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Untitled: a solo theatre performance interrogating clown and bouffon performance patterns, and what they offer to the performance of personal narrative in South African theatre today

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ABSTRACT:

This research paper investigates the use of the popular theatre personae of the clown and the bouffon as practical tools in the theatre making project, particularly focusing on their interaction with personal narrative and autobiographical fragments. It could be argued that use of personal narrative as a story- telling strategy within theatre has created a set of expectations and assumptions for audiences, and requirements on the part of the performer, who is obliged to demonstrate and declare a sincere and authentic presentation of self. This paper aims to address the issues associated with personal narrative story-telling, and to expand on the assumptions of what constitutes as autobiographical story-telling, particularly within the South African theatre paradigm. In so doing, this research offers performers and theatre makers alternative methodologies and practices in the use of subjective experience in the theatre making project. Using a practice-led research model, core propositions and methodologies around the use of the clown and the bouffon and their contact with autobiographical fragments were tested and investigated through the creation of *Untitled,* a devised theatre work. Key texts from practitioners such as Jacques Lecoq, Phillipe Gaulier, Jon Davison, John Wright and Keith Johnstone underpinned the theoretical component of the research. The clown and the bouffon encourage a critical, yet comedic approach to dealing with personal narrative story-telling, allowing theatre-makers and performers to experience an objective distance from sometimes, emotionally sensitive material. In so doing, they offer audiences a stylistically heightened theatrical encounter, where the authenticity and truth of the artist's personal experience is masked by the deliberate use of overt theatricality.