstract and the metaphorical as well as the world that is concrete and literal. Clowns can break the fourth wall or not. They can wear a nose or not. They can have extensive dialogue, speak in gibberish or be silent. Clowning is a continual process of discovery and rediscovery. Clowns are multi-dimensional characters who express the full range of multi-layered human emotions. And all great clowns share a delicious spirit of play, the ability to be present with their audience, a commitment to vulnerability and authenticity and, despite every conceivable obstacle, a willingness to persevere.

### ***PLAY***

To be a clown, we must truly learn to play with curiosity and abandon, without fear of judgment, without worry and without trying to prove how brilliant, original or funny we are. Instead, we must simply play to explore our own joy in the moment. And paradoxically, that is serious work. University of Hull's Louise Peacock, author and senior lecturer, states:

Clown play may appear to be frivolous but in each frame in which it occurs, that play has a serious purpose: to communicate life truths to us, to help us access the healing power of laughter and to be reminded of the importance of play in a world where its value is too often diminished...Play helps us to create the link between reality and imagination, and to bring more creativity and joy into our everyday life. Clowns show us the way (Peacock 159).

## ***PRESENCE***

Clowns live their lives in a conversation with an audience. Creating this dialogue demands *presence*. To be truly present is to embrace the moment for what it is without fear of what is to come or regret for what has already happened. It is being grounded in the “now” with the audience. We must be willing to arrive in all of our messy disaster and to unconditionally accept our imperfectly perfect selves. As clown is the art of not knowing, it requires us to completely surrender outcome without putting expectations or assumptions on it. For us in the audience, when clowns are truly present, it is as if we can see behind their eyes as they glimmer with the truth of what they are feeling. In these moments, our humanity is reflected back to us and we recognize ourselves in the clowns. They are our mirrors and we can then accept the truth that our foibles are what make us unique. They teach us that having emotions is normal and, in fact, that pushing aside or denying unpleasant emotions is abnormal. They inspire us to put aside our social mask, open our hearts and just be ourselves...uncensored. And that only happens when a clown is present in an intimate conversation with the audience. When that “magical space” is created and the audience is invited on the journey, then the power of clown is transformational.

## ***AUTHENTICITY***

Comedy works when the performer is honest and truly committed to the situation.

In clown, it is not about the thing itself, the object or the situation; it is about the clown's relationship to the thing. Sitting in the audience, we want clowns to share their emotional journey with us. When clowns reveal their vulnerability, we connect to them. The caution for the clown is to not get too caught up "in the number" which is what Bayes uses to describe what happens when a clown is no longer sharing the experience with the audience but is lost in her fantasy world.

The clown world is unconventional and incongruous and follows an illogical logic. If performers try to be clever or funny, it feels dishonest to an audience and they do not laugh. The best part about comedy is its clarity: it either works or it doesn't. The audience always guides the clown; usually, the audience's silence indicates things are not working. The information offered by the audience allows the clown to change tactics or explore a variation on the theme.

The performers do not have to be any more ridiculous than they already are. Simply playing with a spirit of generosity instead of pushing at playing leads to more authenticity in the performance. Great clowns are always in the moment and therefore are great listeners and observers. They astutely and immediately address all distractions including hecklers in the audience, cell phones, talking or technical issues and find a way to implement these elements into the show through improvisation.

## ***FAILURE***

In his workshop, Bayes described clowns as almost “prehistoric and primal creatures, simple beings with open hearts and soft brains.” However, clowns do not believe they are stupid and have no shame or awareness of their simplicity. Clowns are doomed to fail, but failure is no obstacle for clowns because they never lose their hope and optimism that everything resolves itself in the end.

In a clowning workshop in London in 2009, Mick Barnfather stated that “clowns are not necessarily good at anything, but they believe they can do everything. They can make us believe that they are the experts.” Anarchists by nature, they break all of the rules and in doing so often find sublime solutions for their problems. “Whilst the clown often fails to achieve what they set out to achieve, their failure is framed by their optimism and by the simplicity of their approach to life” (Peacock 14).

## **WRITING CLOWN**

### ***WHY IS THAT FUNNY?***

Surprise, one of the main elements of comedy, is manifested through three methods: the reversal of expectation, the rule of three, or incongruity. Reversal of expectation is to surprise the audience with an action that is the opposite of what they were expecting and thus elicits their laughter. For example, a woman is set up on a blind date with a person who claims to be a model but the date turns out to be a hand model who has buck teeth, nerdy glasses and questionable fashion. The humour is precipitated by the qualities

the audience associates with high-fashion models.<sup>2</sup> The rule of three involves a series of actions: two actions that are similar and a third that is different and employs a reversal of expectation. For example, a person steps outside the door, slips on a banana peel and falls; the next person comes out, slips on the same banana peel and falls; the third person steps outside, sees the banana peel, wisely steps around it and, while triumphantly looking back at the peel, slips off the side walk and falls. Incongruity juxtaposes two elements that are not normally associated with one another: a drug dealing grandma or a remorseful devil. It works because the contrast is surprising and funny.

Paradoxically, comedy is born in the seriousness of the situation. The clown world is direct, tactile and literal. Hilarity is intensified with specific details and justified choices. For example, a clown is taking care of a child and has specific instructions to take the child for a walk but not to let the child fall into the puddles formed in the recent rainstorm. The clown carefully, gently and purposefully dips the child in each and every puddle so the little girl does not fall into the puddles. This exemplifies the justified but illogical reasoning and unconventional thinking of clown logic.

Another important element of comedy is the layering of humour and meaning. In any form of comedy, the audience loves reincorporation or a verbal or physical call back. If a joke, a gesture or an object gets a laugh, a performer may integrate that same item into a future scenario in the piece; this is termed a *call back*. The audience members recognize it and laugh again

not only because it is still funny but also because it is unexpected and makes them feel as if it is an “inside joke” between them and the performer.

The constant flux of status in the world of clown sets up a high stakes atmosphere and we, the audience, are engaged. Without the possibility of tragedy or failure there is no potential for comedy and no reason for us as the audience to invest. We watch because relationships are at risk and clowns are all about relationships. The complexity of relationships involves the ever-shifting balance of power and status among characters which is foundational for comedy. In clown, this means having a high status Joey, a low status Auguste and often a Ringmaster possessing the ultimate status.<sup>3</sup>

### ***THE PARADOX OF STRUCTURE***

Most great clown shows are not entirely improvised. Shows that work well with an audience are often carefully written and scripted. Paradoxically, a script provides a safety net for the performer allowing him to take the risk of improvising with the audience, i.e. in order to take risks and be free, structure is required. Ironically, there is no creativity without restriction.

Most narratives in the western world have the same structure: beginning, middle, climax and end. In other words, things often start off normal for the characters, things get worse, the hero meets adversarial circumstances, and then things get better. There is always conflict or tension and finally the story resolves when the characters have won the ‘battle’ and have overcome their obstacles. In clown, this structure is often subverted.

We laugh when we, as the audience, relate to a topic. Therefore, it is important to create clown material from the performer's unique perspective and from a place of personal truth. Themes and messages can be found in a performer's passions or what is happening in the performer's personal life at the moment. It is of utmost importance that work is created from a place of passion and inspiration or the piece falls flat or feels forced.

## **ACTING CLOWN**

### ***LEARNING CLOWN***

Clowns live in their bodies and not in their heads. They work from pure impulse, heart and feeling. As Kennard says, "the power comes from the heart; force comes from the head." Therefore, the work of an actor preparing for clown always begins with preparing the body for comedy through a series of movement exercises that help the actor listen to his impulses and listen to the audience. Actors have to relearn what they already knew as children: trust the impulse. For example, the walk or the gesture is not interesting without the generator of impulse and inspiration; Bayes believes that "the hope of fun and the pursuit of fun both live in the body." The challenge is to not get caught intellectualizing and judging every impulse. It takes a lot of ideas to have a great idea and artists have to embrace and celebrate their failures. They have to let the fun lead to the idea and allow themselves the freedom to be inspired through play without the pressure to be brilliant.



## ***AN ACTOR'S MANIFESTO***

Clown is essential training for an actor because actors need to learn to allow themselves to be fully seen and become open and revealed to an audience. Clowning requires the vulnerability to not layer on things that an actor may believe makes her seem more interesting to an audience. "It's excruciating to see acting in clown. We feel patronized and cheated. I know that it's all acting but, as I've said many times before, if we can see the acting-it's crap" (Wright 193). While this is also true for dramatic acting, Wright is attempting to explain how feels more painful to see bad acting in clown than in other dramatic forms.

The clown's open, optimistic heart and a healthy editor become true sources of creativity. As actors, the challenge in creation is to allow our impulses and ideas to speak louder than our own personal "critic." The voice of "the critic" is always there but the secret is to place more value on the other internal "voices."

Learning to surrender outcome is one of the most difficult concepts to learn in clown because many people work so hard in life to meet our own and others' expectations; however, expectation and assumption cut off our experience of the present. As actors, we must learn to truly participate in our experience. We must always keep our hope and optimism alive despite knowing that hope leads to heartbreak, despair and anger as well as to delight, ecstasy and happiness. Hope is the suspension before tragedy or bliss. And with hope we learn to play without worry and play in the spirit of

complicité with the audience. Whatever happens on stage happens in the audience, too. If we as performers are feeling bored and uninspired, the audience feels the same. Again, while that is true in many dramatic forms, it is particularly so in clown which often breaks the fourth wall and engages the audience directly. Therefore, we must celebrate the opportunity to converse with the audience. Our tactics might not work, but we can always change what we are doing. The trick is to find *the game*; find the pleasure in the logic of nonsense.

Because clowns teach us something about what it means to be human and perhaps something about the spirit of generosity, we need to embrace all our imperfections and be unafraid of how unpleasant or inappropriate we can be. We must learn to play at the speed of fun, loud and messy or quiet and soft. If we are too careful, we are not going to make important discoveries. We must surprise ourselves rather than prove ourselves. We must be fierce and messy. We must learn to play on the verge of our balance. We must remember that talent is distributed equally throughout the body, not just in the brain. It is important to keep awake our courage, to trust in simplicity, to celebrate our fragility and our ferocity and to make a point of pursuing our fun. We must open our heart chakra and post a sign that declares we are “Open for Business!”

### ***THE RULES***

Keith Johnstone’s basic rules of improvisation also apply to clown: Play, Drive the Story, Really Care about the Situation, Meet the Danger, Listen

to Yourself and to Your Audience. In addition, there are rules for the performer as she interacts with the audience and rules for the performer for herself.

*Between the audience and the performer*

1. The first rule of clowning is to present yourself to the audience by taking a full breath upon entering the stage. You must also release the audience through an exhale when exiting the stage. Take the audience into your world and leave them with a new awareness.
2. Come out with the intention that you need to communicate with your audience and have a great time together.
3. Trust the audience.
4. If the audience loved something, do it again.
5. If something doesn't work, try something else. If that doesn't work, own the flop.
6. Keep connecting with the audience in the spirit of complicité.
7. Keep the audience safe.
8. Know when to leave the stage.

*Rules for the performer*

1. Keep the emotions up and out.
2. Be honest.
3. Trust the impulse.
4. Take risks.
5. Be zany.

6. Be physical; embrace gestures.
7. Remember the rules of comedy<sup>4</sup> and break the rules once you know them.
8. Keep your hope and your optimism alive.
9. Be generous, not clever.
10. Let the ideas come from fun instead of ideas that come from the activity of solving the problem of the exercise – consider what you think is funny as opposed to what you think the audience will find funny. Don't come in with an idea of what fun looks like but do come with what is truly fun for you to do.
11. Allow yourself to be terrible. Never bring your best idea, bring your third worst idea.

## **TEACHING CLOWN**

### ***THE LECOQ and POCHINKO TECHNIQUES***

Having been trained in clown techniques developed by Jacques Lecoq and Richard Pochinko, I appreciate how both methodologies are essential in deepening one's understanding of clown. Lecoq was passionate about the direct way masks could amplify the physical aspects of a performer and the potential for communication with an audience. In addition, Lecoq's research centered on the human body and its movement. Through his work with his students, he came to believe that "the body knows things about which the mind is ignorant" (Lecoq, *The Moving Body* 9). The Lecoq method begins with the neutral mask and then progresses to the larval mask, half mask and ends with the clown's red nose. Three of the principal skills that he encouraged in

his students were *le jeu* (playfulness), *complicité* (togetherness) and *disponibilité* (openness).

As a student of Lecoq, Pochinko also started his students' work in clown by focusing on mask exploration. However, his method is more of a quest for self-knowledge through the mask and he incorporates many ideas and influences of other practitioners. He is particularly known for his use of native ideology and the concept of six directions to guide students in their

... he devised a structure that facilitated the acquisition of knowledge of self. A vision quest that sends the student out in ignorance and sees them return with understanding...Pochinko insists that his students of clown go on this journey not once, not twice but six times to face themselves in all directions. The six directions derived from Native ideology – North, South, East, West, Below Below and Above Above (Coburn and Morrison 30).

development of their clown's mask.

Only after encountering the masks of the six directions, are Pochinko's students able to create the seventh mask which is their clown.

Lecoq's approach, which is more centered on finding the clown from the outside, is in contrast to Pochinko's method of going within and bringing the information found internally up to the surface. One also finds an underpinning of native spirituality in Pochinko's work. In native sacred

clown, “the clown’s purpose is to tell his shameful secret. To overcome his pride and dignity so that he can lay bare his humanity with humility and joy to ensure the equitable survival of the group. Pochinko’s coup was to realize that this ancient societal requirement could be applied to modern performance clown” (Coburn and Morrison 18).

Although the two practitioners’ techniques employ both structure and freedom to explore the clown, Lecoq encourages more reliance on the audience to give information to the performer who then determines if there is success or not. While I agree that one must bring oneself to clown, I argue that one can also find oneself through an audience – both are important and essential.

### ***THE TEACHER AS PROVOCATEUR***

To work in red nose necessitates a degree of knowledge of self. In the European tradition, that knowledge is divined by the teacher. The student learns about him/herself through the teacher’s eyes; made explicit in the teacher’s reaction to his/her work. The student is reliant on the teacher’s greater knowledge. The student is not equipped or empowered to gain or utilize knowledge for his or her self (Coburn and Morrison xii).

The role of the teacher in instructing students in the art of clown is important and can be controversial. There are diverse views by clown practitioners and experts. In contrast to this tradition, Pochinko, Kennard,

Henderson and Morrison expect their students to discover self-knowledge through reflection and play and, as teachers, they take a non-interventionist style stance. This is not to say that they abandon their students in any way but rather, like a psychologist, they keep mirroring back or questioning students to help them dig deeply and find their own knowledge and make their own meaning.

Following the European approach, Lecoq took an active role in his students' development of their clowns. One of his famous pedagogical practices was his use of the principle of *via negativa* (Latin for negative way) which "suppresses explanation, example and instruction. He simply told his students, 'No. That's not it,'...He used *via negativa* to avoid theorizing and intellectualizing" (Wright 186). However, from a student's perspective, the *via negativa* may feel like bullying which is not the desired intent. In contrast, although John Wright also believes that the teacher must coach and intervene, he maintains that "to play clown you have to love being on stage in front of that audience more than anything else in the world, and you can't find that openness and that degree of pleasure if you're terrified" (Wright 187).

Wright says that a teacher can be "in the game" by taking on a role of what he would call the "boss-clown." In this way, the teacher becomes the provocateur and plays with her students in a way that invites the students to go beyond and to find creative ways to solve problems. As a provocateur, the teacher helps the students keep their work "alive and funny" but the students

never feel demeaned or abandoned. The teacher has perspective that the students do not have and it is important that he share that perspective with them in a way that moves their work forward or deeper; however, Wright says “It doesn’t work if I try to set myself up as an expert or a critic and try to tell you where you’re going wrong...you’ll start to think and to analyse what you’re doing, and then all your playfulness and comedy will quite simply evaporate” (Wright 188).

Although I am drawn to the self-exploration implicit in Pochinko’s method, I also find it can be self-indulgent as it does not impress upon students the rigour of being in complicité with the audience the way Lecoq’s does. In addition, as valuable as it is to require students to reflect deeply and to continue to draw at the well of their creativity, I believe that students must also continuously seek to find their reflection in the mirror of the audience. Knowledge of oneself is not divined solely through either of their methods; it is found through the stumbling, falling, getting up and trying again. I subscribe to Lecoq’s method of having the teacher be a participant in the development of students’ clowns; however, I do not engage in every activity with the students because I do not want them to over-rely on me as their provocateur. As much as I support their efforts to find the fun and be funny, I also challenge my students to embrace the poetry and pathos that Pochinko embraces. Further, like Wright, I disagree with Lecoq’s insistence on *via negativa*. It is destructive and militant.



As a teacher, I have experienced great success giving students feedback in a playful manner. For example, if the premise in an improvisation is that the student is auditioning for the part of a rooster and her tactics are not working to engage her audience, I might say, "Oh yes, I can see that you are auditioning for the part of the dog. Those auditions are in the room next door. These auditions are for the part of the rooster." If the student's new tactics elicit laughter from the audience I might then say, "Wow! Your agent was right! You were born to be the rooster!" In this way, I am in the "game" of the audition and the student receives feedback in a humorous and non-demeaning way.

Like Wright, I believe that my job is to keep my students playing. It has been my experience that by being playful with them as I give them feedback, their defences stay down, they work harder, they have more ideas and they tap more deeply into their creativity. As complex and challenging as it is, I believe that clown can be taught and that students can uncover what is uniquely funny about them. Students often arrive with some cynicism about exercises because they fear failure and fear being vulnerable. I allow them to bring their cynicism but they must temper it with benevolence because once they learn to embrace failure as a necessary element of the clown world, they can unleash their spirit of play, take risks and have fun.

# CHAPTER ONE

## BUILDING THE ENSEMBLE

Cultivating a supportive and non-judgmental culture where students can find their abandon in play is the objective of this chapter. It is important to build a strong ensemble because clowning requires complete vulnerability of our most authentic selves. When students feel physically and emotionally comfortable with one another, they will take bigger risks and make important discoveries. Although clown itself is not an ensemble genre, students require an environment where they can fail safely without feeling like their integrity is being threatened. This is essential because in classes or workshops, students alternate between being performers and being the audience. Performing in front of their peers allows students to take the baby steps necessary before walking on the high wire in front of a *real* audience where the stakes are much higher.

### **WHOA, YES!**

#### ***The power of positivity***

*Start every lesson by inviting the students to set an intention to challenge themselves to stay open.*

1. Have students form a circle.
2. Ask students what they think the most important 3-letter word is for theatre and for life.
3. Discuss that when we say “YES” we open ourselves up to new experiences and step outside of our comfort zone. The only way to find our clown is to take emotional and physical risks. When we say “NO” we stay in control of the situation and we don’t relish in play. The students must find their abandon and go emotionally where they have never gone before.
4. In the circle, get students to shake their hands like they are in a Broadway musical. Think big “jazz hands!”

5. Invite them to summon all the energy from the ground and allow that energy to infuse them from the bottoms of their feet to the top of their heads. Similarly, invite them to summon all the energy from the sky and allow that energy to infuse them from the top of their heads to the bottom of their feet.
6. Literally, get them to vibrate with positive energy!
7. Slowly and quietly and as a group, get them to collectively say, "YES!" and clap their hands at the same time.
8. Crescendo the "YES!" until the group has reached the maximum sound level.
9. As a group, collectively find the ending and exclaim in unison a final "WHOA, YES!" There does need to be a visual cue so students can find the ending together. The visual cue is done by everyone slowly bringing their hands back to slam down the final "YES!"

### **TA-DA!**

#### ***Embrace and celebrate failures***

*The clown is constantly misinterpreting and misunderstanding. Clowns embrace failure and let the problem become the solution. Clowns never lose their optimism. They are invisible creatures who always have hope that things work out in the end.*

1. Have students form a circle.
2. Ask students to visualize and conjure up feelings of negativity and failure.
3. Tell students "On the count of three you must loudly say, "AGHH!" "UGH!" "BLAH!" and so on."
4. Remind them that they have the power to reframe this experience; instead of getting down on themselves, they are to celebrate their failures by loudly saying, "TA-DA!"
5. Have students create their own "power pose" to accompany this saying.

*Invite students to use "TA-DA!" anytime that they feel like they have not triumphed at an exercise. It is very powerful and essential to reframe failure as*

*something to embrace instead of something to fear! I tell my students to make friends with their fear because whatever we resist... persists.*

Ask students on a regular basis “Are you working at your maximum?” Students often play small not only because they are intimidated, but because they are not used to playing in a big way.

*Try this next exercise to practice celebrating failure. Students begin by throwing a large ball in a circle. (Children’s play ball or beach ball works well.)*

1. After a couple of throws, ask students to imagine that the ball is now made of glass. For the final round of throws, have students imagine the ball is a baby or a puppy.
2. If at any time the ball falls, the whole group takes a moment and says “Awww!” immediately followed by the person who failed to catch the ball loudly announcing, “TA DA!” to celebrate the failure.

### ***! SUCK AND I LOVE TO FAIL & I AM ENOUGH!***

#### ***Relinquish expectation***

A mantra that works well with students is, “I SUCK AND I LOVE TO FAIL!” Invite students to really own these words.

*Children are natural clowns and creators because they do not pressure themselves to be brilliant, funny, intelligent or clever. They take pleasure in play and therefore stumble upon sublime solutions to their creative problems. There is a profound power in admitting that it is quite normal to “suck” at something that we have not done before. By removing the expectation to be brilliant, we free ourselves up to be inspired. And most likely, if we find some inspiration, we may just find something surprisingly brilliant after all.*

Another mantra that works well with students is, "I AM ENOUGH!"

*What I find fascinating about watching my students work is that they often push too hard at an exercise. They tack on unnecessary gestures to make themselves look more interesting because they fear that they are boring. Clowning is about complete authenticity and being our most genuine selves. It is the only mask that uncovers who we are. Therefore, we cannot act disingenuously. That is uninteresting to watch. I want to really see my students in all their flawed glory.*

### **THE PLEDGE**

#### ***We get out what we put in***

1. Invite students to form a circle.
2. Ask students to raise their right hands to make a pledge.
3. Invite them to repeat after you. "I am responsible for my energy and I will bring my FUN!"

### **HEART CHAKRA: OPEN FOR BUSINESS**

#### ***Have the courage to be vulnerable***

*Clowns live their lives in conversation with an audience. They do not have a protective social mask. The clown is the skinless grape...vulnerable, open, and available to experience all the possibilities of life. This exercise is a goofy reminder to stay present and to wear our hearts on our sleeves.*

1. Invite students to form a circle.
2. Ask students to begin massaging their own sternum.
3. Slowly, have them open up their hands and raise them up to the sky while singing a silly opera note in the shape of the vowel, "AH!"
4. Have the students *joyfully* exclaim, "HEART CHAKRA, OPEN FOR BUSINESS!"

## **STANDING OVATIONS & OPEN APPRECIATIONS**

### ***Celebrate small successes & appreciate one another***

*I don't think we need to wait until our wedding day to get a standing ovation.*

*Give students standing ovations and celebrate even small successes.*

1. Tell students that anyone in the class may call a standing ovation.
2. Caution: Remind students that ovations must be earned because we still want to maintain how special a standing ovation is.

*Another lovely exercise to do after a couple of classes is what is called an "open appreciation." An open appreciation is when a student appreciates someone in the group for their work or for their generosity of spirit etc.*

1. Have students unite in a circle. (could be standing or sitting)
2. Allow one or more students to openly appreciate someone in the ensemble.

*VARIATION: Do an open appreciation "blitz." Tell the students that they have one minute on the clock and they need to appreciate at least five people in this time frame.*

## **BRAIN BURSTS**

### ***Recognize extraordinary thinking***

*This ritual is a little silly, but very fun. When someone in the ensemble has an extraordinary thought or new idea, anyone in the group may have a brain burst.*

1. Ask students, "Put your hands on your head in fists and exploding your fingers in an outward manner while you make the sound of a tiny explosion."
2. Explain that this action signifies that someone has blown or expanded their mind and given them the gift of a new way of thinking and they may use this as appropriate.

## **CHECKING IN**

### ***Refocusing & reading the room***

*Students do not breathe enough and without breath it is impossible to connect with our creative impulses. Whenever you feel you need to refocus the energy in the group, have students “check in.”*

1. Tell students “when you hear me say, ‘Check in! you are to take a breath in through the nose and breathe out through the mouth.’”
2. Tell them that each time they hear you say “Check in!” they are to do this three times.

*Teachers must harness the energy in a room. This activity is a simple but effective way to get a quick read of where your students are emotionally and physically in that moment.*

1. Invite the students to form a circle.
2. Have them create a sound and an action for how they are feeling.
3. Go around the circle and have one student at a time say, “I” followed by the sound and action that expresses where she is emotionally and physically.

*VARIATION: Have the other students repeat the sound and the action before going onto the next person.*

## **BREAK OUT OF YOUR BAGGAGE & DROP KICK YOUR CRITIC**

### ***Challenge your comfort zone!***

*Clowns believe they can do anything. They have strong desire and curiosity to try new things and have exciting adventures. Therefore, we must learn to play with an open heart and a healthy editor.*

1. Invite the students to find their own space in the room.
2. Have the students close their eyes and invite them to visualize a material or object that they could get stuck in.

3. Ask the students to visualize a way to “break out of their shell.” For

Side-coach – ask:

- “What does the substance feel like?
- What texture is it?
- What colour is it?
- Does it have an odour? etc.”

example, if they were stuck in a pumpkin shell they could escape by using a pumpkin seed as a shovel.

4. Have the students act their scenarios out both physically and vocally. When they make their great escape, encourage them to throw a little dance party for themselves and celebrate!

5. Upon completion of this exercise, get them to evaluate their bravery by giving themselves a 1-5 rating on their fingers. Did they work at their maximum? Did they express themselves as

fully as they could have both physically and vocally? Did they step out of their comfort zone? Did they have fun and take pleasure in their play?

6. Invite the students to repeat the exercise again. Challenge them to take even bigger risks. See if they can surprise themselves. How loud can they be? How physical can they be? How much fun can they have?

*VARIATION: Instead of breaking out of baggage, students lose their inner critic.*

Side-coach - tell them: “This critic is so obnoxious that it physically starts to weigh your shoulder down. But you have the power to stop this critic!”

1. Invite students to visualize a critic sitting on their shoulder.

2. Tell them, “On the count of three, I want you to ‘drop kick your critic!’ whatever that means to you.”

3. Have the students physically and

vocally act this out.

### **SONGS ABOUT ANXIETY**

#### ***Acknowledge & embrace anxiety***

*This is a very silly thing to do, but it is so honest and reaffirming.*

1. Ask the students what their fears and anxieties are about studying clown.
2. Tell them to create a little song about it.
  - a. Tell them to make it purposely silly sounding with odd rhythms and



notes.

- b. Invite them to take their third worst idea instead of their best idea. This provides permission to fail so that they actually enjoy this exercise.
- c. Give students very little time to prepare this. We want the raw version of what they are truly feeling anxious about.

### **RHYTHMIC NAME GAME**

#### ***Exploring the rhythm of comedy & getting to know one another***

1. Invite students to form a circle.
2. Say to them, "You are each going to share your name in an unusual rhythm."
3. Have the students say their name three times.
4. Although, it would be great to elicit laughter from the audience, it is more important to invite the students to say their names in a way that is fun for them to do.
5. Remind them that this exercise is about connecting to the audience. Ensure that each student has full circle awareness and performs for the audience.

### **SNAPPY NAMES**

#### ***Memorize names***

1. Invite students to form a circle.
2. Instruct the ensemble to begin snapping in a rhythm.
3. Go around the circle and have each student say his name on the snap.
4. Then have the students do double snaps. On the first snap, the student says her name and on the second snap the student says someone else's name in the circle. The student who is called upon continues by saying his name followed by someone else's name, etc.

## **NAME ALLITERATION**

### ***Finding the fun & learning names***

1. Invite students to form a circle.
2. Ask them to think about an adjective that best describes them.
3. Now, ask them to think of an adjective that starts with the same letter as their first name to create alliteration. For example, Smart Sally.

Side-coach –Invite the students to do something that is fun for them to do. Make sure that they really connect to the audience while performing. If they did not take a risk or were not taking pleasure in their play, have them try again. Ask for their maximum both vocally and physically.

4. Using the inspiration of their adjective, invite students to come up with a physical action that would best compliment their chosen adjective. Remind the students that the body and voice are one instrument working together to create meaning.
5. One at a time, have the students perform their names and have the rest of the class repeat the action/alliteration-name in a call and response pattern.
6. After learning all the names, have the students switch places in the circle and see if, as a group, they are able to go around the circle and do everyone's action successfully.

## **NAME HIT MAN**

### ***Obey impulse and memorize names***

*This is a very fun and a great game for memorizing names, acting on impulse and for creating focus. Invite the students to play at the speed of fun and to take risks.*

1. Invite students to form a tight circle by standing shoulder to shoulder.
2. You begin by tapping a student on the shoulder which then activates that student's voice.
3. That student calls someone else's name in the circle. That person must touch someone in the circle.

4. Once touched, the student says someone's name in the circle. And so on...  
*You may eliminate players who are too slow or players who say someone's name who is no longer in the game.*

### **NAME BANG!**

#### ***A game for learning names***

1. Invite students to form a circle.
2. Elect someone to be the shooter in the center of the circle.
3. The shooter points at someone in the circle and says her name.
4. The student that has been selected ducks to avoid being shot.
5. The students on either side point at one another and say the other's name.
6. Whoever says the other's name first survives and the other student dies and says, "TA-DA!" That student then sits in the circle.
7. Eventually, there are two remaining survivors.
8. Have these two students stand back to back in the center of the circle and close their eyes.
9. Stand behind a student who is standing in the circle.
10. Count backwards from 3 to 1 and when you get to "1" the two students open their eyes.
11. Whichever of the two students says the name of student behind whom you are standing is the winner of the game.

*VARIATION: Alternately, instead of killing students off, the loser of each shot becomes the new caller in the center of the circle.*

### **ATOM & COMMONATOR**

#### ***Understanding our similarities and differences in the ensemble***

Side-coach – As they mill about, invite the students to fill all the spaces of the room and to walk a little bit faster than their normal walk.
---

1. Have students mill about the room.

2. You begin by calling out “ATOM” and a number. If you call out “ATOM 4,” the students immediately form into clusters of four students.
3. The students who did not find a group joyously yell, “TA-DA!”

*After Atom, it is time to play Commonator. Students find the common denominator between/among them.*

Side coach - Explain to students that their commonalities may be large or small, superficial or heavy, deep and meaningful. For example, they may love pistachio ice cream or they are all passionate about ending child labour in developing countries.

1. Begin by having the students mill about and then call out “ATOM 2.” In pairs, students have one minute to find out what they have intrinsically in common with one another. Once they have found their common denominator, they sit down and see if they can find more commonalities.
2. Once everyone is sitting on the floor, ask each group what they found in common. Have the others actively listen and if they have that particular thing in common, have them raise their hands.
3. Have the students mill about again and invite them to be cognizant of choosing new partners each time. Call out “ATOM 3” and then “ATOM 4” etc.
4. Finish this exercise by getting the students to sit in a circle. Ask them to come up with a democratic solution of how the ensemble can ensure that everyone is seen and heard in finding out what they all intrinsically have in common.

### **THREE TRUTHS & A LIE**

#### ***Getting to know one another***

1. Hand out a single piece of paper to each student and have students divide the paper into quarters.
2. In three of the boxes, they write a truth about themselves. For instance, Box #1: “I love Broadway musicals,” Box #2: “I love dark chocolate,” and

Box #3: "I have been skydiving."

3. In one of the four boxes, the students write a lie about themselves. The trick is to make the truths seem like lies and the lie seem like a truth so it isn't easy to tell which is which.
4. Once students have written their three truths and a lie, invite the students to mill about, look at each other's papers and have them guess which box contains the lie.

### **DROWNING HANDS**

#### ***Become physically comfortable with everyone***

1. Invite students to mill about in the space.
2. Make sure they shake hands and make eye contact with everyone.
3. Tell them "As of now, you will drown if you are not making contact with someone's hands at all times!"
4. Students literally swim in a sea of hands moving and alternating from hand to hand to hand to avoid drowning.

### **PARTNERS**

#### ***Become physically comfortable with everyone***

#### **Variation #1: Play with your partner**

1. Invite the students to mill about in the space.
2. Explain that when you say "partner," students pair off.
3. Then say "With this partner, have a staring contest until someone is victorious."
4. Get the students to mill about again and get them to pair off with a new partner.
5. With this partner, they do a little waltz together.
6. Continue offering different actions for each new set of partners.

### **Variation #2: Making contact with the floor**

1. Invite the students to mill about in the space.
2. Tell them, "When I say 'group of 4,' you get into groups of four."
3. Then tell them how many points of contact they may have with the floor. For example, if the students may only have four points of contact with the floor, two students may hold up the other two students. The four points of contact are the four feet on the floor. Or they may all have one foot on the floor, one foot off of the floor and be holding on to each other for balance. There are many creative ways to fulfill the points of contact assigned.

### **Variation #3: Body parts to body parts**

1. Invite the students to mill about in the space.
2. Explain that when you say "partner," students pair off.
3. Once they are paired, say "With this partner, you both must connect your shins to each other's heads." Again, there are many different variations and ways to fulfill the assigned connections.

### **MOO!**

#### ***Promote positive group dynamics and break the ice***

1. Invite the students to find their own spaces in the room and have them get onto all fours on the floor as if they are cows.
2. Invite the students to close their eyes.
3. Tell students the rules are as follows:
  - a. I (the teacher) select the "Major Moo" by tapping a student on the head.
  - b. The Major Moo stands up, opens her eyes and stands in a wide-open stance so that the rest of you can crawl through her legs and join her by standing on the other side to form one line.
  - c. After the Major Moo has been selected and is standing, she becomes the strong and silent type and she does not ever speak a word.

- d. Those of you remaining on hands and knees and with your eyes closed try to find the Major Moo. Move around the room mooing.
  - e. If you call out by mooing and hear another “Moo!” you know you have not been successful in finding the Major Moo.
  - f. If you “Moo!” and do not hear the response of a “Moo!” you crawl through the Major Moo’s legs and stand on the other side creating a Major Moo “tunnel” through which other students must now crawl.
  - g. Once on the other side, you open your eyes and, as you are now assimilated into Major Moo, you remain silent with your eyes and legs open.
4. Eventually, the entire class is assimilated and standing in one line.
  5. Of course, there are always a couple of cows that cannot find the line. It is important that the line remains silent so that students can truly find the line by playing the game. The remaining cows also need to go through the entire chain of legs to come out the other side.

# CHAPTER TWO

## WARM-UPS & PLAY

In order to clown, we must engage with our spirit of play. In playing these games, something magical happens. Adults forget that they are supposed to act maturely and revert back to a time long ago in a land where ordinary had no place because everything was extraordinary. Our ability to play feeds all clown work. The way we play games is also the way we play on stage. Therefore, we must play with risk, energy, abandon and commitment. We must learn to pursue our fun and let the fun lead to the idea. When we play, we are fully present and not concerned with being brilliant and, paradoxically, we then have the freedom to be inspired. These exercises are designed to warm up the body, mind and clown spirit of the participants so that they begin to enter into the clown world. When we engage our bodies in play, we can begin to listen to our impulses without judgment.

### **SHAKE THAT BODY**

#### ***Super quick warm-up to create alertness***

1. Invite the students to form a circle.
2. Ask them to shake their right arm, followed by their left arm, followed by their right leg and finish with their left leg.
3. Now, have them count backward from five to one as they shake each limb for the duration of those counts. For instance, shake the right arm for 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Now shake the left arm for 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 etc.
4. After one round of shaking the arms and legs, start the count down from 4, 3, 2, 1. The final round is a 1, 1, 1, 1.



## **GO!**

### ***Gets the blood flowing***

1. Invite the students to get into pairs and decide who is “A” and who is “B.”
2. All of the students who are “A” create a single file line. Ask all the “Bs” to do the same. You now have Team A and Team B.
3. Have Team A and Team B move together to create two parallel lines.
4. Each person standing at the front of the lines says, “GO!” The person at the end of both lines then moves towards the front of the line weaving back and forth through the line until reaching to the front.
5. Upon reaching the front of the line, the student says “GO!” and the student currently at the back of line begins to weave through.
6. This continues until either line A or line B successfully reaches the finish line marked by you.

*It is important to note that if a student at the back of the line starts to weave without permission (the “GO”) the student must return to the back of the line and start again. Also, students love to cheat by making the spaces in the line larger than they need to be. The spaces should be big enough for a person to swivel through and no larger!*

## **BOMB & SHIELD**

### ***A fun physical warm-up***

1. Invite the students to mill about in the space.
2. Invite them to choose someone in the room to be their enemy or “bomb.” The students do not reveal this information to you or anyone in the room. It is top secret!
3. Now, invite the students to choose a different student in the room to be their protector or “shield.” Again, this information is top secret and cannot be revealed to anyone.
4. The game begins and the rules are simply this: it is imperative that students are behind their “shield” and away from their “bomb” at all times.

5. This game is incredibly active because all students are on the move and trying to protect themselves against their “bomb.”

*Students may experience feelings of anxiety, fear, excitement, astonishment, joy, delight, etc., which is perfect because clowns feel everything at once and their feelings are often heightened. Tell them, “You know you are in clown mode when you are feeling just below your emergency panic level so that your inner critic is silenced.”*

*VARIATION: You may add another ingredient and have the students select a “target” to go after while keeping the “shield” in place for protection from the “bomb.”*

### **BUM TO BLACK**

***Creates an awareness of the space, one’s own physicality and the physicality of others.***

*Great clowns have a strong awareness of the space that surrounds them. This exercise quickly warms up your students and allows them to truly see the space of the room with all of its possibilities for play and improvisation.*

1. Invite the students to find their own space in the room.
2. Call out a body part and a colour to connect that body part to. For example, “bum to black.” The students immediately find something black in the room and they connect their bum to it.
3. Create time pressure by giving a command like “nose to pink” and immediately count down out loud “5, 4, 3, 2 and 1!”

### **BODY BALL**

***A fun physical warm-up***

1. Invite the students to form a circle.
2. Select one student to be in the center of the circle and hand the student volleyball.

3. The rules are very simple. Each student must hit the ball with his or her hands at least once. A student may hit the ball more than once and the ball does not have to be hit in any sort of order.
4. Once every student has hit the ball with his or her hands, it is time to move to the next round that begins immediately - there is no pause between rounds. In this round, every student must hit the ball with his or her knees at least once. In the third round, every student must hit the ball with his or her feet.
5. If the ball touches the floor in any of the rounds, you begin the game again. For example, if the students were on the “knees” round and dropped the ball, they go back to the “hands” round.
6. The person in the center is part of the game, but is placed in the center to cover more ground and prevent the ball from dropping.

*VARIATION 1: Simply have the students to keep a ball in the air for as long as they can and to always see if they can beat their former rally.*

*VARIATION 2: Alternately, you may set a goal of 35 hits before the ball can drop to the floor. Get the students to count the hits as they make them.*

### **STOP, GO, SQUAT, JUMP**

#### ***Find the fun in failing***

1. Invite the students to mill about in the space. Have them walk with a sense of purpose and invite them to walk a little bit faster than their normal pace.
2. Say to them, “I will call out four different commands for you to perform.”
3. “When I say, ‘Stop!’ you must stop and hold an energized freeze. When I say, ‘Go!’ you return to milling about in the space. When I say, ‘Squat!’ you squat for a second or two and then continue milling about. When I say, ‘Jump!’ you jump up and continue milling about.”

4. After the students have mastered those four commands, it is time to have some fun in failing. Tell the students “You will now perform the opposite task of the command that I call. For example, ‘Stop!’ means ‘Go!’ and ‘Go!’ means ‘Stop!’ and ‘Squat!’ means ‘Jump!’ and ‘Jump!’ means ‘Squat!’” Call out commands.
5. Students celebrate their mistakes (and there will be many) with a “TA-DA!”
6. You may also call “Switch!” at any time and then the opposite command becomes true again.

### **WHO KILLED KING JOHN?**

#### ***A warm-up for the mind***

1. Invite the students to form a circle and have them number themselves off.
2. You are King John or the first caller who initiates the game.
3. You choose a student to dialogue with and you start by saying, “Who killed King John?”
4. The student responds, “Not I!”
5. You respond, “Then who killed King John?”
6. The student responds by selecting another student’s number in the circle. For example, “Number 3 killed King John!”
7. Student number 3 then respond, “Not I!” And the other student continues the above dialogue, “Then who Killed King John?” Student number 3 selects another student’s number in the circle and says, “Number 7 killed King John” and so on.
8. Tell students that it is important to play this game at the speed of fun! They are to take risks and make the dialogue incredibly fast.
9. If a student makes a mistake with the dialogue or does not respond when their number is called, they become the new King John and a new round begins.
10. The former King John becomes the new number 1 causing the entire circle to shift up by a number.

11. The students may also call upon King John in the circle. For instance, "Then who killed King John?" "King John killed King John!" Etc.

### **3-WAY BALL TOSS**

#### ***Awareness, memory and focus***

1. Invite the students to form a circle and have them raise their hands.
2. You need three different colours of balls or beanbags to do this exercise. Let's say the colours are red, yellow and green.

Side Coach – Encourage students to breathe because it helps them to stay present and to focus on the task at hand.
---

3. You begin throwing the red ball to a student. You always throw the red ball to this particular student. The student that received the red ball puts his hand down to indicate that no one else may throw to him. He then selects another student in the circle to throw to. Continue this process until all the hands are down. Once the pattern is completed, it always remains the same for the red ball round.
4. Practice the red ball round sequence once or twice to really memorize it. Now, create a new sequence of throws and catches with the yellow ball and memorize it. Finally, create a new sequence of throws and catches with the green ball and memorize it.
5. Once they have memorized all three sequences, try throwing all three balls at the same time in the circle. The most important rule in this game is to really ensure that the balls are caught. The thrower has to make sure that the catcher is ready. They are in a spirit of complicité together.

*VARIATION 1: Compliment the three ball patterns by adding a sequence of name patterns. For example, on the "red ball," sequence students add the vocalization of saying the name of the person that they are throwing to. Then on the "yellow ball" sequence they say their name to the person that they are throwing to. Finally, on the "green ball" sequence they say another student's name to the person that they are throwing to.*

*VARIATION 2: This game may be played with a series of actions and products instead of balls. For example, in the first sequence they could “High 5” their receiver. In the second sequence, they could spin the receiver around. In the third sequence, they could bump hips together.*

*VARIATION 3: They could pass their favourite chocolate bar patterns. A student would start by saying SKOR to someone in the circle and she would say to someone else in the circle BOUNTY and he would say to someone else in the circle MARS, etc. to establish a pattern. Run the pattern a few times and then have students establish a second pattern. Run that pattern a few times. Then put the first and second pattern together and run them both simultaneously. Then introduce the third pattern until everyone's brains explode!*

### **CATCH THE FLY**

#### ***Promotes listening and alertness***

1. Invite the students to find their own space in the room.
2. Invite them to take a wide and open stance and to bend their knees.
3. Get them to put their hands in front of them as if they were on top of a table.
4. Invite them to focus on a fixed point and to stay present with their breath.
5. When you clap your hands, the students collectively turn their heads and upper body to the right and clap their hands as if they are catching a fly. They do this as quickly as possible and ultimately, the students clap together as an ensemble. Immediately, after the clap they return to their opening position with their hands on top of a “table” and focus on their fixed point.
6. When you clap your hands for a second time, the students catch a fly on their left side and return back to center. When you clap your hands for a third time, the students look above and catch/clap the fly and return back to center. When you clap your hands for the fourth time, the students look

- below and catch/clap the fly and return back to center.
7. Play with the rhythm of your claps to keep your students guessing.
  8. Now, have the students react to your claps by moving only their heads to the right and back to center and to the left and back to center and so on. Also, invite them to yell angrily at the fly when you clap your hands.
  9. To increase the difficulty, have the students now hop with both feet to the right and back to center, to the left and back to center, to the front and back to center and to the back and return to center.
  10. Finally, put the entire sequence of tasks together. The students move their heads, clap, yell and hop at the same time to the right and back to center and so on upon your claps.

### **THREE CLAPS**

#### ***Promotes focus, awareness and listening skills***

1. Invite the students to mill about the space.
2. Tell students, “We all have ‘socialized selves.’ This is a walk that we have learned over many years. It is our movement signature and our way of being in the world.”
3. Invite the students to walk in a “neutral” way. There is no such thing as “neutral” because our bodies carry our personal history. However, invite them to be cognizant of walking in a way that does not display their comfortable habits and tendencies.
4. Tell them, “Ensure your eyes are looking into the space and receive the gift of really seeing the room and everyone in it. Lengthen your spine and imagine that there are two forces stretching your spine in two directions. There is a force above you from the sky and a force below you from the ground. Roll your shoulders back and down three times. Activate your sternum and imagine that there is a beam of light shining from it. Walk a little bit faster than your normal pace and fill all the spaces of the room. Give your feet the gift of exploration and curiosity. And most importantly, breathe in and exhale fully.”

5. When you feel the students are ready, explain the directions of the game:
  - a. When you hear me clap my hands or hit a drum, freeze where you are. (Remind them to breathe and energize this freeze.)
  - b. The second time I clap my hands or hit a drum, you move only your heads. You may move your head to the right or to the left and this move should be done in one quick beat. (Remind them to keep breathing.)
  - c. The third time I clap your hands or hit a drum, you walk in the direction that your head is facing.
6. Play the game and experiment with the rhythm of the three claps. For example, you may clap the first time and then wait three beats until the next clap and then quickly clap the last one. Keep your students guessing!
7. Upon completion of the exercise, invite the students to reflect on how they feel now versus how they felt before they did the exercise. They should feel a heightened awareness. This is the energy that is required for clown.

### **SIMON SAYS**

#### ***Listening, impulse & play***

*One of the oldest games in the drama teacher's canon is "Simon Says." However, it is a surprisingly great game for clown training. The students are absolutely present in this exercise because they are in a heightened state of awareness. Also, there is a high failure rate in this game that allows for much celebration of our imperfectly perfect selves. In addition, this game also helps the students to become aware of their impulses.*

1. You are "Simon" and in this role you are responsible for calling out a variety of tasks for the students to perform.
2. Always preface the task with the words "Simon says" or the task is not to be acted out by the students. For example, "Simon says, jump on one leg." The students perform this task. If the command were simply, "jump on one leg" the students continue doing their former task.



Side coach – Tell students “Remember to breathe.” Ensure that their eyes are looking into the space. Tell them, “If you are looking at the floor you are not present but are up in your head and thinking about the exercise. The secret to clowning is to be in your body following your instincts and impulses.”

3. If the student has an impulse to move when she is not supposed to, the student joyfully exclaims, “TA DA!”

4. There are also hilarious punishments that may be lovingly given. The students choose from one of three punishments: they receive a gentle hit on their shoulder, they receive a hug from the teacher or they give or ask for Swiss kisses (three alternating cheek kisses) to someone in the class. The idea here

is to instill that failure can be fun and it is not something to be feared and avoided.

5. Be tricky with your commands. For instance, “Simon says walk faster and now slower.” If the students slower that is a mistake because it was not preceded by “Simon Says.”
6. Here is another tricky one: Simon says pick a number between 1-10 and now take that many steps!
7. It is also fun to put the students in pairs and when one of them makes a mistake, he becomes responsible for punishing the other with love. I like to get the students to say something ridiculous when their partner makes a mistake. For example, “you are a screw up, but I love you anyway!”
8. You may eliminate players who make more than three mistakes.

### **JUST A SIMPLE GAME OF TAG**

***Simply play & take risks***

#### **Variation #1: Mr. Pinchy & Mrs. Slappy**

*The wacky titles for tag Variations 1 and 2 (Mr. Pinchy & Mrs. Slappy and The Icky Finger of Fun) come from the wonderfully imaginative Christopher Bayes. He is an Associate Professor and the Head of Physical Acting at the Yale School of Drama.*

1. Invite the students to find their own place in the room
2. The rules are easy. One student is selected as “Mr. or Mrs. Pinchy.” The selected student tags the other students by pinching them on the arm.
3. Students caught/pinched by “Mr. or Mrs. Pinchy” also become “IT” and begin pinching the other students. Eventually, all the students are “IT” and are pinching one another. Pandemonium ensues!
4. For variety, you may also play “Mr. or Mrs. Slappy.” This is exactly the same game of tag, however, instead of pinching, the selected student slaps the other students on the arm.

### **Variation #2: The Icky Finger of Fun**

1. Invite the students to find their own place in the room.
2. One student is selected to be “IT” and she tries to tag another student. If successful, the other student becomes “IT.” Although this is the basic rule of tag, there is an added twist.
3. Before the tagger attacks he is to do something a bit gross with his finger. Hence, the title of the game. For instance, he gets caught, he loudly says, “GROSS, look at my icky finger of fun! It is getting the lint out of my belly button.” And he proceeds to attack and tag someone else.
4. The new tagger finds a different way to endow her finger with something icky.

*You start to see clowns coming alive in this game because the students play as if their lives are in danger. It is completely hilarious.*

### **Variation #3: Hug tag**

1. Invite the students to find their own place in the room.
2. Select one student to be “IT.” He tries to tag another student.
3. However, to save herself from becoming “IT” the student that is being pursued by the tagger hugs someone.
4. Tell them that they only have a three second hugging window.
5. Also, only two people in the ensemble may hug at a time.

6. Watch for the fool moments! For example, a student starts counting very slowly, “ooonnnee, tttwwwoo...” Etc.

#### **Variation #4: Freeze tag**

1. Invite the students to find their own place in the room.
2. Two students are selected to be “IT.” They work together and come up with a game plan to freeze all the other students in the room until there is no further movement.
3. Once a student is tagged, he freezes with his legs in an open stance.
4. Other students must try to save the frozen victims by crawling under their legs.
5. Once the student has been saved, she begins playing the game again trying not to get caught.

#### **Variation #5: Chain or blob tag**

*Resistance is futile!*

1. Invite the students to find their own place in the room.
2. Select one student to be “IT.” He attempts to tag another student.
3. If the student is successful in tagging another student, the tagger and the tagged join hands and are now a team of taggers.
4. The two of them continue to try to tag the remaining students. Again, once a student has been tagged, she joins the chain and becomes a tagger.
5. The game ends when all of the students are linked together.

#### **Variation #6: Enchanted Forest**

1. Invite the students to create a single line on one side of the room.
2. Elect one student to be the “ONE-LEGGED FROG” in the enchanted forest. The “FROG/TAGGER” may only hop on one leg to catch the other students.

3. The students' objective is to cross to the other side without being tagged by the one-legged frog. If the students are caught on their way to the other side of the room, they become trees in the enchanted forest.
4. An "ENCHANTED TREE" cannot move from where it was caught. These trees/students also become taggers, but they may only swivel around using their arms and hands. Their feet are rooted to the ground.
5. The remaining students that make it successfully to the other side have to cross back again. These students continue to cross back and forth until there is only one winner amongst the forest of enchanted trees.

#### **Variation #7: Fox & Rabbit**

1. Invite the students to get into pairs and to find their own space in the room. Ask them to hold onto one another's forearms to create a "rabbit hole."
2. Elect one pair of students to be the fox and the rabbit. The fox is the tagger and the rabbit is being pursued.
3. When the fox is chasing the rabbit, the rabbit may save itself by ducking into a "rabbit hole."
4. Once the rabbit is safely inside the hole (in the middle of the arms), the student who is facing the rabbit and looking into the rabbit's eyes is safe to stay where she is. However, the student on the other side who is looking at the back of the rabbit's head becomes the new rabbit and must run away from the fox.
5. The former rabbit and the student that is looking into the rabbit's eyes form a new "rabbit hole."
6. If the fox tags the rabbit, then they immediately reverse roles and the rabbit becomes the fox and chases him.

*Role reversals may happen many times if the rabbit does not seek refuge in a hole.*

### **Variation #8: Blind Tag**

*Contrasted with all the other tag variations, blind tag teaches students to remain calm instead of going into panic mode because it is done with an energy of slowness and a “Zen” attitude. Not having the sense of sight invites students to “see” with their other senses.*

1. Invite the students to find their own place in the room.
2. Explain that everyone is “IT.” This game of tag is played in slow motion because the students’ eyes are closed. In addition, in order to be safe, the students must tag people softly and slowly as well.
3. Tell students, “If you touch palm to palm with someone, you are both out.”
4. The game is played until there is one person remaining “untagged.”
5. Invite the students to take risks. For example, a student could make noise and then move to a different space in the room so that she cannot be located.

*VARIATION: In addition to having their eyes closed, students hold hands with a partner and attempt to tag in pairs.*

### **THE ROYAL KINGDOM**

#### ***Play and the inner child emerges***

1. This game has four different physical pair positions/poses: King, Queen, Horse and Princess. As students are milling about, their pairings are constantly shifting and changing and they may have a new partner each time a pose is called.
2. Without talking, each pair of students determines who is Person 1 and who is Person 2 and they assume the characters in the pose. In each pose, they play different royal characters.
3. Teach the students each of these four poses:
  - a. The King pose: the King (Person #1) is standing and pretending to “knight” the Knight (Person #2) by tapping the Knight’s shoulders with his sword. The Knight is on the ground bowing to the King.

- b. The Queen pose: the Servant (Person #1) is holding the Queen (Person #2) in her arms as if to carry the Queen over a puddle of water.
  - c. The Horse pose: the Horse (Person #1) is on all fours on the ground. The Rider (Person #2) is sitting on the Horse's back but without applying his full weight.
  - d. The Princess pose: the Prince (Person #1) is kneeling and looking into the Princess's (Person #2) eyes while holding her hand. The Princess (Person #2) is standing and looking into Prince's (Person #1) eyes with love.
4. Now, invite the students to mill about in the space.
5. Call out one of the four positions and count backwards from five to one to create some time pressure. For instance, "PRINCESS in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1." There is energy of panic and excitement in clowning. The panic helps to quiet the voice of the critic so the student is able to act on impulse.
6. The students immediately pair up by choosing the closest person to them and striking the "Princess pose." This should be done without talking and negotiating about what player should strike position #1 or #2. The physical comedy possibilities are limitless.
7. Clowns live in a high stakes world. There is always something to win and something to lose. And the clown does whatever is necessary to win. Therefore, it is recommended that you eliminate players that do not find a partner within the time limit. Also, eliminate pairs that were the slowest in the group at striking the commanded pose.
8. However, before eliminating these players, they may redeem themselves by using clown logic. Clown logic is a nonsensical and absurd way of thinking or solving a problem that has a sublime wisdom to it. For example, the student that did not find a partner in time could play both roles of the Princess pose: simultaneously alternating between being the Princess and being the Prince. Invite the students to be cunning and mischievous. If they can convince you that they "planned" to fail then let

them stay in the game. Also, do not allow the student to use words to defend their position. Students must communicate non-verbally.

9. If a student must be eliminated, have him joyously exclaim, “TA-DA!” The student becomes part of the audience and watches the game.
10. Once you have only two students playing, give them a challenge. For example, Tell them that in the Princess pose they must convince the audience that they really love the other person. Again, invite the students to use clown logic. Love for a clown looks a little unconventional. The clown would probably not blow a kiss, but she might climb up and down a tiny ladder to show her partner how fearless she is. Give your winner a standing ovation!

### **CATCH THE BACON**

#### ***Mischief, cunning and clown logic***

1. Invite the students to form a circle.
2. Number the students off by counting 1, 2, 1, 2 etc.
3. Have all the ones and the twos form two separate lines facing one another.
4. The students in Line 1 standing directly across from the students in Line 2 are opponents.
5. Number the students off again. The first person in Line 1 is number one. The first person in Line 2 is also number one. The second person in Line 1 is number two. The second person in Line 2 is also number two, etc. Invite the students to come up with a “cheesy” cheer and name for their teams.
6. You stand at the front and in the middle of these two lines. You dangle a scarf (a.k.a. “the bacon”) in the air.
7. You call out a number. For example, “#4” and both number 4’s run and try to get “the bacon” from you.
8. The objective is to get “the bacon” back to the player’s original spot in the line without being tagged by the opponent. When a player is holding “the

- bacon” he is vulnerable to being tagged. If the player is successful in returning to his spot in the line with “the bacon,” he wins one point for his team.
9. If a player is unsuccessful in returning to the line with “the bacon” and has been tagged by the opponent, the other team wins the point.
  10. Now, for the fun part of the game. Only give the above rules of play to the students. Then, invite them to use their cunning ways to outwit and outsmart the other team. For example, they could throw the bacon to someone on their team and then run to their original spot and be handed the bacon. You see some of the best examples of clown logic in this game.
  11. Once a cunning strategy has been employed successfully, the students cannot use this strategy again. There are many ways to solve the problem of this exercise.
  12. The game is usually played to the best of seven (i.e. the first team to win 4 times).

### **GRANDMA'S FOOTSTEPS**

#### ***Clown logic, play & risk taking***

*This favourite childhood game is a perfect clown exercise because it incites clown logic, cunning and students taking pleasure in play. The students are constantly failing in this exercise and learning how to embrace failure with ease. This game is very watchable because there are high stakes and we love to see people succeed and fail with raw uncensored emotion as they overcome their obstacles.*

1. Choose one student to be Grandma and have her stand alone at the far end of a room in the center.
2. Invite the other students to line up behind Grandma at the other end of the room. Grandma faces the opposite direction of the student line. The students are looking at Grandma’s back.
3. The objective for the students is to successfully cross the room and tap Grandma on the back. In doing so, the successful student becomes the new Grandma and the game begins again.



Side Coach – Invite the students to take pleasure in failing. Tell them, “Take risks and to try new strategies to get to Grandma. The biggest risk is to move while Grandma is watching. And the biggest risk for Grandma is to not always turn around to catch the approaching students. Grandma must always change her rhythm or she becomes predictable. As an audience, we get bored once we have figured out the rhythm. Comedy is a surprise attack on rhythm. Also, Grandma must keep the game moving along. She does need to look for movement, but then quickly needs to resume the game.”

4. When Grandma is not facing the students, this is the opportunity for the students to cross to her. However, when she turns around to look at the students, they must be totally still or she sends them back to the starting line position. If a student is sent back to the starting line position, he may continue trying to cross to Grandma but he cannot argue with Grandma. We laugh when people are caught out.

5. Once you have played a couple of rounds of this version, it is time to raise the stakes. For example, have the students stand on a box at least once on their way to Grandma. Alternatively, invite the students to

work in groups of three or five and get them to cross to Grandma without being caught moving. The students in the ensemble must be touching at all times. Have at least two of the students from the ensemble stand or sit on the box on their journey toward Grandma.

*VARIATION: Try playing this game with a time limit to up the stakes even further.*

# CHAPTER THREE

## IMPULSE & COMPLICITÉ

Follow your impulse! Actors hear this note all the time. But what exactly does it mean to follow an impulse? An impulse is a gift from the most instinctive and intuitive self. It is not something that can be overly intellectualized. An impulse is a feeling that one has to move or react or speak. The problem is impulses are often defeated by unnecessary judgment and questioning of one's creativity. The exercises in this chapter invite the participants to learn to trust an impulse and to then to act upon it. Clowns are incredibly intuitive and almost prehistoric creatures. They run on impulse and heart. They don't *think* their way through a problem, but rather *feel* their way through one. Furthermore, listening to an impulse allows the clown to be complicit with the audience and the other clowns with whom they share the stage. Complicité is the spirit of play and connection between the audience and the performer(s) or between a group of performers. It is a delicate relationship that involves an agreement to go on a journey together. When the audience is connected to the performer and vice versa, they are in delicious complicité. And...when that happens...anything is possible!

### **TOUCH & GO**

#### ***Learning to respond with the body***

1. Invite the students to find a partner and have them decide who is "A" and who is "B."
2. Partner "A" begins running and partner "B" follows her. Partner "A" stops running, puts her hand out and says a body part. Partner "B" immediately connects that body part to Partner "A's" hand. Partner "A" then begins running again and Partner "B" follows. Partner "A" stops running, puts her hand out and says a different body part. Partner "B" immediately connects that body part to Partner "A's" hand. Repeat and have the

students switch roles.

3. Ensure that the “A” role is not a moving target when “B” connects with them. Also, invite “A” to play with levels. For example, sometimes his hand may be above his head or below the waist or on the ground. Use the other people in the room as obstacles to navigate around as well.
4. Now, have Partner “A” call out any colour, season or word that comes to mind. Partner “B” chooses the part of her body that wants to respond to that specific word and connects that body part to Partner “A’s” hand.
5. Invite the students to trust their impulses. Students have a tendency to want to really think and make the “right” choice. Invite them to think with their bodies and to trust the first impulse that they have.

### **CIRQUE TRAIN**

#### ***Let the fun lead to the idea***

1. Invite the students to get into groups of three or five and then have them form a single file line.
2. The person at the front of the line is the first leader; however, every student has the opportunity to lead because the leadership alternates.
3. You give the students an image that evokes movement. This image only serves to get the Cirque Train started and then the movement morphs into different shapes. An image that evokes movement may be as simple as: grumpy bears, slithering snakes or excited puppies.
4. The first leader is inspired by the image from you and he creates a movement with or without sound. The leading student begins moving throughout the space and his line follows him mimicking the exact same movement and sound. Because the students are leading a line, invite them to lead their groups in zigzag patterns to avoid confusion about who the given leader is.
5. Every student should lead for at least ten seconds and when the student is ready, she shouts “Cirque Train!” and runs to the back of the line. The next person in the line becomes the new leader.

6. Immediately, the movement that came before inspires the new leader and he morphs this movement and sound into a new one that everyone follows.
7. Students are afraid of not having an idea and sometimes pre-plan their movement. This exercise is about being comfortable in the “not knowing” and obeying impulse. Invite the students to truly find the idea in the fun and in the moment of the exercise. The idea does not come from “thinking” about the movement; the idea comes from “doing.”

### **BAMBOO**

#### ***Presence, play and obeying the impulse to move***

1. For this exercise, you need a class set of bamboo sticks. Invite the students to find a partner and get into their own space in the room.
2. Invite the students to hold the bamboo sticks in their right hand and have them face their partners. Partners should be about three feet away from one another.
3. In the spirit of complicité and obeying impulse, the students switch sides and grab each other’s stick. The objective is to ensure that both students can grab each other’s stick without the stick hitting the floor.
4. The students continue trying to grab each other’s sticks, but heighten the stakes by continuing to widen the space between them.
5. Now, have the students try this game in a group of three and decide to rotate either to the left or the right to avoid collisions. Again, have them start close together and invite them to keep making the spaces between them larger and larger.
6. Finally, invite the students to form a circle and they all play the game together. Again, we choose a direction to rotate in and begin with a smaller circle and end with a larger circle.
7. Make sure that your students are present in this game and that they don’t go into “Zen” (zoning out) mode. Invite them to be in the game with the other person and to not become too obsessed with their sticks. Tell them

that in the audience, we always want to watch *the game* which should be dynamic, spirited, risky, playful and never pessimistic. State, “It is important that we take care of one another: I want to ensure that my partner can actually catch the stick. The most difficult part of this game is to find 100% agreement - no one follows and no one leads. Again, the impulse comes from the body. This game is about learning to truly listen to the impulse because our bodies do know when to move if our brains do not get in the way. “

### **ONE TO FIVE**

#### ***Complicité***

1. Invite the students to find their own space in the room.
2. Have them get into a neutral stance: feet in parallel position and shoulder width apart, slight bend in the knees, straight spine, level head and breathing deeply. Invite them to have *soft* focus where they are looking at a fixed point, but have an acute awareness of everything that is happening in the room.
3. With this full awareness of everyone in the room and listening to impulse, one student begins to walk in the space. Obeying impulse again, this student comes to a stop.
4. In the spirit of *complicité*, two students begin walking at the exact same time and stop at the same time as well. Three students walking and stopping at the same time then follows this. Continue this up to five students walking and stopping at the same time and back down again from five to one.
5. If more students move than the prescribed amount, you may either go back by one or return to the beginning again with only one student moving and then two etc.
6. Now, invite the group to start thinking musically and rhythmically. Play with the tempo (slow/fast) and the duration (short/long) of the

movements. If this entire game were a musical score, what would be the most dynamic rhythm to find?

### **COUNTING TO 20**

#### ***Obey impulse***

1. Divide the students into two groups. Have these two groups form two separate circles. They are two teams competing against one another. The objective is to be the first group to successfully count from 1-20.
2. The students must make eye contact with one another and they must stay present and avoid going into Zen mode.
3. Students begin to count from 1-20 in their groups. This should be done on impulse and not in any sort of established sequence. If two students say a number at the same time, the group must begin back at #1.

### **RHYTHM BREATHE**

#### ***Playing with timing***

1. Invite the students to form a circle.
2. Using breath and impulse alone, the students compose a fantastic musical score complete with crescendos/decrescendos and sustained/staccato rhythms etc.
3. One student begins the composition by breathing in through his nose and out through his mouth. On the out breath, the student makes eye contact with someone in the circle and directs the breath to her.
4. The student that has received the breath breathes in through her nose and on the out breath connects with a different student. The breath continues to be passed in this manner.
5. If the students are truly listening to their impulses, the rhythm naturally changes and it is an exciting composition to listen to. Invite them to be sensitive to when a rhythm needs to change. Comedy is all about variations in rhythm and timing.

## **IMPULSE WORK**

### ***Learning to listen with the body***

#### **Walking to the wall**

1. Individually or in groups of three, have students simply walk to a wall

Side-coach – tell students:

- Grab the impulse right away. The first impulse you feel. Don't second-guess it.
- What is the objective? To find the imaginary wall. Ask your body to take you there.
- Even if you follow some wrong impulses, your body leads you back in the right direction.
- Live and be okay in the "not knowing."
- What throws you on stage? Missed lines? In clown, mistakes are a gift that you get to play with.
- Take risks all the time. Don't get stuck in the impulse trap of moving backwards and forwards with no commitment.
- In a group of three, you get more impulses because you feed off of one another. Don't judge the impulse. If you get them, take them.
- Raise your hand up if you are having fun. Put some risk on top!
- Is it important to find the wall? No. This exercise is about understanding the correlation between the head and the body. You can trust the head impulses, too.
- Don't just lead with the feet, lead with the entire body.

with  
their  
eyes  
closed.

2. Have the students place their hands out in front of them. The head is centered. When the chin is lowered this indicates that the student is thinking instead of feeling. The knees are unlocked and the spine is straight.
3. Invite the students to get as close as they can to the wall without touching it.
4. Tell the students to take risks and have fun. Say, "If you feel yourself falling forward or back, then you need to go with it. Breathe always. Go big. Do not walk with trepidation. If you find yourself stuck in the same rhythm... breathe."

### **Walk to the invisible line #1**

1. As the teacher, create an invisible line by clapping your hands through the air to create the “energy” of a line and the student(s) walk(s) to that line.
2. The student(s) get to see where the line is being placed before she/they closes her/their eyes to start the activity.
3. Remind the students to not go into trance mode, to stay present and to listen to their impulses.

### **Walk to the invisible line #2**

1. You create the line the same way... through clapping.
2. However, now the student(s) does/do not get to see where the line is being placed.

### **Find the bottle**

1. Place a bottle in the room.
2. With his eyes closed or blindfolded, the student has three tries to go

Side-coach – Say to the student:

- If you start thinking, breathe! Full breaths.
- Was the impulse intellectual or organic?
- Don't think too hard about it. Thinking leads to judging.
- Go where the fear is.
- Keep your play alive while still having your objective.
- Even if you do not find the bottle, be proud of your work. It's about the journey and not about finding the bottle. Laugh at the ridiculousness of it all.
- As the teacher, you can up the stakes by saying “You have one minute left!” or “You have three impulses left!”
- You can also ask the student to point to where he thinks the bottle is.

down to the floor and find the bottle.

3. You call out “STOP!” if the student is in danger of hurting himself.



### *Walking and stopping*

#### *Learning to trust the impulse*

1. Invite the students to begin by milling about in the space.
2. Tell the students that when they have an impulse to stop, they need to trust and follow that feeling. Similarly, they follow the impulse to begin walking again.
3. There is no side coaching from you except when you invite the students to walk faster or slower.
4. Eventually, invite the students to create a shape with someone that has stopped. Both students leave the frozen image together by breathing in through the nose together and out through their mouths.
5. You may also invite the students to create group sculptures. Sculptures can be created through following an impulse or by a word that is given by you. For example, freedom, love, responsibility etc.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## CONNECTING

Breaking the fourth wall and connecting with the audience is a skill that requires practice for the actor. When an actor is complicit with his audience, the audience feels part of the performance and the actor/spectator relationship is wonderfully disturbed. The audience is somehow “in on it” and part of a secret whispered conversation with the actor. Clowns should not be so enveloped in their own performance that they are not listening to their audience. Great clowns can be “in the number” (.i.e. fully engaged in their world on stage) and simultaneously connected to the audience. The audience wants to see the clown in fantasy mode and sharing that story; but, more importantly, they want to see how the clown feels about what is happening. The audience needs to be an intimate part of the conversation, to be taken along for the journey and to be transformed as a result.

### **TOILET PAPER TAG**

#### ***Listening and being in the game and with the audience***

1. Invite the students to find their own space in the room.
2. Hand out a foot long piece of toilet paper to each student and have the students place the toilet paper in the back of their pants to form a tail.
3. The objective for the students is to grab as many tails as they can and become the last surviving player to still have their tail in place. Once a tail is grabbed, the student is eliminated from the game.
4. However, you have a drum or a whistle and you are the “on” or “off” switch for when the tails may be snatched. For example, the game begins and the students go after one another’s tails. When you hit the drum, the students immediately stop the game and begin milling about instead. When the drum is hit again, the tail snatching resumes and so on.

5. Students who do not obey the drum signal and continue snatching tails are also eliminated for not listening and for being too much “in the game.”

### **GRAB THE TAIL**

#### ***Being in the game and with the audience***

1. Invite the students to form an audience and select two students/competitors to play the game.
2. The two students place a scarf or a long piece of material in the back of their pants to form a tail. Their objective is to get the tail from their opponent.
3. You have a drum and act as the “on” or “off” switch for when the tails may be snatched. When you hit the drum, the students must immediately freeze in their position and face the audience. The students must continue breathing and take in their audience by making eye contact with everyone. When you hit the drum again, the game resumes and so on.
4. If the student does not obey the drum, he forfeits the game and is eliminated. In the audience, we want to see an enjoyable game full of risk and play. Invite the audience to cheer and make noise and see if the opponents can be sensitive enough to respond to the drum.

*VARIATION: For extra risk, blindfold the two opponents and ensure that there are two students who act as “safety watchers.”*

### **RELAY STOP & START**

#### ***Listening and risk taking***

1. Invite the students to form two parallel lines with an equal number of students in each line.
2. The objective is to be the team whose members all successfully cross to the other side first.
3. Explain that when you hit a drum and one person from each team crosses to the other side of the room.

4. When you hit the drum again, the players stop in their tracks. If a student wobbles or moves, he goes back to his line and starts again. When you hit the drum again, the players move again.
5. When a student completes the walk and crosses to the other side, the next person in the line begins and so on.

*VARIATION: You may create more of an obstacle course to get from one side to the other by placing chairs or boxes that need to be navigated around.*

### **DREAM DATE**

#### ***Giving the audience what they want***

*Ultimately this game helps performers develop their awareness and sensitivity to their audience so that in performance, they are actually able to take the audience on the journey with them.*

1. Invite the students to form an audience and select one student to perform.
2. Tell the performer that she is going to ask the audience out on a date.
3. Invite the student to improvise and she must really explain to the audience how fabulous this date is going to be so that each member of the

Side coach – You may need to help the performer “tune in” to the audience’s response by pointing out if the audience seems disengaged. This is especially important for beginning students who are developing their abilities to be sensitive to and to be able to “read” their audience or “check in” with them.

audience really wants to go on the date with her. For example, she could say “I’m going to take you on a walk in New York City’s Central Park. Then we will stop and have a picnic lunch complete with champagne and strawberries.”

4. If the audience wants to go on the date, they put up their hands one by one.
5. The goal for the performer is to get all of the audience to put their hands up. In order to achieve this result, the performer must be

incredibly sensitive to reading the audience and giving them what they need. If the audience is not interested, as indicated by few hands going up, the performer must change her tactics to engage the audience by introducing new ideas for date options.

*VARIATION: Alternately, the performer may enter and introduce someone. There really isn't anyone to introduce, but the audience is looking for how the student would interest them in this fantasy person. If they are interested, they put their hands up. If not, in good spirit they throw their socks at the performer. This should incite joyful panic in the performer so that the performer can change her tactics and win the audience's interest back. In addition, through reverse psychology, this game also teaches the performer to find the fun in failing.*

### **APPLAUSE**

#### ***Really wanting to know, but not knowing***

*This game is about "being in the crap" or in failure mode. It teaches students to keep their optimism alive and to enjoy the journey of not knowing what to do. We love performers who make offers and big mistakes and blithely flaunt the "egg on their face." This exercise may be done with one student or with a group of three.*

1. Select three students that would like to perform and have them leave the room. With the remaining students choose a physical action. This action should be rather simple, for example, get on all fours and bark like dogs, row a boat or dance like ballerinas. The physical action may be accompanied with a sound or song or not.
2. Invite the three performers back into the room. Their objective is to figure out the physical action that the students have come up with by making physical offers. The performers are not allowed to talk to the audience or with one another. However, they may make sounds.
3. The students are now the audience and they are responsible for guiding

Side Coach – Receiving “applause” is similar to getting the compliment of “laughter” from an audience. Invite the performers to be very sensitive to their audience and to play in the spirit of complicité. If something is working, invite them to continue to explore that line of improvisation. Invite the performers to make big physical offers and to make offers with confidence. Tell them to “FAKE IT UNTIL THEY MAKE IT!” If something is not working, the performers must immediately change what they are doing. Again, the performers cannot be so much in the “number” that they are not connecting and looking at the audience. This exercise is truly a triangle of listening to one’s impulse, the other performer’s offers and to the audience. The performers must always keep their optimism alive and play with a spirit of generosity.

the performers through their applause or lack thereof to figure out the physical action. For example, if the action were to get on all fours and bark like dogs, the audience would give a bit of applause if the performers bent their knees to get closer to the ground. The audience would not give applause if the performers started to spin around. Basically, the audience gives applause for any physical action that is similar or moving in the right direction of the final desired action. When the performers accomplish the task, the audience gives them a standing ovation.

4. A more difficult level is to play this game by getting the performers to say a line of text or having them sing a song along with the physical action.

### ***DO THAT FUNNY THING YOU DO!***

#### ***Discover what is uniquely funny about you***

1. Invite the students to mill about in the space.
2. Tell the students that they have exactly 30 seconds to tell everyone, “YOU ARE SO FUNNY!”
3. Now, invite the students to get into pairs and have them decide who is “A” and who is “B.”
4. Partner “B” begins by saying, “You are so funny! Do that funny thing you do!”
5. Partner “A” begins by doing a physical action and/or sound that is fun for her to do. If the performer is genuinely having fun, the audience has fun

- as well. "A's" objective is to get 5-point laughter from "B." 5-point laughter is not just a chortle, but a full-on primal belly laugh.
6. Even if partner "A" made partner "B" laugh have partner "B" really push partner "A" to make exciting discoveries about what is uniquely funny about him or her. Partner "B" then says, "No, not that! Do the funny thing!" Of course, partner B is doing this all in the spirit of play and not criticism.
  7. Partner "A" may try to do a variation on the theme or try something completely different. For example, if partner "A" stuck out his tongue in the first round, he could do a variation on this theme by simply sticking out his tongue and adding a silly sound to the action.
  8. Eventually, partner "B" rewards partner "A" by saying, "Yes, that's it! That's the funny thing!"
  9. Now, it is partner "B's" turn to make "A" erupt with laughter.
  10. Also, invite the students to experiment and play with "loud and hard" fun/actions and "quiet and soft" fun/actions. Something does not need to be obnoxiously outrageous to be funny. It can be simple and quiet, too.

*VARIATION: Play the well-known drama game, "If you loved me, you would smile."*

*There are FOUR different ways to play:*

- 1. One student performs for the entire class and you are the partner/caller.*
- 2. Two students perform in a pair for the class.*
- 3. All the students are in pairs without an audience.*
- 4. All the students form a circle with one performer in the center and with everyone in the circle is the performer's partner/caller.*

*The game is played with student "A" making a silly physical action/sound offering. "A's" goal is to get "B" to smile or laugh. "A" does an action and says the text, "If you loved me, you would smile" before, during or after their action. If "B" has smiled, then it is "B's" turn to make "A" smile. If "B" has been*

successful in keeping a straight face, then they respond to “A” by saying, “Honey, I love you, but I just cannot smile.” “A” continues playing with “B” making many physical offerings or doing a variation on the theme until they are rewarded with “B’s” smile or laughter. Invite the students to really play with the rhythm of the text. Comedy is all about the timing!

### **CLAP & CHEER FOR CHARM**

***It is not about the “thing” itself, it is about your relationship to the “thing.”***

*Clowns live in conversation with the audience. This exercise invites the performer to take the audience on a journey. Stage presence and charm is about truly believing that you have gifts to offer. If you believe that what you are sharing is amazing, the audience does, too. It is not about the thing that you are sharing with the audience, it is about you and the care that you bring to the*

*sharing.*

#### **Side coach – Rule of 3**

As a teacher, you can begin to discuss the rules of comedy. In this exercise, the Rule of Three comes up. The Rule of Three is simply this: something happens, something similar happens and on the third time there needs to be a change in what happens. For example, a person comes out of a door and slips on a banana peel. The next person comes out the same door and slips on the same banana peel. The last person comes out of the door and sees the banana peel and maneuvers around it only to slip and fall a moment later. We also call the “third time” a reversal of expectation. For instance, we were not expecting the third person to avoid slipping on the banana peel only to slip on something else a few moments later. Comedy is a surprise attack on rhythm.

1. Invite the students to form a circle. Everyone begins applauding and one student enters the center of the circle as the first performer.
2. The performer walks around the inside of the circle making a genuine connection through eye contact with all the students/audience. Invite the performer to be truly present and honest. There is no need to be disingenuous or to overact.
3. The performer then non-verbally invites the audience to stop applauding. She takes a



beat/moment to take a big breath before she performs her unique and amazing skill. This is similar to the magic of setting up a trick.

4. The unique and amazing skill could be anything from playing an invisible guitar to successfully doing a yoga position. Most likely, there is laughter because of the “reversal of expectation.” For instance, the audience is expecting a great trick and then instead they see the performer “touching their toes.” Students need to be made aware the “Rule of 3.” See Side Coach note.
5. The trick for the performer is to believe that what she is sharing is magnificent. The performer must believe that she is having a great effect on the cosmos!
6. After the “magic” is performed, everyone in the circle erupts with thunderous applause as if they have just seen somebody do ten double back flips.
7. The performer again makes eye contact with everyone in the circle and genuinely appreciates the audience for the “conversation.”
8. The performer returns to the circle and the next student enters and so on.

### **HEY, LOOKY!**

#### ***Connecting with the audience and exploring the rhythm of comedy***

*Clowns see the extraordinary in the ordinary. They see the world with endless possibility.*

1. Invite the students to find their own space in the room.
2. Give each student a tissue and have the students improvise all the different objects the tissue can become. For example, a mini-Superman cape, a bowtie, an airplane etc. Remind the students to truly take pleasure in their play and see if they can find some inspiration instead of worrying about being brilliant. The best way to have a great idea is to have many ideas. Also, invite the students to continue playing even if they think they have exhausted all the possibilities.
3. Now, invite the students to select their favourite tissue improvisation that

they wish to share with the class. It is now time to perform. Have the students form an audience.

4. In addition to sharing their tissue object, students are given a line of simple text to play with as well. The text is, "Hey, you guys, looky, looky!" Students must explore the rhythm of this text when sharing their objects. For instance, the text may be said slowly or quickly. The text could be broken into smaller pieces. The text must be infused with subtext.
5. The objective is to truly connect with the audience while simultaneously enjoying the play in sharing the object. The more authentic fun that the student can have in sharing, the more fun we have in the audience. The ultimate goal for the student is to take the audience on a journey and to make the audience laugh.
6. Invite the students to keep their optimism alive. If something is working then continue to explore it. If something is not working, then change it or do a variation on the theme.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## PHYSICAL COMEDY

Text is a crutch! The big fun in comedy and improvisation comes from the body being fully engaged in the moment. To live in a body that has appetite to be on stage is exhilarating. Students will play with extreme emotions, learn how to communicate the emotion fully with their bodies and delve into the rules of comedy. This chapter explores what comedy is possible when the body gets to talk. The exercises are designed to challenge students to create a fantasy world and to play in it with reckless abandon.

### **SYNCHRONICITY**

#### ***The perfect clown state of wanting to know, but not knowing***

1. Invite the students to form an audience and select five students to perform.
2. Line up five chairs and have the performers begin in a seated position.
3. The goal of the five performers is to move in complete synchronicity with one another. As a teacher of comedy and in the spirit of play, provocatively side-coach and improvise with your students. Begin by saying, "You are the group from Russia that has an impeccable ability to move as an ensemble. I have heard incredible reviews about you."
4. Continue to explain the rules of the exercise to the performers:
  - a. When you hear the sound of KEYS rattling, you all stand up together. When you hear the KEYS rattling again, you all sit down together.
  - b. When you hear me CLAP my hands, you move your head to the left and back to center as an ensemble.
  - c. When you hear me STOMP my feet, you move your shoulders up and down three times.
  - d. When you hear me strike the DRUM, you pucker your lips as if you want to be kissed. When you hear me strike the DRUM again, your lips

return to a neutral position.

- e. When you hear me WHISTLE, you cross your right leg over your left leg. When you hear me WHISTLE again, you uncross your legs.
5. Finally, “because you are the award winning team from Russia, you will do all of this with your eyes closed and in complete synchronicity.”
6. Usually, the performers are rather hopeless at working together as an ensemble and hilarity ensues. After the exercise, reflect with all the students as to what was funny and why the audience laughed if they did. We enjoy watching the performers being “in the crap and in failure mode.” Encourage the students to really commit to their choices even if they know they are making mistakes.

### **WAITING ROOM**

#### ***Playing at maximum***

1. Invite the students to form an audience. Select five students to perform.
2. Place five chairs in a row and have the five performers take their seats.
3. Invite the performers to imagine that they are in a room waiting to see the doctor. They have all been there for at least twenty minutes and their minds are starting to wander. They do not know one another. Invite the students to fully explore this beat and to not indicate their emotions. They just need to be present. Text may be used throughout the exercise, but sparingly.
4. The first person in the row begins to smile because they think of something a little bit funny. Again, stress that this moment should be simple and honest.
5. The second person in the row also begins to smile. This little smile is passed down the line.
6. This little impulse of laughter begins to crescendo from one person to the next and with every round until the students are working at their maximum impulse of laughter. The students literally should be on the floor or on top of the chairs laughing. This is incredibly physical and

- exhausting because the students should be laughing with their entire bodies and not just from the neck up.
7. Invite the students to explore all the colours and nuances in the emotion of happiness. For example, embarrassment, amazement, intrigue etc.
  8. Invite the students to try to find the “game” within this exercise. For example, if one student begins pounding the floor, they all might take this physical action on. If one student begins pointing and laughing at another student, this could become the “game.”
  9. When you feel the students have physically explored the emotion of elation or joy to their full potential, you can invite them to find an ending.
  10. Alternately, this exercise may end with a “caught-out.” Have one student simply walk into the scene and have the performers realize that the “doctor” has caught them. Have the performers try to regain their composure.

### **HAMSTER FUNERAL**

#### ***Wild abandon and play***

1. Invite the students to form an audience. Select five students to perform.
2. Place five chairs in a row and have the five performers take their seats. The performers begin seated and then may utilize the chairs later on as props, obstacles, set pieces, etc. as the improvisation warrants.
3. Invite the performers to imagine that they are at a family funeral for their beloved pet hamster named Harry. They are all deeply saddened and are trying to pull themselves together.
4. Invite the students to all have a focal point fixed in imagining that there is a recent photograph of Harry placed on an altar in the center of the room right in front of them. In this photograph, Harry is cutely running on his hamster wheel and his head looks like it is encircled by light. One might believe that Harry has a halo and is now a little angel in heaven. On top of the altar there is a burning candle that is surrounded by rose petals. Beside the candle is an open casket with a perfectly manicured Harry

- inside of it. His whiskers have been beautifully trimmed and he has never looked better.
5. Comedy is all about truth and honesty. Invite the students to play this first beat of simply looking at the altar and remembering Harry with integrity and presence.
  6. The first person in the row begins to sniffle or tear up because he might be remembering a precious moment with Harry. Again, stress that this moment should be simple and honest.
  7. The second person in the row also begins to sniffle. This little sniffle is passed down the line.
  8. This impulse of sadness begins to crescendo from one person to the next and with every round until the students are working at their maximum impulse of sadness.
  9. Invite the students to explore all the colours and nuances in the emotion of sadness. For example, anger, desolation, guilt etc.
  10. Invite the students to try to find the “game” within this exercise. For example, one family member could accuse another, “Why aren’t you crying?” And then all the family members could begin chasing her around while yelling and screaming, “You didn’t really love Harry!” The richness of the comedy comes out of having clear relationships. The more the performers truly care about the situation, the more we care in the audience. Although conveying the emotion to the audience is extremely important, it must be manifested throughout the body. If the emotion is only shown from the head up (i.e. through sounds and facial expressions) it is not engaging to watch. Physical comedy requires a body that is actively pursuing the objective.
  11. Text may be used minimally, however, invite the students to tell the story through their bodies. They may make emotional sounds to assist them.
  12. When you feel the students have physically explored the emotion of sadness to their full potential, invite them to find an ending.

## **INSIDE JOKE**

### ***Imagination, commitment and improvisation***

1. Invite the students to form an audience. Select one student to be the

*Side-coach– tell the performer:*

- You have to take huge risks even if you fear the disaster of failing and not eliciting any laughter from the audience.
- Come out with the intention that you need to share this hilarious thing with us... this “gift.” You cannot live in your normal body. You have to live in a body that has appetite and hunger to communicate. Your entire body needs to feel the laughter.
- Begin from a personal place. Be patient, start with the journey not the outcome. It’s okay to push a bit. Remind your body of this emotion. Don’t focus on the need to do it right. Just take pleasure in performance.
- See the image that you have created, but squint at it a bit. It is like seeing the image in water colour. You cannot eloquently define the event and are only able to articulate a couple of words.
- You are funnier than the story. Personalize this story. You have a desire to communicate with us, but the obstacle is the laughter!
- Text can be a crutch. Play the emotional range and find all the nuances of the emotion.

performer.

2. This is the set-up for the improvisation: you have just seen the funniest thing backstage. It is the funniest thing that you have ever seen in your life and you want to share it with the audience. You cannot even find words to explain what happened. You

try, but you can only get little pieces out about what happened because you are laughing so hard. The more vivid the imagery is in the mind of the performer, the easier it is for the performer to convey the hilarity to the audience.

3. To help the performer get to that place of hilarity, the student may use an actual event that made him laugh hysterically in the past or may use his imagination to create a hilarious fictitious event.

## **THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

### ***Caught-out!***

1. Invite the students to form an audience. Select one student to be the performer.

2. Give the performer a pair of glasses, a sheet of paper and a pen.

Side-coach– say to performer:

- In comedy, an audience loves to see high status individuals fall to having low status. Come into the room with complete control and authority so you have farther to fall.
- Relish and play in your own fantasy world and truly imagine the board. Do and say everything that you can so you do not get fired. Fight for your life!

Remind the student to stay in her body, to allow her feelings to manifest themselves physically and to not rely on words or text alone to convince the board. This is about the physical comedy not the verbal comedy.

3. In this improvisation, give all the instructions prior to the performer beginning the improvisation. As always, if the performer gets lost or seems confused, you side coach to assist.

4. This is the set-up for the improvisation: you are a teacher and you have had a completely terrible morning. You hate your students. You come into the room as mad as hell. You put your glasses on and you begin to take the attendance. You may even

swear or belittle your students. Don't worry about being politically correct. When you don't hear any of the students responding to you, you look up and see that your students are not there. Instead, the board of governors is sitting before you. We want to see you in the "crap." You are "caught-out." You try to leave, but the door is locked and you cannot open it. You cannot escape your fate! You want very badly not to be fired. The board has all the power. We want to see you sweat as you try and convince them not to fire you.

### **FANTASY/NIGHTMARE PARTNER**

#### ***Exploring energy & character***

1. Invite the students to find a partner and decide who is "A" and who is "B."
2. "A" begins walking and "B" follows behind. It is important that "A" walks in his natural way. To help the "A" students with this, give them a simple task like silently doing multiplication tables.
3. As "B" makes observations on "A's" walk, invite her to analyze the speed and weight of "A's" walk. Is it fast or slow? Is it heavy or light? Is "A" more



- pushed or pulled through the world? Where is “A’s” center of gravity? Does he lead with any specific part of his body? Where does he hold tension? Does he have any unique movement or gesture characteristics? How do his feet connect with the floor?
4. Invite “B” to mimic and practice this walk while still following behind “A.”
  5. Now, invite the students to form an audience and select a pair to perform.
  6. “A” begins walking and “B” follows behind while demonstrating her walk. Once you feel that “B” has mastered the walk, have “A” sit down.
  7. Invite “B” to exaggerate “A’s” walk by 25%, 50%, 75% and now 100%.
  8. Have all the students perform and then have the pairs switch roles.
  9. Now, have “A” interview “B.” Invite “A” to be cognizant of “B’s” voice in terms of her pitch, rate, force and tone. Does “B” have certain vocal habits or does she use any catch phrases?
  10. Here are some questions to consider for the interview process:
    - a) What are your hopes and dreams for the future?
    - b) What is your greatest fear?
    - c) What is your happiest moment?
    - d) What is your greatest achievement?
    - e) What is your most valued possession?
    - f) What is a typical day like for you?
    - g) What are your hobbies?
  11. Now, invite the students to form an audience and select an “A” to perform an improvised monologue based on “B’s” interview. “A” mimics “B’s” vocal and physical mannerisms to the best of his ability.
  12. Have all the students perform and then have the pairs switch roles.
  13. Now, invite the students to find their own space in the room. Tell students, “Close your eyes and imagine either your fantasy or nightmare lover. If you could date anyone in the world, who would this person be or what attributes would she have? For your fantasy lover, what makes her so attractive and if it is your nightmare lover, what makes her so heinous?”

14. Explain to students that they must play in a heightened physical state making “big choices” i.e. exaggerating their movements and expression.
15. Have the students perform as if they are their fantasy or nightmare lover speaking to their partner.

### **STEALING FOCUS / NO FOCUS**

#### ***Exploring what is watchable***

1. Invite the students to form an audience and select two students to perform.
2. In this exercise, the performers make physical and/or vocal offers in the hopes of eliciting laughter and interest from the audience. It is a friendly

*Side-coach –*

- Remind them that there is no malice between the two performers. It is a fun and friendly match. Both performers must keep their optimism alive.
- Tell the performers:
  - “Play for the audience and with each other. You cannot ruin the fantasy of the other person.”
  - “Accept the compliment of laughter and allow the audience to guide you. Do many variations on a theme.”
- Count from one to three to incite joyful panic in the performers to hopefully get them to risk and make new offers and to get out of their heads and into their bodies. If, by the count of three, the performer has not made the audience laugh or engaged them, the student must leave the stage and celebrate his failure with a triumphant “Yes!”

competition to see who can steal the focus from the other. You, as the teacher, interrupt the game every so often and invite the performers to freeze. The students in the audience point to which performer is stealing their focus.

3. When all the students have explored this exercise, you may try another variation of it. Again, invite two students to perform. Now, neither student wants the focus from the audience. While the students

are performing, you call out who is in focus. The exercise has to be a good game to watch so students cannot just stand perfectly still. Invite the performers to take risks.

## **PULLING A FACE**

### ***Mask work and play***

1. Invite the students to form an audience and select two performers.

*Side-coach –*

- Say to the audience, “Status and contrast are very interesting to watch. Who has more status in the scene?”
- You count from one to three to incite joyful panic in the performers to hopefully get them to risk and make new offers and to get out of their heads and into their bodies.. If, by the count of three, the performer has not made the audience laugh or engaged them, the student must leave the stage and celebrate his failure with a triumphant “Yes!”

2. Performer “A” makes/pulls a funny face and then performer “B” makes/pulls a funny face for the audience. Both performers are trying to elicit laughter from the audience. If something works, they may continue “calling” that face back or doing a variation on the theme. If something is not working, they can own the “flop” moment and make a new offer. Tell them, “Owning the “flop” moment means acknowledging with the audience

that your offer did not work – it did not incite audience laughter. Acknowledgement comes in the form of taking a beat/breath and reacting in some way that shows, that you, too, know that your offer didn’t work. It could be a sigh, a shrug, a knowing smile, a wink, etc.”

3. Invite the performers to see if they can find the “game” and the relationship between them. If the performers are listening, the audience tells them with their laughter what the game is. Here’s a simple example of a game that could develop: one partner could become scared of the other because their “mask/face” was so terrifying or both clowns could fall in love with each other.

## **STATES OF TENSION**

### ***Exploring energy levels***

*This exercise is an abridged version of John Wright’s from his wonderful book Why Is That So Funny? Often in comedy, performers become talking heads and*

*this exercise obliges students to use their bodies to explore the full range of emotions and tensions.*

1. Invite the students to mill about in the space.
2. Tell them that they are going to physically explore the seven states of tension.
3. Invite the students to really allow their bodies to inform their voices. For instance, if their body is in a relaxed state then their voices will also be in a relaxed state.
4. Explain that you will be announcing the levels and will give a scenario or a quotation about the state to help them focus their energy.
5. Each state of tension may be explored for 5-10 minutes. Ask students to take a breath and transition into the next state of tension that you announce.
6. The only real side coaching in this exercise is to consistently remind students to stay in their bodies and embody fully the state of tension being explored.
7. Following this exercise, an important discussion in class would be to explore how this exercise forces us to open up to the possibilities of what are bodies are capable of in the full range of conveying emotion.

***Level one: exhausted, intoxicated and seasick***

- Your body feels heavy as if it were full of lead. You have to fight against gravity. Every step you take is a huge effort. You are constantly losing your balance and trying to regain it again. The voice is barely activated.

***Level two: cool, casual and relaxed***

- You are on a white sandy beach. You do not have a care in the world. You are uncommitted and completely relaxed. Your voice is calm, slow and gentle sounding.

***Level three: efficient, business-like and economic***

- You are completely focused. Every move that you make is precise and accurate. You do not expend any extra energy. Your speech is clear and economic as well.

***Level four: neutral***

- Less is more! This is the state of tension we play before something happens. Neutrality is moving with no story behind your movement. “The state prior to acting or character creation where the actor is in a state of perfect balance, presenting nothing but a neutral generic being.”~ Lecoq

***Level five: crisis and high anxiety***

- Every action is urgent and imperative. There is a high level of anxiety in this state and constant movement. Look for a possible bomb in the room. Your voice is full of anxiety in this state.

***Level six: dilemma***

- Every action is frantic and extreme. There is a bomb in the room and you have to find it in 10, 9, 8 etc. Your voice is full, activated and loud.

***Level seven: suspension***

- The bomb is about to go off. You are afraid to move forward or backward. You can barely make a sound with your voice.

**LOVE CONFESSIONS**

***Exploring character through the states of tension***

1. Invite the students to form an audience and select five performers.

2. Invite the five performers to form a tightly shaped group. Have them mill

*Side-coach –*

- Playing with contrast is hilarious in these improvisations. For example, in level one or two have the performers tell their “partner” how important it is that they take their relationship to the next level. They invite “their partner” to move in with them and explain all the reasons why they think this proposal works.
- In level three or four, have the performers set-up the perfect date scenario.
- In level five or six, have the performers beg for a date. Have them list all the reasons they are loveable and great partners. Don’t be afraid to interject and say, “he/she will never love you!” This ups the stakes and throw the performers into a heightened state of dilemma.
- In level seven, tell the performers that they are meeting the person of their dreams! Despite the obstacle of being in awe and hardly able to speak, they need to get an autograph.

about in their group and get them to constantly change leaders by playing in the spirit of complicité.

3. Now, call out different states of tension and have the group immediately assume the physicality of each state while continuing to mill about the space.

4. Invite them to form a single line facing the audience and call out a state of tension. Have them

pick someone in the audience and invite all five of them to profess their love to this audience member in this state of tension.

5. Now, individually, they each choose an audience member and all of them profess their love in a state of tension. Remind them, “Ensure that your body and voice are working together as one instrument.”

### **SKIPPING REHEARSAL**

#### ***Clown and the art of not knowing***

1. Invite the students to form a circle.
2. Teach the students a simple song complete with choreography.
3. Place the students in groups of 3 or 5 and give them a minute to rehearse the song and choreography that you just taught.
4. Invite the students to really “fake it until they make it” and to really perform as if they are on a Broadway stage.

5. Heighten the stakes by telling the students that they are being marked on technical performance and artistic merit for a mark out of 10. This is a little provocation that you are secretly creating so that the clown can rear its head in this exercise. After the presentations, ensure that all the groups receive the same grade so everyone wins!

*VARIATION 1: Instead of you introducing the song and choreography, the students may pick a song of their choice and add choreography to it. Invite the students to pick a popular song that is well-known. Have the groups perform the song and dance only once and then pick a group of students to mimic what they have just seen with no rehearsal time. You see the clown emerge as the students desperately try to solve the problem of this exercise.*

*VARIATION 2: Begin by clapping 5 different rhythms. In small groups, have the students recreate the rhythms that they have just heard. It is very hard and when they make a mistake, they cannot show that they have screwed up. They all need to sell it!*

## **HUNTING DUCKS**

### ***Extreme physical comedy***

1. Invite the students to form an audience and select three students to perform. NOTE: I recommend doing this exercise with three students because it is interesting for the students in the audience to see different interpretations and that physical comedy manifests differently in each person's body. In addition, having other performers on stage allows the student performers to feel safe and thus, they take greater risks.
2. Invite the three performers to get into their own space. They act as three soloists, all performing together simultaneously, but in their own worlds so they do not interact with one another.
3. You narrate this entire exercise and the students improvise the scenario simultaneously. There are three different scenarios to improvise all

containing different roles for the students to immediately assume. The students may make sounds, but should avoid using text. The students are playing in the “number” but are also connecting with the audience.

**Scenario ideas:**

**Hunting ducks-** You are all duck hunters. It is a gloriously warm spring day

Side-coach – As the teacher, you can always extend the scenario: “Now you are plucking the duck, butchering the duck, stuffing and cooking the duck, etc.”

and you are ready to shoot a duck. You have been dreaming of this day all winter. Now, you are the cute little duck waddling through the marsh. Now, you are the duck hunter getting out your rifle and getting ready to shoot. Now, you are the duck looking terrified. BOOM! The gun goes off! Now,

you are the bullet flying through the air. Now, you are the duck clinging to life. Now, you are the victorious hunter... and back to the duck, hunter, bloody bullet etc.

**The fisherman & the worm-** It is a hot and humid summer afternoon and you are ready to catch a big fish. You get out your fishing rod and your bait. Now, you are the worm. Now, you are the hook. Now, you are the worm being put on the hook. Now, you are the excited fisherman. You cast your line out into the sparkling water. Now, you are the worm flying through the air and hitting the water. Now, you are the drowning worm. Now, you are the fisherman reeling in the line and taking a sip of beer. Now, you are a hungry fish getting ready to devour the worm. Now you are the worm, the fish, the worm, the fish biting the hook, the fisherman reeling in the line, the fish hitting a rock, the fisherman reeling in the line even harder. Success! Now, you are the suffocating fish, the excited fisherman and the fish. Now, the fisherman poses for a photo, holding the fish in one hand and his beer in the other.



***Paris cigarette-*** It is a gorgeous autumn day in Paris, but the beauty of the day could not possibly compete with the beauty that is you. You are a strikingly beautiful French woman smoking a strikingly long cigarette. You pull out your dainty compact from your purse and begin to powder your perfect nose. You take a puff of your cigarette. Now, you are the smoke from the cigarette wafting upwards in the air. Suddenly, your lover appears and he is a very overtly romantic and “over-the-top” stereotypical Hollywood version of a French man. Now, you are the lover blowing kisses. Now, you are receiving the kisses. Now you are the cigarette being smashed by a high-heeled shoe. Now, you are the high heel. Now, you are the smashed and smothering cigarette. Now, you are the lover saying words of love in French. Now, you are the woman running toward the lover. Now, you are the lover swirling the woman around in your arms. Now, as the lover you propose marriage and now you are the woman saying YES!

### **IT'S A SMALL-BIG WORLD**

#### ***Absurd comedy***

1. Invite the students to find their own space in the room.
2. Have them choose an everyday activity such as doing the laundry, feeding the dog, showering etc.
3. Have the students improvise for a minute or two and then get them to edit down their everyday activity to five simple actions.
4. Have the students work on their pieces until they have a memorized sequence of actions.

Side coach – Remind students that what was a simple, normal task has become challenging because they are a giant in a small world. Ask them “What do you do differently now that your objects are tiny?”

5. Now, the students are normal sized, but everything around them is now really small. Have the students live in that world while performing their everyday activity.

6. Now, the students add sound effects to their small-sized world. However, the sound effects are huge

- sounding. For instance, if they were pouring a tiny bag of dog food into a tiny bowl, the sound effect could be KA-BOOM!
7. Now, the students remain normal sized, but everything around them is now huge. They must live in that world and then add tiny sound effects. The contrast is hilarious.
  8. Invite the students to perform for the class.

### **FOUR-LEGGED LOVE**

#### ***Fantasy and articulated gestures***

1. Invite the students to find their own space in the room. Ensure that each student has a chair to improvise with.
2. Tell the students that the chair before them means the world to them. They are truly, madly and deeply in love with it. In fact, the chair feels the same way about them. They have a thriving and meaningful relationship.
3. Tell them, "Making every gesture count, how do you approach your chair after being separated for a long period of time?"
4. Say, "Now, look at the audience, the chair, the audience and the chair. Show us how much you miss it and love spending time with it."
5. Tell them, "How do you sit down in the chair? What is your most favourite thing to do with the chair? How do you leave the chair when you go to work? And start to leave the stage, but continue to check in with us and the chair."
6. Lastly, tell students to say one last beautiful thing to their chair and then exit.

### **UNCONVENTIONAL IMPROVISATIONS**

#### ***Exploring the rhythm of comedy***

1. Invite the students to form an audience and select three or five performers. Only one student performs at a time, however, it is helpful for the soloist to have the feeling of support from the other students on stage

- with her. The ensemble may also improvise from time to time if they sense that the soloist needs support.
2. As the teacher, you provide the playful provocations that allow the student to really explore what is uniquely funny about her. Your provocations also help the student to get out of her heads and into her body.

Share the following with students before beginning the improvisations:

- Invite the performers to bring their third worst ideas and not their best ideas. Their best ideas often don't work because they were created with their intellect and with their desire to solve the problem of the exercise. The ideas that work come out of the pleasure of being in play mode. Remind the students that the fun should lead to the idea.
- The students need to be in the "number," but also very much in conversation with the audience. If the audience is not reacting then the actor needs to change what he is doing. If a physical offer doesn't work, he can take the "flop" moment. This means that he may acknowledge that what he did didn't work and he can share that feeling with the audience before moving onto their next offering. We want to see the number but also the clown creating the number.
- Clowns believe that they can do anything and everything. For example, a clown might think she knows what actors do because she once saw the Juilliard actors warming up their voices behind the stained glass windows. Therefore, if you were to ask a clown to be an actor, he would do something unconventional and would do a lip buzz, recite tongue twisters or do yoga poses. Nothing in the clown world is conventional.
- Clowns are always a few seconds in character and then they need to be with the audience. For example, if you asked a clown to show the Stanislavski technique she would probably do it but keep one eye open to see what the audience thinks.

*Below are a variety of different improvisations to experiment with and many ideas for side-coaching the students. Some comedy teachers use a drum and strike it when the student is lost or thinking too much about the improvisation. This should incite joyful panic in your students so that they can be uninhibited and unleash themselves so they can be “in the moment.” Although some of these improvisations involve quite a bit of speaking, they belong in this physical comedy section because they oblige students to have their bodies lead and inform their text and vocal choices. They also allow the students opportunities to embody a variety of personas.*

### **Improvisation #1: The sporty type**

#### ***Side-coaching ideas:***

- I hear you are the SPORTY TYPE. Show me your moves on the court.
- Tell me the rules of cricket.
- Show me your long distance walking impression. Let me see lots of hip action, style and go as fast as you can. Now, add in that thing you learned in your Olympic training or that move you picked up from watching sports movies.

*Sometimes, allow your students to demonstrate a move for only five seconds and then hit the drum. This becomes their iconic move.*

### **Improvisation #2: Fast/slow talkers**

#### ***Side-coaching ideas:***

- As a fast rhythm talker, give me your best impression of a sports announcer, teenage girl, auctioneer etc.
- As a slow rhythm talker, give me your best impression of a yoga teacher, bingo announcer, stoner, grandparent, golf announcer etc.
- Tell me your full name and address as fast as you can. Now, imagine a lemon or hot potato in your mouth. Try again!
- Tell me your life story in ten seconds and now tell me without words. Hit the drum and get the students to tell you their life story faster and faster.

- I am making a Shakespearean film, but the budget has been cut from 65 minutes to 5 minutes. Please recite your monologues as fast as you can so I can figure out who to cast and who to cut.

### **Improvisation #3: Real charmers**

#### ***Side-coaching ideas:***

- It's so interesting that birds of a feather really do flock together. You are all truly the most charming people in the class. Wait, one of you is not that charming. No, it's not you or you, it's YOU! Wait, maybe I am wrong. It's actually him that is the most charming...and so on.
- I have also heard that you are a real romancer. Show me your romantic and irresistible moves or recite that poem you wrote.

### **Improvisation #4: Experts**

#### ***Side-coaching ideas:***

- Invite the students to give you their first name as confidently as possible to the point of being aggressive.
- You are all so intelligent. Tell me what your specialty is.
- I have heard you are a great explorer. Show us the scariest shark encounter you have had. Show us what you look like when you are spelunking.
- You are a great specialist on movement and modern dance. Please show us the piece that you are choreographing right now.
- I hear that you play for the greatest band in the UK. Show us your rock star moves, show me the instrument that you play, let me hear you sing etc.
- What kind of doctor or surgeon are you? Let's see how you would perform a surgery.

### **Improvisation #5: Animal kingdom**

#### ***Side-coaching ideas:***

- Thank you so much coming! Your agents said that you were the best actors. We are remaking the film “Animal Farm” and we are looking for the sound of a cow.
- On page 57 of the script, there is a mating ritual scene. We are looking for the mating rituals of the: earthworm, elephant, rhinoceros, beetle, camel, horse etc.

### **Improvisation #6: Daft instructions**

#### ***Side-coaching ideas:***

- Confidently, give the students instructions about how they are to leave the stage and come back on again with a drum roll. Purposely, make the instructions incredibly confusing and then have the students repeat the instructions and assure the students that they have understood perfectly. For example, you might tell the students, “Before leaving stage you jump three times, make a half-quarter turn to the right, a half-turn to the left, plié, breathe in, breathe out and exit. Wait backstage, take 5 breaths, squeal like a pig and when you hear the drum roll count a beat of three and enter skipping until you arrive to downstage centre. Got it?”
- Purposely, change the drum roll so the students are never sure when to come on. In clown, we never have to be more ridiculous than we already are.

### **Improvisation #7: Neutral mask**

#### ***Side-coaching ideas:***

- It is a funny thing to ask a clown just to be neutral, but I have heard you are the master of not showing any emotion on your face at all.
- You are all so fantastic at being completely neutral. Did you just smile from hearing that compliment? Now, are you refusing to acknowledge that you showed emotion?

### **Improvisation #8: Adult language**

#### ***Side-coaching ideas:***

- I am looking for a specialist on bad words and swearing and have heard that you are a great rap artist. Let me hear some of your rhymes. (Remind them that clown swear words are not regular swear words.)
- I hear that you get in trouble a lot for swearing. The last time you were grounded, what did you say to your brother? Remember that this is unconventional swearing. For example, “I called my brother a JERK-HEAD! He is a JERK-FACE when he puts the empty milk carton back in the fridge!” etc.

### **Improvisation #9: Baby talk**

#### ***Side-coaching ideas:***

- Invite the ensemble to imagine that they are each holding a baby. Have the students talk in nonsensical baby talk to their babies.
- When you hit the drum, the students all look up and talk to the audience as if we were their babies.
- Now as a soloist and on the hit of the drum, the student alternates between talking to the audience and talking to their baby in “baby talk.”
- Now with the same rhythm of speech, invite the student to introduce a Shakespearean show. On the hit of the drum, the student alternates between “baby talk” and introducing the Shakespeare show.
- If the student does not get a laugh, you may send them to the “flop” corner. However, the student can redeem him or herself on the way to the corner by trying a variation on a theme or trying something new.

### **Improvisation #10: Soap opera stars**

#### ***Side-coaching ideas:***

- Your agents all told me that you have exactly what I am looking for to cast my soap opera.

- Let's start with the devil possession scene on page 21. Dr. Johnson comes home and looks into the mirror and notices a darkening in his eyes. Let's take it from there. And... action!
- Let's go to the next scene on page 33 Sam has just been kicked out of the house and is living on the streets. He takes heroin for the first time. And... action!
- Of course, we need to see the giving birth scene on page 40 as well.



# CHAPTER SIX

## CLOWN

The clown is the skinless grape. Vulnerable. Courageous. Authentic. Clowns reveal all their humanity and not just the pieces that they want others to see. They show up in all their messy disaster. When the red plastic nose is worn something unexpected happens. We actually see more of the person behind it. The smallest mask in the world actually uncovers the performer. The exercises that follow invite the actor to weave together the past with the present so that the clown can be fully realized. Performers are invited to trust their impulses and to come to an understanding that vulnerability and honesty are at the core of clowning. Actors will play in all sorts of unconventional scenarios and learn to let the “little one” lead.

### **SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT**

#### ***Vulnerability, honesty and sharing with an audience***

1. Ask students to bring to class an important memento. It should be

Side-coach – say the following:

- You are more precious than the thing that you want to share.
- Your object cannot come between you and the audience.
- There is greatness in your story.
- You must really engage with the object in order to engage the audience.
- What gives the piece momentum is your relationship to the object, but not the object itself.
- Don't look at the floor or off into outer space. You are either with us or with the object.
- You do not need to apologize for your feelings. You do not need to make it okay for us at the end of your piece.
- Take the audience on a journey and transform them.
- Don't demonstrate or feel the need to explain anything. Just be in your emotion fully.
- For an audience to feel safe, you have to drive the bus and own your right to be on stage expressing yourself.

something that has significant meaning to them and they will be sharing them with the class.

2. They share these objects with the class.

3. Invite the audience to sit in the shape of a semi-circle.

4. Students perform individually. Each student looks at her

object, engages it and allows whatever emotion it sparks to be present. She then shares that emotion with the audience. This exercise is done in silence with no text and only emotional sounds.

### **MY BIG STUPID FUN**

#### ***Vulnerability, honesty and revealing yourself***

*Students are given a title and create a planned improvisation in the style of a wacky Broadway musical.*

1. Divide the students into groups of three or five.
2. Tell them that they are going to be given the title of their wacky Broadway musical. Everyone has a moment to perform a solo. During the solos, the chorus must support the soloist by providing a rhythm, continuing to sing, doing choreography etc.
3. The piece must be fully choreographed.

Side coach – tell them:

- Reveal something about yourself. Take a risk. Be emotionally vulnerable and honest.
- Clowns see the world as if they are squinting at things. So everything is a bit hazy and not in crisp focus. Use the personal but not the specifics of your daily life so it is more of a poetic idea. We need you to be more beautiful than we are in the audience.
- Come with an appetite and a desire in your body to communicate. Come with the intention that you need to communicate with us.
- In the audience, we want to see YOU on stage. YOU without all the ADJUSTMENTS.
- Lead with the clown brain. Do what is truly fun for you to do on stage.

4. There is singing throughout. Tell them to go for three-part harmony!
5. They must enter and exit with a ton of enthusiasm. The beginning should be a great surprise attack.
6. Invite the students to really play with rhythm. When does the tempo need to change? When does the piece need to be soft? When does the piece need to be loud?
7. They must stay within the theme of the song. There does not need to be any extra words other than the title of the song, however, there may be.
8. Tell them to tether the piece to their own personal experience.

9. This exercise may be repeated many times with different song titles being used for the inspiration. Every time the student performs, we want to see more and more of who they truly are.
10. After many explorations, invite the students to create their own song.  
What is important for them to share?
11. And on the last day of class, invite the students to share what they feel was their greatest accomplishment in the class. Use the song title, **"YAY FOR ME"**

### **Quiet & intimate song titles**

- *I have a little light inside*
- *My little tiny soft and quiet fun*
- *I really want to be great*
- *If you really listen, you can hear the sounds of...*
- *We made it just for you*
- *I've got something special*
- *Where ever you go, there you are*
- *If I had to, these are the things that I would leave to you*
- *Things that make us go... ooh, ahh!*
- *Around the world of wonder*
- *Learning to drive with the little one*
- *It makes me so frightened, my insides tighten*

### **Loud & messy song titles**

- *Look at me, I'm so funny*
- *I love it!*
- *I've got a little secret, a naughty little secret*
- *My big stupid fun*
- *I've got a little wiggle, it makes me want to giggle*
- *OH, nuts!*
- *I don't even want to do that*

- *It's a stupid explosion*
- *It's coming, the surprise*
- *Get ready for the big-big show*
- *Bam, there it is!*

### **THE TOUR OF WHAT THIS ISN'T**

#### ***Discovering the extraordinary in the ordinary***

1. Invite the students to find a partner. (Note: all students will do this exercise at the same time and perform for their partners.)
2. Decide who is "A" and who is "B."
3. Partner "A" begins by taking "B" on a tour of the room. They should hold hands and should be running so that they don't overthink the exercise.
4. This is the tour of what things are not. For example, is the stereo really a stereo or is it a transmitter for communicating with the aliens from outer space? Is the TV really a TV or is it a large chunk of Swiss chocolate? Etc.
5. Invite the students to be inspired and to not worry about being brilliant. Invite them to just approach a prop or piece of furniture without having any preconceived ideas about what it could be. It is okay to take a breath and a pause and allow an idea to gently drop in.
6. "A" shows "B" three or five different objects on the tour. Upon completion, "B" takes "A" back on "A's" tour and repeats back the objects to "A" in exactly the same order that they were shown.
7. "B" then takes "A" on a tour and "A" also repeats "B's" tour.
8. Students may use language or text, gibberish or be silent.
9. At the end of the exercise, have the students form a circle. Ask each pair what their favourite item was that their partner showed them.

*VARIATION: After partners perform for one another, you may invite partners to perform for the whole class.*

## **CHILDHOOD PHOTO**

### ***Remembering freedom, play and possibility***

1. Invite the students to bring their favourite childhood photo to share with the class.
2. Ask the students to talk about why they love the photo they chose. Tell them that the essence and spirit of the child in the photo is still alive and within them today. Invite the students to see if they can get glimpses of who their clown might be from the photo.

NOTE: It is important to remember that childhood photos do not always display the spirit of the child as the idealized picture of innocence and abandon. Sometimes the emotions captured in a photo are complex, disturbing or unpleasant and that is necessary in clown because no emotion is rejected. The clown honestly plays the authenticity of emotions in all their complexity.

## **GREATEST FANTASY**

### ***Remembering childhood dreams***

*Your clown may be derived from your childhood fantasies.*

1. Invite the students to form a circle and have them introduce themselves with a fantasy name. It could be a nickname or a name that they have always wanted.
2. Now, have the students introduce themselves as their greatest fantasy. This could be a certain dream occupation or a complete fantasy like a superhero. The students may do this exercise with or without words. However, remind them it is better to show than to tell!

## **GUIDED IMAGERY**

### ***Childhood is the idea that everything and anything is possible***

1. Invite the students to assume a relaxed position on the floor with their eyes closed.

2. With their mind's eye, invite the students to visualize favourite moments from their childhood using the following list as a general guide.
  - Favourite events: camping, Christmas, birthdays, Halloween etc.
  - Movies
  - School memories
  - Food
  - Books
  - Songs
  - Best friends
  - Pets
  - Toys
  - Activities: best and least favourite?
3. Invite the students to choose one significant moment from their childhoods that they wish to share with the class. Have them choose their own space in the room and strike a frozen action picture (tableau) of this moment.

### **THE NOSE RITUAL**

#### ***Look at your simple-minded friends***

1. Invite the students to form a circle and give each student a nose.

Side-coach – say the following:

- What does the nose feel like? Smell like?
- The nose represents all hopes, fears and dreams.
- Play with an open heart and to not be afraid to be driven by pure emotion and impulse.
- Accept all emotions and feelings without judgment.
- Truly allow yourself to find pleasure in PLAY!
- Live in the “now/in the moment” with no past to regret or future to dread.
- Let all images and desires come and go.
- Drop these words into your nose: freedom, cunning, mischief, joy, magic, abandon, power, innocence, experience, courage and vulnerability.

2. Invite the students to close their eyes and to hold the mask in their hands. Side coach them while their eyes are closed.
3. Ask students to put on their noses.
4. Tell them, “Now, I want you to look at your simple-minded friends with

- a soft brain, open heart, open mouth and some curiosity in your eyes.
5. Remind the students to have respect for their mask. For instance, tell them “Don’t wear the nose on your forehead, or swing it around and always turn away from the audience before putting on/off the mask.”
  6. Now, invite the students to find their most “right” costume. If a costume piece just suffices, it will definitely not do. Invite them to truly celebrate their bodies by choosing costumes that have colour and shape. Explain to them “The costume is critical because it helps you find your body, emotion and attitude celebration. The costume helps you trust that you are in clown. But it is also totally unimportant because we clown all the time. The costume is the rest of the mask and it can change from day to day. It is the outward manifestation of the inner self.” NOTE: The room should look like a child’s playground full of brightly coloured hats, shoes, fabric, costume pieces, toys and props.
  7. As soon as the students are in costume, ask them “How does the costume affect you on all levels-physically, emotionally, spiritually, creatively, sexually and generatively?”
  8. From this point on, students should not speak. However, being very vocal and physical is encouraged. Tell them that every emotion has a sound and we want to know how the clown feels about everything. Wearing a hat is a must. Shoes should be worn, too. Make-up may be worn or not but if make-up is used make-up around the eyes is most important because the audience accesses the clown and what the clown is feeling through the clown’s eyes. It is how we access the soul of the clown.
  9. Next, the students find their personal “clown walk.” Invite the students to

Side coach - Tell them:

- Try exaggerating all movement.
- Now make all the movements small.
- Try moving in slow motion.
- Strike poses!
- Make sound.

explore the way their costume or body mask informs their movement. Tell them to allow the face to be changed and manipulated by the movement of the body.

10. Invite the students to move with shy

feet, nervous knees, flirtatious hips, happy belly, proud chest, indecisive head etc. Allow the students to intuitively find a walk that feels the most right.

11. Now inform the student they need to find some curiosity in their feet. Have them point at something in the room and say, “*What is that!?! That is the funniest thing I have ever seen!*” or “*That is the scariest thing I have ever seen!*” or “*That is the saddest thing I have ever seen.*” or “*I don’t know what that is!*” Then have the students follow up with, “*Oh, it’s just that...HAHA, YES!*” Invite them to react with their entire bodies and not just from the head up.

Side coach – Invite the students to really keep their voices in their bellies. Tell them that people often have the tendency to get squeaky and high pitched, their voices become disconnected from their breath and they cease to communicate meaning.
---

12. Play a game of Yes, let’s! with no words, but lots of sound. Explain that you will call out a variety of tasks for them to perform. When they hear you call out the task, the students must immediately say, “Yes, let’s!” and begin the task. For example, “Let’s pretend that we are in an insane asylum.” Or “Let’s do a parody of ourselves.” (Again, no words allowed.)

## **CHILD’S PLAY**

### ***Pure play and impulse***

1. Invite students to look at the room carefully and explore the possibilities in every prop and object as if they are seeing it for the first time.
2. Students play with one another as well and invent games and fun things to do with one another. The rules of the game are simple: no hate or malice, no words and only vocals, enjoy everything and when you get bored do something else.
3. Allow the students to improvise for an extended period of time.
4. You may also want to do some group improvisations. Inviting the clowns to attend a wedding, funeral or birthday party may work well.



5. Invite the students to play with different levels of emotion from 1-10. You may also side-coach and tell them what level to play in.
6. You may also side-coach and give relationships to the clowns. For instance, "You are a married couple" etc.
7. Ensure that within the pandemonium that students are really listening to one another's offers.
8. The rules of great improvisation are: listen to your impulses and to the offers being made, truly care about the situation, drive the story forward, meet the danger and play.

### **UNCONVENTIONAL CLOWNING**

#### ***Exploring pleasure in play***

Side-coach – tell them:

- What do you do well? What do you want to share?
- Show me everything you can do with your costume.
- How goofy can you be with your skirt, pants, scarf, etc.?
- How do you enter and exit a room?
- How noisy can you be?
- What would you do if you wanted to surprise me?
- You don't sing, but I heard you were an unusual singer.
- How would you be flirtatious?
- Show me the winning photo that you took on "America's next top model."
- I heard you were a jewel thief! Show me your mission impossible moves.
- You invented a dance move that the Russian ballet company is now using in their next production of "Swan Lake." Show me that dance move.
- How neutral can you be?
- I heard that you are a great rapper!
- Let me see your audition for the film called "The end of the world!"
- You are the best at offering an apology. No one can stay mad at you!

1. Invite the students to find their own space in the room.

NOTE: You side-coach this entire improvisation.

2. The objective for your students is to get your attention.

Tell them that clowns break all of the rules except their own. They are curious problem solvers. Clowns do have

- consequences, but they just don't think about them.
3. Invite your students to really share their emotions with you. As the teacher, you are the single audience member and the clowns are competing for your attention. Have the students use their unconventional clown logic.
  4. If you find that you are not looking at some of the students (i.e. they are not doing anything that captures your attention), ask them, "Are you having fun? If not, change what you are doing!"
  5. In addition, you may also give props as simple gifts for the students to utilize in their improvisation.

### **CARMINA BURANA COW**

#### ***Fantasy and play***

*In this hilarious exercise, the students are in love with "the perfect cow." A wonderful piece of contrasting music to underscore this improvisation is Orff's Carmina Burana. It is as grandiose and epic as this scenario is silly and it plays up the incongruity of the romantic love of person and cow against the backdrop of the serious music.*

1. Invite the students to form an audience and select three students to perform. NOTE: You narrate throughout this exercise and the students improvise in response.
2. The three performers are soloists in their own world and they do not interact with one another. Invite the performers to begin by bringing the audience into their world. All the thoughts are articulated for the audience. The clown wants to share everything with us.
3. Remind students to breathe fully and to genuinely make contact with the audience.
4. Tell them that this is their scenario:
  - a. Your entire life, you have loved cows! In fact, you are obsessed with cows. You cannot stop dreaming and fantasizing about cows.
  - b. It's springtime and the sun is shining. You are out on your daily

walk when suddenly you smell something!

- c. Is it what you think it is? YES! It is cow pooh! You get onto all fours and you relish in the deliciousness of the smell. (Invite the students to make their own offer here: what would they do with the cow pooh?)
- d. You investigate and in the distance, you see a farmer's field. You run (on the spot) to get to the red barn because you know what is behind the door of that red barn... COWS!
- e. You get there and place your hands on the door (make sure the students are sharing their feelings with the audience).
- f. You vibrate with excitement because you can feel the energy of at least one hundred cows behind that door.
- g. You open up the door and one hundred cows rush out. You are in heaven!
- h. Then you see your dream cow. The cow you have been fantasizing about all your life. You instantly love her. You embrace her!
- i. Suddenly, the farmer appears with a shotgun. You are terrified, but you know you are innocent and guilty only of loving someone you can never have.
- j. The farmer kicks you out. You have no choice. You must say goodbye to your cow. (Invite the students to come up with an offer using unconventional logic. How do you say goodbye to your cow?)
- k. Now you must get out! You run away bereft and collapsing from the pain of losing the love of your life.
- l. You make a brave decision and run back to the field one last time to say your final goodbye. (This can be a single word, simple phrase or a look.)

## **SAVING THE SHOW**

### ***Don't think, just do it!***

1. Invite the students to form an audience. Select three students to go behind a door.
2. Have the performers imagine that a show is flopping and when they come out from behind the door they are attempting to save the show with their crazy thing that always works!
3. The students come out one at a time and perform for less than one-minute each. This completes round one. The students have three rounds to find something that interests the audience.
4. If they received the compliment of laughter after the first round, they may continue repeating that offer in the upcoming rounds. (Remind them that this is called a *call back*.) They may also do a variation on a theme or try something new with each round.
5. Remind them that the “show” is flopping and they need to save it by taking big risks and having mad amounts of fun.

## **CANADA'S NEXT TOP DANCER**

### ***Playing for an audience***

1. Invite the students to form an audience and select three performers.
2. Tell them, “This is a dance off competition and we are looking to find Canada’s next top dancer! This is life and death competition! Everybody wants to win!”
3. The three performers enter the stage one by one and the order is decided off-stage.
4. You are responsible for calling “Next!” and inviting the next clown to show off her skills.
5. Clowns dance with each other and more importantly for the audience.
6. After a moment, call a “Freeze!” and the clowns freeze in their last positions. Ask the audience who they were watching.
7. Tell the performers, “If you were the clown not being watched, you need

- to change your tactics and make a new offer.”
8. After the performances, explain to students that this exercise is not about being a great dancer it is about being a great clown and living in a body that wants to be on stage. Ask them, “Why are we swayed to watch certain dancers?” and invite them to discuss this.

*VARIATION: You may play musical chairs as well for a variation on this exercise.*

### **CLOWN CAT WALK**

#### ***Play and unconventional choices***

1. Invite the students to form an audience and select five students to perform.
2. Put on some fierce cat-walk/runway model music and invite the performers to come out one at a time to show-off their best walks on the runway.
3. The “models” do need to really “bring it!” They need to commit to their silly walks and find the fun in making unconventional choices.
4. Invite the models to really connect with the audience. You may also make this a competition to find “Canada’s Next Top Model.”

### **TITANIC GOODBYE**

#### ***Feeling full of everything***

*In this exercise, you narrate the entire time and the students respond physically and vocally with limited text.*

1. Invite the students to find their own space in the room facing you.
2. Tell them that they are on the maiden voyage of the Titanic and they are so thrilled. They are waving goodbye to you. You are the most important person in their life.
3. Suddenly, the Titanic hits the iceberg. They are absolutely terrified. The ship begins to flood with water. The electricity is flickering on and off.

4. Suddenly, the ship starts to break into two pieces.
5. In an attempt to save their lives, they jump overboard into the freezing cold ocean water.
6. The famous Celine Dion song starts to play and they see a white light before them. They walk toward the light.
7. They see you in their dream world. They have an incredibly important message that they need to tell you or a gift they need to give you. Again, this message is a bit unconventional. (For this last part, allow the students to say their messages or give their gifts individually and then they “cross over to the other side” and become the audience.

### **EMOTIONAL ROLLER COASTER**

#### ***Obeying impulse and committing to big emotion***

##### **Variation #1: Impulse 10 solo**

1. Invite the students to form an audience and select three students to perform. NOTE: There is no hat or no nose needed for this exercise.

Side-coach - Tell performers:

- When you enter, you must take in your entire audience and stay connected with us throughout.
- Take pleasure in the emotion that you have chosen. Find the fun!
- Don't plan a monologue... just follow your impulses.
- You can choose to use words or not.
- Start your emotion behind the screen and bring it on stage with you.
- Intuitively, find an exit beat and give the audience one last look before exiting.
- As you side-coach, invite the students to go further into their emotions. Ask the audience, “Do you know the emotion he is trying to portray?”
- Ensure that the performers stay in ONE emotion without shifting to another emotion.
- You can also invite your students to play the contrast of the emotion. For example, a lustful person that has to convince the audience she has never had sex or the shy boy telling the audience about winning the public speaking award.

2. The three students go behind a flat or screen and come out one at a time.

3. Invite the performers to choose an emotion (anger, lust, happiness etc.) The students come out from behind the screen in their chosen emotion at *Impulse 10*. *Impulse 10* is full throttle and unleashed emotion; the

- body and voice work together as one instrument to express the emotion.
4. The goal for the performers is to simply express the emotion and to live in it fully.
  5. As soon as the first performer exits the stage, the next performer enters.

**Variation #2: Switch duet**

1. Invite the students to form an audience and select two students to perform.
2. Have the two students decide who is “A” and who is “B.”
3. Partner “A” comes out in an emotion and an impulse level of his choosing.
4. You say “Next!” and partner “B” comes out in an emotion and an impulse level of her choosing.
5. The partners use one another and the audience’s reactions for inspiration.
6. Tell the performers “Allow your partner to take you more and more into the emotion and work at your maximum. There may be dialogue or this improvisation can be purely physical.”
7. You say “Switch!” and immediately partner “A” takes on “B’s” emotion and vice versa.
8. Intuitively and on impulse, performers must find an exit beat and give the audience one last look before exiting.

**Variation #3: Body talk**

1. Invite the students to mill about in the space.
2. You call out an emotion and an impulse level from 1-10. For example, you may say “FEAR at LEVEL 3!”
3. The students immediately react, but may only use their bodies to express the emotion.
4. Invite the students to fully embrace the emotion from the tops of their heads to the bottoms of their feet.
5. Tell students to keep the emotion up and out instead of down and in.

They are to share the emotions with the other students in the room, but refrain from touching one another.

#### **Variation #4: Emotional duet**

1. Invite the students to each find a partner.
2. Tell students that they begin by facing their partner and together, in the spirit of complicité (with no one following and no one leading), they must find a common emotion they both take on and they do this by simply making eye contact.
3. Tell the students, "Begin in the common emotion at Impulse Level One and together build the emotion to Impulse Level Ten matching each other's energy the entire time. Always stay connected to your partner and keep the emotion up and out."
4. Once both partners have reached Impulse Level Ten, they switch into another emotion using one another for inspiration. This emotion also starts at Level One and builds to Level Ten.
5. Again, once that emotion has maxed out to Level Ten the next emotion begins and so on.

#### **GROUP THERAPY**

##### **Committing to Impulse Level Ten**

1. Clowns take pleasure in every emotion and every thought is articulated for the audience.
2. Invite the students to find their own space in the room.
3. The students do the following exercises with increased physical and vocal intensity. All exercises start at Impulse Level One and build to Impulse Level Ten.
4. The students do not use words to express their emotions. The students must stay focused on the given task and they must play for you (the audience.)



5. The students begin the task of picking flowers in the emotion of sadness at Impulse Level One. With each flower they pick they are reminded of their ex-partner that broke their heart and this takes them into Impulse Level Five. When they pick the next flower, they are reminded of their first date and this takes them to Impulse Level Eight. Suddenly, they see their ex-partner across the street giving a flower to his or her new partner. This takes them to Impulse Level Ten.
6. Now, it is time to take charge of their lives. Have the students get out their imaginary paper and pens. They are going to write their ex-partner a letter. A very angry letter! Begin in Impulse Level One of anger and start to write. As you write, you begin to remember all the little things that annoyed you about him or her. This takes you into Impulse Level Five of anger. And then you remember the one thing that your ex did that drove you nuts. This takes you into Impulse Level Eight of anger. And as you write, you remember the night that they left you all alone and with an empty carton of milk in the fridge, too! Now, you are in Impulse Level Ten.
7. Anger is pain and you decide that you need professional help to cope with all your feelings. You enroll in group therapy. Have the students form a circle. Tell them that they are going to tell you (the therapist) about the one thing that their partners did that made them so angry. Again, this is a little unconventional. The students are only able to express their thoughts using one word. For example, if the issue was that their partner never left them any cereal, they would only say “cereal.”
8. Invite the students to really play with the word and with an action that would go with it. Have them connect with everyone in the group and see if they can elicit the compliment of laughter.
9. Once the students have released their anger, they each begin to take notice of someone in group therapy who is very charming. They begin to flirt with their “someone” across the circle in an unconventional way. This flirtation begins in Impulse Level One and increases to Impulse Level Ten.

10. This is group therapy so the students cannot physically touch one another. They might want to, but they must resist the temptation.

### **GREATEST TRICK IN THE WORLD**

#### ***Thinking with the clown brain***

1. Students require some time to prepare for this planned improvisation. However, do not give them too much time or they over-think it and the improvisation may lose its immediacy and spark. One day should be more than enough time to prepare for this.
2. These are solo improvisations. The “trick” is something that the student truly wants to share with the audience. The more the student cares about what she brings to share, the more the audience cares, too. In the audience, we need to feel the gesture of generosity and not just experience the trick itself. Some examples of tricks are: a series of dog barks, Superman poses, a headstand, wearing a bunch of full bags of chips on a shirt and falling face forward to the ground, a cartwheel, etc.
3. The trick must be successful and the student should not have a “flop” moment. We need to experience triumph before we experience the flop.
4. It must be an act of courage with high stakes and risk involved. Without the possibility of failure, there is no clown. In other words, nobody wants to watch the tightrope walker cross from one side to the other when the rope is on the floor.
5. Remind students to enjoy the problem of the exercise, instead of solving the problem of the audience.
6. The trick has to have a finish. There has to be a tactile and measurable goal. It needs to have a “Hooray, I did it!” Tell them, “This is an event that you have been in training for and you are so proud of having done it!”
7. Most importantly, we need to know how the clown feels throughout the trick. The clown needs to share the experience with us in the audience.
8. The trick should be done without text, however, the students may wish to use a couple of words or speak in gibberish. The students should not

indicate and should **show** instead of **tell**.

9. Tell students “Here is an example of a trick: zip yourself into a duffle bag, set a timer and get yourself out in under twenty seconds.”
10. Again, invite the students to think with their clown brain instead of with their actor brain. Have them bring their third worst idea and not their best ideas. The trick must be **fun** for the student to do.
11. Clowns always want to make the trick really good! They don’t want to be bad.
12. There needs to be a great build up and an equally great pay off.
13. The specificity of the goal is very important: why, you, that?
14. Tell students, “If you flop, don’t plan what happens after the flop. You have to feel it all. You have to fully feel the humiliation as all your dreams come crashing down. Play in the hope and confidence that it will all work out. The bigger your hope means the bigger your disappointment will be. You are not ever pathetic, but it is a tragedy if and when your trick does not come to fruition. And...you cannot ever give up on the show. Keep your optimism alive.”

*VARIATION: Try doing a trick that requires a group of three to accomplish. Say “It’s something that only you three can do and it must work. You have all been training for this event. It’s the finals and the stakes are high. You all fear disaster, but you expect to triumph. Avoid bickering with the other members of your team.”*

## **THE RODEO OF CHAOS**

### ***Planned improvisation***

1. Invite the students to come up with a nonsensical title for a two minute planned improvisation clown solo.
2. Place all the titles in a hat and have each student choose one. Give students a day or two to create a solo piece using the title as their inspiration for the piece.
3. Some hilarious and beautiful work has been created from these titles but

have students create more: *Monster Town; If I Did a Good and Funny Show Called Vengeance It Would Look Like This; That's Uncalled For; Lullaby in Sparkle Town; I Don't Even Like That; The Squirty-Squirty Rodeo of Chaos.*

4. Most importantly, the students must be excited about their solo and what they want to share. The title is only a starting point. The students create the piece, but their clowns play it!

## **CLOWN NAMES**

### ***Finding the perfect name***

1. Invite the students to form an audience and select one student to perform.
2. Have the performer stand in the "sweet spot." The "sweet spot" is a place on stage that is intuitively sensed by the performer as "right." In other words, not too close or too far away from the audience.
3. Have the performer say "Hello" followed by what the performer might

Side Coach - As the teacher, you must provoke the student to continue improvising. For instance, say:

- That's not your name. Stop lying to me!
  - Hmm, I feel like you might be on to something.
  - Now, you've got it.
  - Now, say your name with some passion behind it. More passion.
- And so on...

feel is his or her clown name. Invite the performer to play with the rhythm of the text so it is not in his or her natural rhythm.

4. This exercise is an improvisation and together with the audience the performer is exploring names that feel the most "right." Intuitively the performer feels when he lands on a name that has a sparkle to it.
5. Clown names are often totally silly sounding. Here are some names that I have encountered over the years: Soggy Biscuit, Weasel, Little Jerry Donut, Sunshine Daisy Surprise, Just One Button, Tadpole Willy and Shovel.

## **CLOWN CHARACTERS**

### ***Exploring the body mask***

*This is a fascinating exercise because you truly see hidden characters in your students that are dying to come out and play.*

1. Invite a student to simply put on her nose and to sweep the floor with a broom crossing from one side to the other.
2. When the student reaches the middle of the room while sweeping to the other side, have her simply stop and see the audience.
3. You decide on a costume for the student to bring into class the next day or week.
4. The student is not going to play the role of the character that you assign. The costume just serves as a body mask. Similar to the nose, the costume just makes the student look a little more ridiculous so the audience can take pleasure and have permission to laugh at her.

NOTE: A list of examples of characters is on the page that follows.

**EXAMPLES OF CHARACTERS**

<i>50's Mother</i>	<i>Damsel (Princess)</i>	<i>Nerd</i>
<i>Angel/Fairy</i>	<i>Detective</i>	<i>Nurse</i>
<i>Army/Soldier</i>	<i>Detective</i>	<i>Peter Pan</i>
<i>Artist</i>	<i>Devil</i>	<i>Pinocchio</i>
<i>Assassin</i>	<i>Doctor</i>	<i>Pioneer/Pilgrim</i>
<i>Athlete</i>	<i>Don Juan</i>	<i>Pirate</i>
<i>Aviator</i>	<i>Farmer</i>	<i>Poet</i>
<i>Ballet Dancer</i>	<i>FBI Agent</i>	<i>Priest</i>
<i>Beggar</i>	<i>Femme Fatale</i>	<i>Prince</i>
<i>Belly Dancer</i>	<i>Fortune Teller</i>	<i>Prostitute</i>
<i>Boy Scout</i>	<i>Frankenstein</i>	<i>Queen (Empress)</i>
<i>Bull Fighter</i>	<i>Girl Guide</i>	<i>Rapper/Gangster</i>
<i>Business Person</i>	<i>God</i>	<i>Robin Hood</i>
<i>Butcher</i>	<i>Gravedigger</i>	<i>Salvation Army</i>
<i>Butler</i>	<i>Horse Rider</i>	<i>Samurai</i>
<i>Captain Hook</i>	<i>Judge</i>	<i>Sherlock Holmes</i>
<i>Cat Lady</i>	<i>King(Emperor)</i>	<i>Sherriff</i>
<i>Cave Woman</i>	<i>Knight</i>	<i>Southern Belle</i>
<i>Cheerleader</i>	<i>Librarian</i>	<i>Star Trek</i>
<i>Chef</i>	<i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>	<i>Superman</i>
<i>Choir Boy</i>	<i>Mad Scientist</i>	<i>Teacher</i>
<i>Cinderella</i>	<i>Maestro</i>	<i>Vampire</i>
<i>Coal Miner</i>	<i>Maid</i>	<i>Warrior</i>
<i>Conductor</i>	<i>Messiah</i>	<i>Witch</i>
<i>Construction Worker</i>	<i>Mickey Mouse</i>	<i>Wizard</i>
<i>Convict</i>	<i>Milk Maid</i>	<i>Zombie</i>
<i>Cowboy</i>	<i>Monk/Nun</i>	

## **CONCLUSION**

### **TA-DA! REFLECTIONS ON THIS THESIS**

The process of defending my thesis has inspired me to have Theory show up to marry Practice! In the dialogue with my thesis committee, I was moved by the discussion that illuminated for me that theory is an act of caring and not merely an intellectual exercise. I intend to research Anecdotal Theory, Autoethnography and Performative Writing to help me further understand how theory and practice can be interwoven together. I am also interested in exploring the concept of play, game theory and the connection of play to neuroscience research. As there is no binary between mind and body, I intend to explore the research on the somatic body, the psychology of clown and how clown can be linked to cognitive behaviour therapy. Further, I intend to research the impetus of laughter, how culture may impact why something is considered funny or not and the therapeutic benefits of laughter. Finally, I want to explore the historical context of clown, its political implications, how it is used to speak truth to power, the role of the trickster and the phenomenology of clown.

I am passionate about teaching pedagogy and I want that to be embodied in my writing so that the reader hears my voice side coaching throughout the exercises. To that end, I plan to add more comments before and throughout the exercises to provide context, objectives and advice to guide the reader toward success with her students. In addition, I want my pedagogy to be transparent and I want to explore the artistry of teaching

clown and embodied practice. Although I highlighted the pedagogy of both Jacques Lecoq and Richard Pochinko I want to further analyze, compare and contrast their techniques and pedagogy for teaching clown. As well, I would like to add commentary about the connection between directing clown and teaching clown and how one feeds the other in an infinite loop.

As I revise my thesis for publication, I want to explicitly address semantics. From the dialogue with the thesis committee, I realize that not all my readers speak the language of theatre and that much vocabulary that I use requires further clarification and explanation. For example, I use the term “character” in three distinctly different ways. The term “Zen” sometimes is used as a positive attribute and other times as something to be avoided. I refer to “impulse levels” but don’t clearly explain what that means. I also use theatrical jargon and need to explain what those terms and phrases mean. For example, I discuss the importance of performers “bringing their third worst idea” but don’t clarify that that really is about listening to the first impulse. In addition, I use the terms actor, clown and performer interchangeably and I need to elucidate their differences. Further, I must be more explicit about what clown is and the differences between teaching clown and teaching acting. The intended audience for this thesis is not solely teachers and directors so in addition to being clearer with vocabulary, I need to make explicit the healing powers of clown training and its ability unleash the spirit of play.



It became clear in the thesis dialogue that my implicit passion for clown that is provocative and not merely of the “lemonade and cookie variety” needs to be far more explicit if I am to convey the important role clown can play in affecting change, challenging the status quo and subverting the norm. These ideas can be explored in an additional chapter addressing how to structure a clown show for performance.

The thesis is structured in a particular scope and sequence so that skills and confidence build in a logical manner. However, good teaching requires differentiating instruction based on the skills and needs of the students. Thus, with a highly skilled or experienced group, the teacher may skip exercises or chapters, or, if a group is faltering or stuck, the teacher may circle back and use exercises from earlier chapters or within the chapter. The point is that while the chapters are intended to build one upon the other, a good teacher or director will use the exercises to breathe life into a class or performance regardless of when they occur in the chapters.

The study of clown has allowed me to reframe failure, to recognize that my deficits can be assets and to live with more curiosity in a spirit of play. I am a different person and teacher because of clown training and my pedagogy has been shaped by the principles of clown. Clown training has given me permission to see, feel and be and has brought more joy to my daily life. I teach with more empathy, honesty and vulnerability. I utilize humor and playfulness to disarm students and break down their barriers so they too, can come out and play. Clowning has built my courage muscle and I am

more able to surrender outcome in order to be present in the moment. In the future incarnation of this thesis, in perfect clown fashion, I intend to be more vulnerable in my writing, to embody clown in my writing and to reveal myself more in my writing. Ultimately, I want my readers to be able to exclaim to one another “Hey you! Hey you in there! Come out and play!”

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> There are many different forms of clown including circus clown, commedia dell'arte, bouffon, theatrical, etc.

<sup>2</sup>This kind of humour is context dependent and cultural expectations may come into play. This specific example presumes a North American context.

<sup>3</sup>In traditional “whiteface clown” there are typically three characters each with different status: Joey, Auguste and the Ringmaster. The Auguste plays a subservient role to the Joey; the Ringmaster keeps the balance between the two and thus has the ultimate status.

<sup>4</sup>Rules of comedy include: reversal of expectation, the rule of three, or incongruity.

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**CAUGHT-OUT:** when a performer is doing something seemingly with no audience around and is unexpectedly noticed by another performer. The “caught out” performer struggles to justify her behaviour or stands in silence, embarrassed.

**CLOWN LOGIC:** a nonsensical and absurd way of thinking or solving a problem that has a sublime wisdom to it. It stands in contrast to scientific logic.

**COMPLICITÉ:** the spirit of play and connection between the audience and the performer(s) or between a group of performers. Complicité is a delicate relationship that involves an agreement to go on the journey together and it is impossible to decipher who is following and who is leading. It is truly sharing leadership and achieving synergy.

**FLOP:** when a performer has tried a tactic and has failed miserably. This often produces laughter from the audience. It is essential to own the flop moment with the audience by the performer, verbally or non-verbally, acknowledging that the tactic has failed. The audience likes to see the clown but also the clown behind the mask creating the scenario.

**IN THE SHIT:** the constant struggle to get out of failure mode. It may also be referred to as being “in the crap” if working with younger students.

**IN THE NUMBER:** when the performer is playing in his own fantasy world without acknowledging the presence of the audience.

**JOYFUL PANIC:** when the performer feels a heightened level of motivation to try various tactics to elicit laughter or engagement from the audience.

**NEUTRAL WALK:** although, there is no such thing as neutral because our bodies carry our personal histories, a neutral walk does not overtly display a person's habits and tendencies.

**REVERSAL OF EXPECTATION:** to surprise the audience with an action that is completely unexpected because it is the opposite of what they were expecting.

**RULE OF THREE:** involves a series of three actions where two actions of out the combination are similar and the third action is different. This usually elicits laughter from the audience because there is a change in the rhythm or timing.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barnfather, Mick. Web. <<http://www.mickbarnfather.com/>>.

Bayes, Christopher. Web. <<http://www.christopherbayes.com/>>.

Bogart, Anne, and Tina Landau. *The Viewpoints Book : A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition*. 1st ed. New York; St. Paul, MN: Theatre Communications Group; Distributed by Consortium Book Sales and Distribution, 2005. Print.

Calcutt, Shannan. Web. <<http://iamizzy.com/>>.

Callery, Dymphna. *Through the Body : A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre*. New York; London: Routledge; N. Hern, 2001. Print.

Coburn, Veronica, author. *Clown through Mask the Pioneering Work of Richard Pochinko as Practised by Sue Morrison*. University of Alberta. Web.

Davis, Eric. Web. <<http://www.redbastard.com/>>.

Duchartre, Pierre Louis. *The Italian Comedy : The Improvisation Scenario Lives Attributes Portraits and Masks of the Illustrious Characters of the Commedia Dell' Arte*. New York, NY: Dover, 1966. Dover Books on Cinema and the Stage University of Alberta. Web.

Gaulier, Philippe. Web. <<http://ecolephilippegaulier.com/>>.

- Grotowski, Jerzy, ed. *Towards a Poor Theatre*. 1st Routledge ed. New York: Routledge, 2002. *University of Alberta*. Web.
- Halpern, Charna. *Truth in Comedy : The Manual of Improvisation*. 1st ed. Colorado Springs, Colo: Meriwether Pub., 1994. *University of Alberta*. Web.
- Henderson, Jan. Web. <<http://foolmoon.org/>>.
- Johnstone, Keith. *Impro : Improvisation and the Theatre*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1981. Print.
- . *Impro for Storytellers*. New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts Books, 1999. Print.
- Kennard, Michael. Web. <<http://www.mumpandsmoot.com/>>.
- Lecoq, Jacques, and David Bradby. *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*. London; New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Lecoq, Jacques, et al. *The Moving Body : Teaching Creative Theatre*. Rev ed. London: Methuen Drama, 2009. Print.
- Morrison, Sue. Web. <<http://www.canadianclowning.com/>>.
- Nachmanovitch, Stephen. *Free Play : Improvisation in Life and Art*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1990. *University of Alberta*. Web.

- Peacock, Louise. *Serious Play [Electronic Resource] : Modern Clown Performance*. Bristol, UK; Chicago: Intellect, 2009. *University of Alberta*. Web.
- Pochinko, Richard. Web. <<http://richardpochinko.com/>>.
- Robinson, Davis Rider. *The Physical Comedy Handbook*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999. *University of Alberta*. Web.
- Rudlin, John. *Commedia Dell'Arte [Electronic Resource] : An Actor's Handbook*. London; New York: Routledge, 1994. *University of Alberta*. Web.
- Scala, Flaminio. *The Commedia Dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala : A Translation and Analysis of 30 Scenarios*. Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2008. *University of Alberta*. Web.
- Spolin, Viola, ed. *Theater Games for the Classroom : A Teacher's Handbook*. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1986. *University of Alberta*. Web.
- Stiles, Patti. Web. <<http://pattistiles.com/>>.
- Towsen, John H. *Clowns*. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1976. *University of Alberta*. Web.
- Wright, John. *Why Is That So Funny? : A Practical Exploration of Physical Comedy*. London: Nick Hern, 2006. *University of Alberta*. Web.



## EXERCISE INSPIRATIONS

*The exercises in my thesis have been imitated, inspired or influenced by the following practitioners. Included in this list are my original exercises.*

### ***Mick Barnfather***

GO!	HAMSTER FUNERAL
STOP, GO, SQUAT, JUMP	THE BOARD OF GOVENORS
WHO KILLED KING JOHN?	FANTASY/NIGHTMARE
THREE CLAPS	PARTNER
CATCH THE BACON	STEALING FOCUS/NO FOCUS
BAMBOO	PULLING A FACE
ONE TO FIVE	STATES OF TENSION
RHYTHM BREATHE	LOVE CONFESSIONS
RELAY STOP & START	SKIPPING REHEARSAL
DREAM DATE	UNCONVENTIONAL
APPLAUSE	IMPROVISATIONS
SYNCHRONICITY	SAVING THE SHOW
WAITING ROOM	CLOWN CHARACTERS

### ***Christopher Bayes***

HEART CHAKRA ... OPEN FOR	INSIDE JOKE
BUSINESS	MY BIG STUPID FUN
RHYTHMIC NAME GAME	GREATEST TRICK IN THE
DO THAT FUNNY THING YOU	WORLD
DO!	THE RODEO OF CHAOS
HEY, LOOKY!	CLOWN NAMES

### ***Tara Brodin***

THE PLEDGE	SONGS ABOUT ANXIETY
STANDING OVATIONS & OPEN	CIRQUE TRAIN
APPRECIATIONS	CLOWN CAT WALK
BRAIN BURSTS	TITANIC GOODBYE
CHECKING IN	

***Shannan Calcutt***

BREAK OUT OF YOUR  
BAGGAGE & DROP KICK YOUR  
CRITIC  
CARMINA BURANA COW

CANADA'S NEXT TOP DANCER  
EMOTIONAL ROLLER  
COASTER  
GROUP THERAPY

***Jan Henderson***

TA-DA  
CLAP & CHEER FOR CHARM  
CHILDHOOD PHOTO  
GREATEST FANTASY  
GUIDED IMAGERY

THE NOSE RITUAL  
CHILD'S PLAY  
UNCONVENTIONAL  
CLOWNING

***Michael Kennard***

BODY BALL  
TOUCH & GO  
IMPULSE WORK

WALKING AND STOPPING  
GRAB THE TAIL

***Sue Morrison***

NAME HITMAN  
SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT

***Patti Stiles***

I SUCK AND I LOVE TO FAIL & I AM ENOUGH!

***Original Source Unknown***

WHOA, YES!  
SNAPPY NAMES  
NAME ALLITERATION  
NAME BANG  
ATOM & COMMONATOR  
THREE TRUTHS & A LIE  
DROWNING HANDS  
PARTNERS  
MOO!

SHAKE THAT BODY  
BOMB & SHIELD  
BUM TO BLACK  
3-WAY BALL TOSS  
SIMON SAYS  
JUST A SIMPLE GAME OF TAG  
THE ROYAL KINGDOM  
GRANDMA'S FOOTSTEPS  
COUNTING TO 20

TOILET PAPER TAG  
THE TOUR OF WHAT THIS  
ISN'T  
HUNTING DUCKS  
IT'S A BIG-SMALL WORLD  
FOUR-LEGGED LOVE  
CATCH THE FLY