

https://dspace.org/

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

Pombo, Roberto

2019

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/35619

Pombo, Roberto (2019) 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, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/35619>

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

INDEX.

Cover Page …… i
Plagiarism Declaration Form …… ii
Acknowledgements …… iii
Abstract…… iv

CHAPTER 1: *Untitled:* A theatre-making project and set of propositions interrogated.

1.1) Introducing the project and propositions pg2
1.2) Rationale pg4
1.3) Methodology pg7
1.4) Core concepts and key terms..... pg8
1.5) Pre-production: Proposal, Reading and Preparation..... pg10
1.6) Theatre team and collaborators pg12

CHAPTER 2: *Untitled:* Perspectives and propositions from the rehearsal room.

2.1) A Personal Point of Departure pg14
2.2) Towards the Performance Text pg15
2.3) Randal: Clowning Around pg19
2.4) Randal: A Bouffon in The Room pg25

CHAPTER 3: *Untitled:* Reflections on the Audience Encounter and Modifying a Performance.

3.1) The Audience Encounter pg32
3.2) Randal: The Audience meets The Clown pg35
3.3) Randal: The Bouffon confronts The Audience pg42

CHAPTER 4: *Untitled:* Revealing the Theatrical Mask.

4.1) Lecoq and the Mask pg49
4.2) Theatricality and the scope for "truth" and sincerity Pg53

CHAPTER 5: *Untitled*: A Personal Narrative Transfigured: A Conclusion.

5.1) A theatrical heightening of personal narrative pg60

References..... pg70
Appendices pg78

CHAPTER 1: *Untitled*: A theatre project and set of critically informed propositions interrogated.

> What, in the language of theatre, is being true? Is it showing things as they are in nature? Certainly not! Were it so, the true would be the commonplace. What, then, is truth for stage purposes? It is the conformity of action, diction, face, movement and gesture to an ideal type invented by the poet and frequently enhanced by the player.
> - Denis Diderot, *The Paradox of Acting (1883)*.[1]

1.1) Introducing the project and propositions.

The performance text and original script of *Untitled* (generated through rehearsal and performance) might rightfully be positioned within South Africa's long-standing tradition of workshop theatre, pioneered by director and co-founder of the Market Theatre Barney Simon.[2] Actor Richard E. Grant, when talking about Simon and his creative process, said "Stories, personal histories, acute biographies were his focus, addressing what it was like to be South African in the here and now" (Stephanou & Henriques 2005: 346). This tradition, which makes use of actor's personal experiences and testimonies in order to devise work, can also be identified as a key component within my body of work, anchoring it firmly in a local context. In contrast, my practical engagement with the clown and the bouffon has been developed from a European theatrical tradition, specifically the pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq.[3] Lecoq's work and teachings has its roots in Commedia dell'Arte**,** Greek theatre, French pantomime, and is influenced by the works of Antonin Artaud, Jean-Louis Barrault and Jacques Copeau (Evans & Kemp 2016). My project aimed to combine the personae of the clown and the bouffon – with their European roots – within the model of emergent South African story-telling and performance practices. Despite this hybridization, however, I assert

1. Diderot's paradox continues to surface across a range of contemporary texts that investigate notions of truth within theatre and performance. Despite the year of its publication, it is still considered relevant to discourse around these issues today.
2. The term "workshop" theatre refers to a collaborative creative process where the play text is devised by the actors, in collaboration with the director, who improvise narratives in order to generate a script. "Although the emergence of the form can be traced back to as early as 1957, and particularly to the period of the early 1970s, it was in the period post-1976 that workshop theatre became firmly established as part of theatre practice in South Africa" (Fleishman 1991: 1). Workshopped play texts were strongly influenced by the socio-political and cultural landscape and committed to generating content derived from local experience.
3. Jacques Lecoq is a seminal theatre practitioner in the field of physical theatre. He founded the school *l'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq* in 1956. Significant local theatre-makers who have Lecoq training include William Kentridge, Jenni Reznek, Sylvaine Strike and James Cunningham: the traces of his influence are readily discernible in their work.

that my work remained local in its identity and concerns.[4] In this document I reflect on the outcome of that creative approach.

My work towards a Masters degree in theatre and performance has mobilized a practice-led research method synthesizing creative practice and a scholarly dissertation. This interrogation of the production (which took place from the 26th - 28th September 2018) equally reflects on the process of making the work and its presentation. My project, as outlined in the initial proposal remains motivated by three questions: first, how may one profitably mobilize the theatrical mask and personae of the bouffon and the clown as practical tools in theatre-making? Second, what are the implications of embedding these identities – which embrace a heightened style of delivery and theatricality – within a story-telling project that focuses on a highly emotional, provocative and subjectively experienced set of issues such as autobiographical content and personal narrative? Finally, what are the implications of fusing these two questions? In other words, how are issues associated with the performance of personal narratives and autobiographical content impacted on by adopting the formal personae of the popular theatre tradition?[5] In this reflexive self-critique, I record the process and outcomes of drawing on the heightened theatricality and performance style of the clown and the bouffon in order to extend the assumptions of what personal narrative story-telling might be in South African theatre.

From the outset I have been committed to devising a new autobiographically inspired solo theatrical performance under the direction of long-time collaborator Toni Morkel, drawing on creative methodologies from our previous collaborations. Personal experience

4. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridization, which is examined through the colonizer/colonized dynamic, expands the idea of cross-cultural exchange by taking into account the power dynamics inherent in this relationship and their interdependence on each other. This concept can be applied to the South African workshop tradition: The methodology in itself was a hybridization of European theatrical forms (Commedia Dell'arte, Jerzy Grotowski, Antonin Artaud and Peter Brook), situated within a South African context (the mingling of socio-political, cultural theatrical and linguistic traditions), in which South African theatre practitioners, performers and play texts (colonized) engaged with themes that spoke directly to conditions of oppressive governance as recorded by Mambrol (2016) and Hauptfleisch (1997).

5. Both the clown and the bouffon have their roots within the popular theatre tradition, but have been repurposed by Jacques Lecoq as creative tools in contemporary theatre training. The term "popular theatre" is derived from the French *théatrê populaire.* It referred to a theatre that was affordable, educational and available to the masses, as opposed to an elite few. It included theatrical forms such as mime, pantomime, puppetry, clowning, Commedia dell'Arte, vaudeville and circus (Schlecter 2003).

surrounding my mother's relocation to a new home away from my childhood neighbourhood served as the catalyst and starting point for the crafting of my creative project. My objective was to avoid a sentimental or emotionally loaded verbatim narrative. I aimed, rather, to seek out scope for comedy, clowning and self-reflexive bouffonesque critique. Family dynamics and underlying themes, taken from my personal experience provided the impetus for situations, relationships and encounters from which the clown and the bouffon would be able to improvise freely.

The creative project, under the playful command of the fool, laid claim to the license to intensify, exaggerate and celebrate the events of everyday life according to what Ernst Cassirer terms the "logic of the imagination" (Cassirer 1972: 136 – 192). In so doing, I committed to departing from documentary testimony from the outset and sought to use personal material as a departure point from which to create fictionalised character, situation and narrative.

1.2) Rationale.

A reflection on my body of work, devised between 2009 – 2017, leads me to assert that my work is strongly anchored in personal narrative and interrogates the socio-political context of the world that I inhabit.[6] In so doing, my work perpetuates the use of personal narrative as a tool to interrogate local contemporary culture and politics: *The Last Show (2013),* explored my irrational fear of the looming apocalypse through the lens of a conservative mother and son couple living in Brixton, Johannesburg, asking broader questions around race, and "white fear" of the other; *Father, Father. Father! (2014)* was inspired by my religious upbringing in the catholic church addressing themes of abuse of power and control; *KidCasino! (2017)* unearthed the darker side of casino culture through the eyes of two middle-class white children, highlighting themes of addiction and consumerism not only found in the dazzling world of the casino, but within society as a whole.[7] My output fits neatly into the established practice of situating personal narrative at the core of story-telling strategies within South

6. Refer to Appendix A on page 79 for a full list of my devised theatre projects and collaborations.
7. I acknowledge my position as a white homosexual male within South Africa's complex and diverse multi-cultural society. My creative work is firmly anchored in what might be described as a position of relative privilege in a white middle-class society, and it further critically reflects on this position.

African theatre. What these prior works indicate is, first, the extent to which I rely on a process of developing a theme as a direct outcome of a personal position or experience, and, second, the issues and themes developed in the action and characters are situated in a larger contemporary socio-political landscape. Further, my prior work incorporates elements of both clown and bouffon performance modes as strong stylistic components of the work. Given that the narrative and formal aspects of my previous works correspond so closely with the practical outcomes of this research, what then marks this project as innovative practice and not simply a repetition of previous patterns?

My evolving body of work, *despite* its affinities with a growing corpus of emergent local theatre work, constitutes as a significant departure from the ways in which South African theatre texts mobilize personal experience. I observe that I have been working both within and against established practices. It is precisely this tension that I probe by subjecting the thematic and formal aspects of the work to critically informed scrutiny. By drawing on this personal repertoire in the interests of continuing to expand my body of work, I have been compelled to reflect on the intuitive aspects of my own practice with the aim of critiquing (and perhaps extending) this practice. In so doing, this research mobilizes previously utilized methodologies in order to establish a new template and methodological framework from which to pursue and expand on for future projects, as well as a resource for fellow theatre makers and scholars. This dissertation thus draws together a rigorous and scholarly interrogation of the interplay between clown and bouffon as applied in the rehearsal process and presentation of the work in conjunction with the post-performance debates and discussions that followed.

As a contemporary theatre-maker and performer dedicated to generating new work rather than reproducing or interpreting extant play-texts, I am constantly confronted with the task of creating work that is cutting edge and relevant. Divergent theatrical experiences are offered to us through the models of verbatim, playback and immersive theatre. These forms propose innovative means of challenging orthodox, and perhaps even outdated assumptions regarding the role of the audience in contemporary theatre. They offer a dynamic and interactive encounter by promoting inclusivity through audience participation. My creative project pursues the same commitment in seeking to shape an exciting and participatory

phenomenon but explores alternative strategies for promoting interactivity, particularly through the use of the reciprocal interdependence of the clown and the bouffon and their observers.

The intention of my practice-led research project implemented through the creation of a new theatre work (which depended on the use of clown and bouffon) was never to create either "clown theatre" or "bouffon theatre", or even to develop popular clown or bouffon characters, but rather to investigate the theatrical resonance and effect of these personae within the creative process, particularly when addressing autobiographical content.[8] Documenting, assessing and critiquing the interplay between narrative and formal presentation choices, it was my intent to probe the efficacy of the heightened theatricality offered by these two personae, and ultimately test the potential for the hybridization of clown and bouffon as an innovation in contemporary local theatre-making. In effect, my research has been to investigate the possibility of expanding the assumptions of what personal narrative story-telling might be within the South African theatre paradigm and what these popular theatre personae offer to the theatre experience.

The aim of my theatrical endeavours has always been to take my audiences on a journey, rejecting naturalism and embracing a heightened theatricality that disregards the use of the so-called authentic and "real" and relies on verisimilitude as a guarantor of truth. I dispute the accusation that reliance on overt theatricality – evident in a preoccupation with style and form – precludes establishing conditions for empathetic engagement. Adherents of the docu-drama, playback theatre, verbatim and verismo mode insist on the necessity to evoke empathy in the audience via a response based on the sincerity, veracity and truthfulness of what is presented. These are weighty concepts that are inseparable from discourse around the role of works of the imagination and what they offer to society. As Cassirer observes, “Imagination becomes a necessary element of true recollection” (Cassirer 1972: 75). In contrast, I aimed to test the efficacy of overt theatrical artifice as the result of an imaginative exploration of subjective experience. I aimed to demonstrate the viability of this proposition through my practical project which set out to offer an alternative form of

8. I define my research as practice-led as the practical component of my research functions alongside the written constituent of my project and assists in addressing my research questions.

theatre where personal narratives are presented on stage as "real" or as close to reality as possible. My intention was not to prove that theatricality and artifice can allow for authenticity and truth to be found on stage, but rather to experiment with *how* it is able to do so. In so doing, this paper effectively investigates strategies of using a less literal theatrical modal than that of testimony or the use of verbatim material in performance and documents the consequences of this approach.

1.3) Methodology.

The primary focus of this dissertation is in the examination of the performance of my practical project, *Untitled.*[9] My reflections on the creative process, namely the rehearsal documentation in the form of written and recorded material, which was a key component in the creative process, now forms a rich repository from which I can draw on to interrogate the outcomes of that process. Since *Untitled* focused more on formal and aesthetic treatments and their affective impact *rather* than the thematic and psycho-sociological significance of the issues being raised, my written journal, which mobilised auto-ethnographic writing, was not used beyond mapping the creative outcomes and my thoughts surrounding it.[10] This material will be interrogated in relation to the conceptual framework proposed prior to the making of *Untitled.*

Drawing on theorists as diverse as States, Feral and Weber in the examination of *Untitled*, I make use of a selected literature review which informed my thinking at the outset. This literature review is structured around key texts in clown, bouffon, mask, theatricality, audience and personal narrative. In order to contextualize, offer comparisons and trace the development of a personal idiom, I proceed from a brief comparison with my previous works and *Untitled*, analysing my historical use of clown, bouffon and personal narrative: *The Last Show (2013), Father. Father. Father! (2015) a*nd *KidCasino! (2017)*. These comparisons will allow me to interrogate my expansion on previous creative processes in relation to the proposed methodology and objectives of this project.

9. Refer to Appendix B on page 78 for production stills from *Untitled* and Appendix C on page 80 for the DVD and Script of *Untitled.*

10. A notable South African theatre practitioner who makes use of this process is Brett Bailey. Bailey's work *Ipi Zombi? (1998)* was the result of a rehearsal process where a production journal was utilized for documentation, and rehearsals recorded in order to formulate the production text (Bailey 2003: 144).

1.4) Core Concepts and Key Terms.

This introduction to the scope and ambitions of the project launches me directly into the process of rehearsal and production presentation. I contend that an entire chapter dedicated to a literature review might not necessarily serve the purpose of fusing critical thinking and practice as I set out to demonstrate. I opt, rather, to integrate extrapolations from the literature review throughout the document in order to test the relationship between critical vocabularies and their application in artistic practice. I offer, nonetheless, provisional and partial working definitions of the following core terms, which figured so prominently in my rehearsal notebooks and proposal:

Clown:

A comedic persona understood as a descendant of the stock characters of the Commedia dell'Arte tradition. The evolution of the clown from Commedia dell'Arte to the circus saw the development of defined clown roles, namely the white face clown, the auguste and the counter-auguste (Davison 2013). For the purposes of my research and practical creation, I will refer to the clown as an evolution of the counter-auguste (who wears a prosthetic red nose) as revived for use in theatre and contemporary clown training by Jacques Lecoq.

Bouffon:

A mythical persona who can be traced back to the satyrs of ancient Greek satyric drama (Fusetti 2019). As outsiders and outcasts, the bouffon's primary motivation is to mock and ridicule society. My understanding and use of the bouffon will be derived from the work of Jacques Lecoq and Philippe Gaulier and their incorporation of the bouffon as a training tool in their pedagogy.[11]

Mask:

The mask will be referred to and understood not only in literal terms as a playable theatre mask placed on an actor's face, but also figuratively to describe the summation of a

11. Philippe Gaulier is a seminal theatre known for his work on clowning and his school *l'Ecole Philippe Gaulier. "*Having started as a student, then a colleague, of the physical theatre maestro Jacques Lecoq, Gaulier has run his own college – in France, then the UK, and now in Étampes, near Paris – for 36 years" (Logan 2016).

character's persona or the theatrical encounter i.e. the mask of a character would include its appearance and visual components, its physicality, vocal traits and movement. This concept of mask is derived from the pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq which has its roots in Commedia dell'Arte and Greek tragedy.

Artistic Heterocosm:

The introductory chapter in Stephen Halliwell's *The Aesthetics of Mimesis (2002)* introduces readers to a particular passage written by Goethe in 1798 in the art criticism journal, *Die Propyläen.* The passage arrives at the conclusion that one is able to be completely absorbed in a work of art without it being "strictly illusionist or true-seeming" (Halliwell 2002: 2). Goethe suggests that the genuine art lover responds not only to the truth of what is being imitated, but also the "inner perfection of the 'artistic microcosm'" (Halliwell 2002: 3).[12] Halliwell's introductory chapter directs our attention to the view that theatre does not have to be realistic in order to be "true" but rather that one can find truth within the fictional world of the artwork. The notion of the heterocosm is the antithesis of what Halliwell calls "the world-reflecting" model of theatre.

Theatricality:

Theatricality implies an awareness of the performative and creative possibility inherent in the ostensibly banal or ordinary circumstances of everyday life. In relation to the theatre and its constituent elements, theatricality will be used as a term to describe a strong departure from the assumptions and conventions of Western naturalism and its tendencies to represent life on stage as "realistic" or "authentic"; conversely, embracing the mode of intensified or abstracted mode of presentation promotes an acceptance of the heightening of the quotidian. In so doing, theatricality encourages, or at the very least acknowledges the subjective mediation and constructedness of theatrical encounter.

12. Stephen Halliwell, a classics scholar offering revised readings of Aristotle and Plato on mimesis and aesthetics, notes that the "artistic microcosm" references earlier 18th century ideas of the "artistic heterocosm". This term refers to the fictional universe that an artwork creates, or the "world within the world". The term was derived from German philosopher and aesthetician Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (Halliwell 2002: 4).

Personal Narrative and Autobiography:

Personal narrative and autobiography refer to an account of a person's life, or parts of a person's life, as told by that person. It makes use of highly subjective material that is testimonial in nature. When looking at personal narrative in relation to theatre, the term will be used to refer to moments in the lives of performers, or of other people's narratives that were used in the creation of a performance text.

Play:

Seminal writer Huizinga's propositions around the complex concept of "play" have launched subsequent interrogations. He writes: "Play is not 'ordinary' or 'real' life. It is rather a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own" (Huizinga 1950: 8). Play will be referred to and understood as an activity and process which forms an essential component of the theatre-making process. The improvisation of material requires a performer to playfully engage with a subject as a means of exploring and investigating it. It is through this process of playing and improvising that the performance text is crafted. Playfulness will also be referred to as a quality in which a performer is in a reactive state, available and open to spontaneous elements within performance.

1.5) Pre-production: Proposal, Reading and Preparation.

This new presentation, which despite being available for categorization as a one-man comedy show, resists further assignment to a neatly described performance category or genre. The comedic devices employed in *Untitled* expand beyond the written comedic text and narrative structure, to make use of clearly defined moments of clowning and clown technique. The use of bouffon modes of performance, stylistic influences, and parody further constitute as additional elements that locate the presentation in the genre of comedy. I will make use of a brief content description and refer the reader to the attached DVD and script of the performance for further reference to contextualise the way in which the work makes use of definitive clown and bouffon modes of performance. While the focus of this paper is anchored in the interrogation of *Untitled* in relation to these personae, my aim is to tackle a broader set of concerns articulated in the questions as outlined in this introduction.

Prior to starting rehearsals (July – September 2018), I had committed to a body of reading and research in developing the proposal, which mobilized certain aspects of the rehearsal process. Most crucially, the personae of the clown and the bouffon and their respective performance techniques and perspectives, were central tools for addressing personal narrative in a heightened theatrical idiom. My creative and critical framework focused on identifying texts that locate the clown and the bouffon at the core of their practice and writing. The key texts used in the practical exploration of these personae included Lecoq's *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre (2002)* and *Theatre of Movement and Gesture (2006)*; John Wright's *Why Is That So Funny (2006);* and Jon Davison's *Clown Training: A Practical Guide (2015).* These texts encompass the established discourse and contain practical exercises in bouffon and clown work. They form the foundations of my practical training and experience with these personae. They were used in conjunction with my personal journals taken from my studies at *The Helikos International School of Theatre Creation (2011 – 2014)* under the direction of Giovanni Fusetti*.* My training at *Helikos* – which has its foundations in physical theatre – promotes the use of the body as a primary means of theatrical expression, and includes training in mime technique, mask play, and improvisation. My commitment to technical training and acquiring tangible skills associated with the clown and the bouffon, and more broadly physical theatre, have equipped me with a degree of expertise in this field.

My improvisation training has its foundations in the work of Keith Johnstone, gleaned from my third-year improvisation training at *The University of the Witwatersrand*, under the guidance of Sarah Roberts. Johnstone's book, *Impro: Improvisation and The Theatre (1989)* has become a seminal text in the teaching and studying of improvisation in theatre. Johnstone's improvisation technique is interactive, outwardly focused and structured around developing facility in spontaneity, status transactions, mask work and developing narrative skills. These aspects of performance directly correlate with the creative expression of the clown and the bouffon and the role of the audience: the performance of these personae can be viewed as a direct response to the presence of the audience, rather than simply self-expression of the artist. The outward-focused, response-based mode of performance Johnstone asserts, was of particular interest to me as it discouraged a performance that is inward-focused and centred on the self on stage, and rather encouraged the exploration of the spontaneous and creative potential in the

audience/performer dynamic. Documenting and interrogating the role of the audience, which is a crucial and significant component of clown and bouffon modes of performance, is thus situated as a pivotal and central element of my enquiry.

Conventional professional productions are not necessarily obliged to reflect on their objectives and theoretical/conceptual underpinning either before rehearsal, during the process or post performance. My practical project differed from this mode of operations as it expanded the development and reflection periods both prior to rehearsal and after the presentation as a means to apply, test and reflect on the core ideas. The outcome resulted in the project gaining both momentum and gravitas through being developed in accordance with academic protocols, offering scope for more intense evaluation of the outcome of the process than a traditional theatre review or social media criticism might achieve.

1.6) Theatre team and collaborators.

Untitled was directed by long-time collaborator Toni Morkel. Morkel is a veteran South African performance artist, director, theatre maker and actress. Our first collaboration was in 2009 on Robin Orlin's *Dressed to Kill, Kill to Dress.* We have since created a number of theatre productions and founded the Johannesburg based improvisation group *Causing A Scene (2009 till present).* Toni Morkel forms part of *Robaby Productions*, a theatrical performance company formed in 2015 by myself and Joni Barnard. Joni Barnard, a theatre-maker, actress and dancer, was also involved in the creation of *Untitled*, assisting with the movement vocabulary and dramaturgy of the piece. Barnard and I first collaborated in 2014, in the creation of the award-winning *Father, Father. Father! (2014)*, directed by Toni Morkel. The work toured for three years, being invited to perform at the *Amsterdam Fringe Festival* in 2016. We have since created *KidCasino! (2017)*, also directed by Toni Morkel, which will have another season in 2019. Amy-Sue Lithgow, a third-year design and directing student at *The University of the Witwatersrand*, fulfilled the role of stage manager and production assistant of *Untitled.* Barnard and I had worked with Lithgow previously on the 2018 season of *KidCasino! (2017)* at POPArt Theatre in Johannesburg, and at the *National Arts Festival* in Makhanda.

The value of this partnership lies in a shared understanding of the creative process, methodologies and the desired outcomes articulated at the beginning of this paper. A clear theatrical language and style has already been established which serves to open the scope for further exploration and development within our established stylistic territory. The understanding, respect and trust of each other's artistic strengths promotes a dialogic approach to creating theatre in which value is accorded to what each individual's artistic strength is within the partnership and what each constituent is able to contribute to the creative process.

CHAPTER 2: *Untitled:* devising the project in the rehearsal room.

2.1) A personal point of departure.

My proposed creative project evolved from the desire to develop a personal narrative that drew on my experience of my mother's relocation to a new home away from my childhood neighbourhood. I had been alerted to an increasingly urgent need to support my mother as she gets older. The conflicting urge of wanting to live my life independent of my mother (yet wanting or needing to be there for her) had consistently surfaced in different ways. I wrote the following journal entry which served as the impetus for the creation of *Untitled:*

> *My mother recently sold her home and re-located to an "over 60's" housing complex. The move, to a different city away from my childhood neighbourhood, comes 9 years after the death of my father. The move itself, the logistics of getting furniture into storage facilities, the transporting of personal belongings and selling/buying of houses, have all contributed to this being an emotionally turbulent and stressful time for my family and me. I have witnessed my mother experience the empty nest syndrome which has added further stress on her during this already trying period.[13] More disconcertingly, I have been made aware of the conflicted and ambivalent responses to her situation manifested by me and my two siblings: we share the compulsion to relocate and live closer to our mother but are equally compelled by the demands of our own lives and careers which prohibit or at least complicate this kind of commitment. We have been alerted to an increasingly urgent need to support our mother as she gets older. This experience is the acknowledgement and acceptance of the natural phenomenon of ageing and its consequences. I have observed, with heightened sensitivity, the relationship between past and present: it seems that it was just yesterday that I was six years old and my mother was chasing me out of the house because I had dirty feet, now, as a thirty-two-year-old, I am witnessing my mother getting older and increasingly fragile, perhaps even dependent. The experience has been both surreal and sobering. Although intimately felt and deeply personal as it may be, I am forced to register that what we are experiencing is common and shared by many. It has awakened me to the*

13. According to *The Encyclopaedia of Ageing and Public Health (2008)*, *The Empty Nest Syndrome* is concept that refers to a number of symptoms including depression, loneliness and low self-esteem experienced by a mother whose last child leaves home (Loue & Sajatovic 2008: 318).

fact that there is no escaping the journey of life from birth to death: getting old is an unavoidable a part of life.

This fragment of personal narrative was written in order to be as factual, honest and clear in my personal experience as possible. I explicitly and deliberately chose to refrain from exploring over-sentimental and highly emotional material which resulted in the text quoted above being succinct, brief and unemotional. The rehearsal process allowed for expanding on this reflection to encompass a larger time frame, as I reflected on the sequence of events from the death of my father in 2009 – which was the catalyst for my mother's relocation – to the present. It was only in this expansion that I allowed myself to venture in the direction of emotionally sensitive experiences. It was through this expansion that my enquiry extended to addressing themes such as the break-up of family; guilt and obligation; and strategies for avoiding the emotional issues expressed through the notion of spiritual bypassing.[14] The personal and sensitive expression of these deeply felt subjective experiences were then subject to an objectively rigorous and honest examination of the narrative. In the subsequent sections of my dissertation, when I refer to my personal narrative, it is the diarized material above that constituted the core departure point for *Untitled.*

2.2) Towards the Performance Text.

Untitled was the result of a two-month rehearsal process: an intensive one month focus on research and thematic development and the remaining month developing the performance text and solidifying theatrical choices. The text is structured around an evening in the life of Randal, an optimistic and upbeat young man who organises a farewell party for himself in celebration of his pending trip to India. He will be going abroad to study a three-month course in yoga, meditation and mindfulness, all in his quest for self-improvement and self-healing. As the evening's events begin to unfold – incorporating the presence of the audience as guests to this event that he is hosting – we become aware of the complex web of familial ties and estranged friendships that have triggered his internal conflict and prompted a desire to escape to India, away from his current situation. *Untitled* was performed in The Nunnery

14."Spiritual bypassing (or whitewashing) is the act of using spiritual beliefs to avoid facing or healing one's painful feelings, unresolved wounds and unmet needs. It is a state of avoidance. Because it is a state of avoidance, it is a state of resistance" (Swan 2019).

Theatre on the campus of *The University of the Witwatersrand* over three nights, the 26th - 28th September 2018.[15]

The playing area had been set up with the objective of creating an intimate domestic space inhabited by Randal, who was expecting the arrival of his guests. This approach draws on the conventions of realist staging through which the audience is invited to accept the core illusion that the stage is transformed to represent something other than a platform for performance. This arrangement was suited to the central conceit of the audience members, who being greeted as his guests, were subsequently to be granted fictional personae and relationships with Randal. As the audience entered, they would meet Randal – me, transformed into a character – happily situated centre-stage within a private shrine-like setting, playing a djembe drum. In a range of marigold colours, adorned with crystals, dream catchers, incense, self-help books and a framed photograph of Randal in the centre, the room was intended to suggest a shrine or oasis of tranquillity, as seen in images 1 and 2:



Image 1



Image 2

The drumming served as ambient pre-show musical overture. Deliberately a-rhythmical and improvisatory, this introductory segment reinforced the bohemian mise-en-scene. The drumming staged an opening ceremony of welcome and inclusivity via an overtly sacred ritual

15. The Nunnery Theatre is a found space converted into a theatre and retains much of the informality of an interior that has been converted for the purpose of staging small works in an intimate end-on configuration with basic resources. It accommodates about sixty persons and the playing area (with no off-stage storage facilities or points of access) is approximately 4.500 metres square.

that incorporated ceremonial elements from a multi-cultural social context: Tibetan singing bowls, African drumming, Indian incense and "blessing" of chakras, performed to the music of Indian sitarist and composer, B. Sivaramakrishna Rao. Randal then welcomed his friends to the farewell event that he was hosting, introducing the audience to key characters and officially beginning the evening's proceedings. This "program of events" consisted of an official reminder to support his crowd-funding campaign to finance his trip to India, a vegan dinner, songs, poetry-reading and the opening of gifts. The momentum of proceedings taking place as planned was structured to be consistently interrupted throughout the evening by phone calls from his family, a man selling brooms at his gate and a faulty alarm system which kept going off. These interferences served as a mechanism for revealing the extent to which Randal's apparent confidence and composure was increasingly undermined as seen in his responses to these interventions. The evening eventually erupted into chaos as Randal began to realise his family would not arrive: their intermittent phone calls served to offer up multiple justifications and excuses for their non-appearance. Randal's free-spirited façade projecting positive self-worth collapsed in a final counter-movement towards isolation, loneliness and evident lack of fulfilment.

Untitled was conceived in a presentational modality that proposes that masking and transformation of self are both constitutive elements of the theatrical encounter. Masking and transformation – first concealing the body, face, manner and voice of the actor, and then constructing the appearances of another identity as a form of disguise – have long, varied and contested applications in theatre-making. Presentational theatre and performance acknowledges the theatricality of the theatre experience and does not aim to depict reality (Stanton & Banham 1996: 376). The acknowledgement of the audience, which is a key component of a presentational mode of delivery, was also embedded in the diegetic world of the relationships set up by the proposition of the situation being played out: audience members were both characters and spectators. This dual operation is a playful intervention that breaks down established propositions of being positioned either "inside" or "outside" of the performance by blurring the boundaries of these distinctions. The project aimed at extending the strategies of direct audience address and tested ways of including them within the diegetic world.

Preliminary reading around the audience/spectator relationship within performance included working through Bert O. States' essay which focuses on the actor's presence and extends beyond the relatively rudimentary distinction between representational and presentational. Adopting a phenomenological framework for his analysis of the actor's presence and relationship with those being addressed, States argues that within the dialogic exchange of speech, there are three grammatical positions from which speech is possible: "I" speak, "You" speak, "It/He/She" speaks (States 1985: 160). Drawing from these, States introduces three modalities in which the actor presents himself in relation to the audience: the self-expressive mode, in which the actor shows his skill and virtuosity as the "I" who addresses the audience (States 1985: 161); the representational mode, in which focus is placed on the subject matter being represented and the fictive character of the diegetic world (the "It/He/She"), rather than on the performer-audience relationship (States 1985: 181); and the collaborative mode, where the audience (albeit not in a literal sense) takes on the role of the speaking subject (the "You") rather than remaining in the conventionally assigned role of passive addressee (States 1985: 170). Significantly, States acknowledges that the actor may move between these modes within the course of a single performance. The structure of *Untitled* not only accommodated the play between these different modes but effectively promoted the transitions between them: challenging the audience to recognize and acknowledge me, as a performer versed in the craft of clowning and improvisation; aware of their own role as active participants in a theatrical encounter; and simultaneously aware of the diegetic world in which Randal is a fictive character.

The rehearsal process, which expanded on previous methodologies, proved to be a challenging creative experience. *Untitled* was my first attempt at creating a solo work, and more specifically a work that did not utilize the theatrical fourth wall. This element of *Untitled* encouraged an immediate and direct relationship with the audience. Furthermore, the challenging nature of creating a first-time solo work with a strong audience dynamic was exacerbated by limited external directorial input. The parameters set by the obligations of the proposed enquiry and creating a production according to a set of conceptual and critical issues, proved more challenging than I had anticipated. My proposed methodology, with its emphasis on clown and the bouffon modes of performance, was significantly dependent on having another person/team of collaborators/directorial presence in the rehearsal room. The

absence of my collaborators constituted as the primary hindrance in the creation of material, as audience response was so crucial to the material being crafted. In order to craft material successfully without the presence of my collaborators, I made use of a laptop camera to record my rehearsals. This proved to be a viable solution as I was able to review each session from an "outsider" perspective and use my own discretion and directorial eye in analysing and developing the performance text.

2.3) Randal: Clowning Around.

It is crucial, at the outset when addressing the clown and clowning as a performance modality, to acknowledge the dual identity of myself as actor/author and my performance of the constructed theatrical persona of Randal. When discussing Randal, and his role within the theatrical journey of *Untitled,* I stress that he does not exist separate from my considered choices as a theatre-maker and objective ethnographer, but rather is a thought-out construction crafted as a result of a rehearsal process that synthesised story-telling objectives and my theatrical training.

The initial phases of the devising process of *Untitled* began by utilizing Lecoq's clown methodology as a framework for the manner in which I approached my personal narrative. This approach advances a process of developing one's own *personal clown* in which the individuality of the performer is the catalyst for an organic crafting of a unique clown persona. Lecoq resists the emphasis on the clown being conceived as a traditional comic circus persona who performs largely physical and well-rehearsed routines and tricks. His technique proposes an introspective approach where an honest self-examination highlights not only positive attributes of the individual, but also his/her idiosyncratic foibles (Lecoq 2002: 152). The process of developing a *personal clown* is both a journey of self-discovery and simultaneously an outwardly focused, collaborative interaction in which the audience's response is integral to the clown's development. The presence of the audience in the discovery of one's *personal clown* assists the performer in understanding and acknowledge what it is that is ridiculous/humorous about themselves. Furthermore, the audience's presence accentuates the vulnerable theatrical space that is sometimes needed for the development of the *personal clown.* The writing and rehearsal process required me to grapple with emotionally sensitive material by analysing my experience and interrogating its broader themes, through a

thorough and introspective self-examination. I not only addressed my strength, drive and optimism as an individual, but also allowed my expression of anger, sadness and anxiety around the given situation to be revealed. Adopting this creative methodology as a framework allowed me to expose my vulnerabilities and highlight my sentiments as a source of material. In this instance, the process through which a *personal clown* persona is developed, was being applied to the project and process of constructing and developing a coherent narrative using personal narrative as source material.[16] My use of Lecoq's insistence on introspection, in order to address my sentiments about the narrative itself, was a key element in my expansion and development of narrative.

In 2015, I created my *personal clown*, Randal Faxmachine, under the direction and guidance of Giovanni Fusetti, whose approach has its foundations in Lecoq's methodology.[17] In *Untitled*, I utilized Randal Faxmachine in order to explore physical comedy and develop material as way of understanding clown logic and a clown-like way of viewing the proposed material of this project, particularly when addressing the central theme of spiritual bypassing. Clown scholar, Professor David McManus says that the clown will always try think though a situation and fail hopelessly because he cannot understand its logic/rules, OR, succeed because of his ability to bend the rules or invent new rules (McManus 2003: 15). This clown logic points to a kind of genius and stupidity found in clowns, and which McManus states "is more than just a character trait, it constitutes a distinct performance mode from that of the non-clown characters" (McManus 2003: 15). Improvising in red nose, playing Randal Faxmachine allowed me to uncover the simplicity and ridiculousness of what lies at the heart of subscribing to what spiritual bypassing (as a strategy of emotional avoidance) might mean by encouraging a child-like and naive view of the world, holding everything up for close scrutiny.

16. Lecoq's method was similarly drawn on during the creation of my previous works, *The Last Show (2013)* and *KidCasino (2017).* These works both made use of personal narrative as the impetus for the creation of material, and a further introspective and thematic expansion of this narrative to create more source material.
17. Giovanni Fusetti is the director of *Helikos International School of Theatre Creation*. He completed his pedagogic training at *l'Ecole International de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq*, after which he was invited to teach improvisation and clown work. Fusetti's own clown methodology, which has its foundations in Lecoq's pedagogy, also makes use of his 25-year pedagogical research which includes training and practice in Augusto Boal's Theatre of the oppressed, Gestalt, Reichian Bionergetics and Process Work (Fusetti 2019).

Clown-like logic and clown modes of performance could be identified in two of my previous works, *Father, Father. Father! (2014)* and *The Last Show (2013)* which also made use of the presentational style of performer/audience relationship, in which specific fragments were performed directly to specific audience members. Drawing directly from these works, I was able to utilize established and familiar methods when devising clown material with the aim of expanding on them in relation to the objectives set out for this project. The combination of a theatre collaborative with an extant repository of creative work and established methodologies further promoted the continuation of a clearly defined stylistic personal idiom, in which *Untitled* might be neatly located.

Exploring the theme of guilt as the catalyst for the next phase of development led to identifying the situation of a farewell party, which served as a device around which I could reasonably structure multiple interactions with others. In addition, developing action around the situation of a farewell party proved to be a productive departure point for the clown-like characteristic of failure. It offered the potential for expanding on the different ways in which a series of failures could unfold throughout the evening: food arriving late; friends and family not arriving; constant interruptions from different external sources; and, ultimately, would allow for exposing the conflict within the relationships set up between Randal and audience members. Improvising around the above scenarios additionally assisted me in the development of Randal's persona: the failure of the farewell party provided scope for exposing Randal's anger and anxieties as his composure was compromised and undermined in a challenging situation.

As Lecoq suggests, the clown is the person who tries hard, but fails, and so we laugh (Lecoq 2002: 156). Focusing on Randal's overt spirituality and apparent self-composure at the outset, highlighted his subsequent loss of self-possession as the narrative unfolded and assisted in providing an arc for the character journey. These practical permutations of failure in *Untitled* repeatedly undermined the elevated spiritual tone of the celebration that Randal was attempting to create. In exploring the pattern and rhythm of failure and diminished sense of self-worth, I returned to the ideas that had prompted the project to interrogate where I personally had experienced failure and to integrate permutations of these experiences within the text. Using my subjective experience of the relationships and dynamics operating within

my own family in recent years, I was able to draw from those encounters, intensifying and expanding on my responses to them in order to develop the complex interplay between Randal and his family members. In so doing, I was able to craft nuanced material around Randal's phone calls from his family without being literal or adopting the strategies of verbatim theatre.

This exploration of failure during the crafting of *Untitled* led to my use of Jon Davison's exercises around the idea of wrongness in conjunction with Lecoq's *personal clown* and clown logic.[18] Davison says that clowns "do the wrong thing, hear wrong, understand wrong, act wrong, behave wrongly get the wrong result, look wrong, speak wrong and think wrong" (Davison 2013: 99). The manner in which clowns do things ultimately can be reduced to this idea of wrongness. I used his approach to creating clown material when exploring physical gags and finding the comedy of the situation beyond the narrative aspect of it. I explored the wrong way of: hosting a farewell; performing a spiritual ritual; using incense; hanging up a phone; eating a healthy meal; reading a self-help book; playing a guitar and djembe drum. Davison's approach to clowning, which unlike Lecoq's takes into account the historical evolution of clowns, is seen as a highly structured and ordered activity (Davison 2013: 7). My use of Davison's exercises did not directly relate to my personal narrative but were rather used as a practical tool to assist in developing physical, comedic material. The use of "wrongness" and the development of the action according to a pattern can be used to create surprising and humorous moments for the audience, with the opportunity to transform otherwise "straight" action, into the realm of comedy. These practical devices might be understood as core comedic techniques and are fruitful strategies for theatre-makers and performers wishing to incorporate physical comedy and humour to their work. The clown's wrong behaviour effectively demonstrates his failure or incapacity to get things right. Lecoq's formulation guides my recognition of this principle: "The clown is the person who flops, who messes up his turn, and by so doing, gives his audience a sense of superiority" (Lecoq 2002: 156). This characteristic of the clown's failure, as outlined by Lecoq, can be seen as an extension of Davison's idea of wrongness.

18. My use of Davison's exercises around wrongness were gleaned from his workshop I attended in 2017 at AFDA Johannesburg. These exercises can also be found in *Clown Training a Practical Guide (2013),* which I also utilized in the creation of clown material.

In Randal, the audience is invited to encounter a character whose verbal assertions are continuously undercut or contradicted by his actions. Lecoq observes: "The clown needs no conflicts as he is in a permanent state of conflict notably with himself" (Lecoq 2002: 159). Randal is continuously trying to supress his anxieties and anger around the unfolding of the farewell party by excessively using spirituality as a coping mechanism. The core of the conflict within the characterization that I experimented with is relayed through the development of the action (which progresses towards a confrontation with the self) and also manifested outwardly through contradictions inherent in appearance and manner or behaviour. I experimented with the physical manifestations of Randal's nervous and anxious energy, displayed through his gestures and physicality, being performed concurrently, and in opposition to his affectation of speaking in a composed and calm manner. The distinct sense of dissonance that emerged as a result of these contradictions was intended to tease the audience into interpreting what they see rather than taking everything at face value. The contradiction between physical behaviour and verbal manner served as a tool for inserting ambiguity into the propositions of spiritual bypassing. In developing a text around spiritual bypassing, I intended to demonstrate, through Randal, that it is a coping mechanism that demonstrates one being at conflict with oneself and is a tool for emotional avoidance. Randal clutches onto anything spiritual (self-help books, yoga, meditation, mindfulness, veganism, positive affirmations) in order to avoid feeling negative emotions and dealing with conflict within his family/friends relationships.

Wright outlines the persona of the *tragic clown,* who stops trying to debunk everything and play for laughs, but rather accepts his circumstances and his fate. Wright explains: "the dramatic circumstances are so overwhelming that games of any kind are out of the question" (Wright 2006: 237). In a sense, the mask of the clown comes off and his relationship to the world and audience changes. The climactic and final moments of *Untitled,* which revealed Randal as a sluggish and dejected human, were created in line with Wright's notion of the *tragic clown.* Wright notes that the *tragic clown* finds itself in a space where:

> circumstances drive you to act for yourself and to take responsibility. The *Tragic Clown* puts you in a state of 'it has to be done'…This could be logical, courageous or genuinely heroic, or it could be stupid and ill advised (Wright 2006: 242).

The final moment of *Untitled* saw me explore Randal's "it has to be done" moment. As the lights faded to black, he turned his attention and focused slowly on the cleaver lying next to him. My intention was to leave the audience questioning what Randal's next actions might be. This open ending allowed for a range of possible speculations on the part of the audience: Randal uses the tool to take his life forcing a farewell on his family; or, lacking the capacity for real action, does nothing with the cleaver at all. Referring to propositions regarding the *tragic clown* allowed me to move away from pure comedy and explore and create dramatic, nuanced material.

Untitled extends beyond the boundaries of a theatrical one man show of comedy and physical routines, to demonstrate strongly defined moments of clowning and clown-like elements, as examined above. Randal, however, cannot be strictly classified as a clown, nor *Untitled* a clown sketch. Lecoq and advocates of his approach to clowning say that the clown is not about performing a character but rather about playing a part of yourself: the clown is an expression of one's ridiculousness, as illustrated in the creation of one's *personal clown.* Lecoq writes:

> The clown doesn't exist aside from the actor performing him. We are all clowns, we all think we are beautiful, clever and strong, whereas we all have our weaknesses, our ridiculous side, we can make people laugh when we allow it to express itself (Lecoq 2002: 154).

McManus expands on this understanding of the clown saying the key feature uniting all clowns is their ability, through skill or stupidity, to break the rules governing the fictional world (McManus 2003: 13). Davison furthers McManus's proposition saying "The clown stands not only outside the rules of a fictional genre, but also apart from the network of social rules and cultural norms" (Davison 2013: 54). Randal stands in opposition to Lecoq, McManus and Davison. He is a fictional character with a history and background, and exists within the artistic heterocosm created by me as an experimental theatre-maker. My objective in the crafting of *Untitled* was not to create a pure clown persona, but rather to test the boundaries of using clown techniques and methodologies as creative devices. What emerged was foregrounding a character – who displayed elements of the clown – within an unfolding sequence of events that correspond with the linear structure of dramatic writing.

The use of clowning as a rehearsal strategy and methodological approach involved implementing ideas about clown personae, testing the efficacy of these propositions and facilitating creative play. I drew on three core ideas: first, the clown allowed me to examine personal narrative and to highlight the aspects of the narrative that might be emotionally sensitive; second, once the material had been developed, the clown enabled me to explore and create physical comedy by emphasizing the comedic nature of the material; finally, clown logic was used as a tool to understand narrative and develop material from a distinctly clown-way of doing things. The use of these approaches did not result in the emergence of a strictly traditional clown sketch, but allowed moments of the clown/clowning to be animated within a particular narrative form.

2.4) Randal: A Bouffon in The Room.

If clowns can be seen as forms that we make fun of and laugh at, as Lecoq suggests, conversely bouffons can be seen as forms that make fun of us (Lecoq 2006: 118). In contrast to playing consciously with the clown modality, I set out to infuse bouffonesque elements and creative methodologies within the crafting process. Prior to addressing the bouffon's impact on the creation of *Untitled*, however, it is worthwhile to acknowledge the impact of the reading that I had undertaken in developing the project proposal particularly in relation to the bouffon and his/her relation to the world of the grotesque. Mikhail Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and His World (1984),* states the following:

> the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the pot belly, the nose (Bakhtin 1984: 26).[19]

19. Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 – 1977) was a Russian scholar and literary critic most notably known for his "radical philosophy of language, as well as his theory of the novel, underpinned by concepts such as 'dialogism', 'polyphony', and 'carnival', themselves resting on the more fundamental concept of 'heteroglossia'" (Mambrol 2018).

Bakhtin's observation of how the grotesque focuses on body parts that "are open to the outside world", echoes the Lecoqian/Helikosian exploration of grotesque characters and the revelation of what is hidden.

The *Helikos* pedagogy, which has its foundations in the mask-based pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq, explores the grotesque as an expansion of the bouffon. As Fusetti proposes, the nature of the grotesque depends on the constant visible display or exposure of what is customarily repressed or kept invisible, nothing is hidden: they violate and transgress established social norms (Fusetti 2014). This transgression of normative practices is further reflected and enhanced by the use of physical deformity in the façade of the grotesque (like the bouffon's appearance of deformation conveyed though strategically placed padding) resulting in a stylized physicality. The grotesque thus refers to both appearance and manner/behaviour. The effects of utilizing the grotesque are twofold: first, any 'normal' action being done by a grotesque figure seems like a parody (Wright 2006: 300); and second, the tension that emerges in this display of a dual expression of opposing sentiments is theatrically promising. The grotesque demonstration of opposing sentiments was utilized in conjunction with my exploration of the clown's internal conflict with himself. These two elements of performance, it seemed to me, directly corresponded with each other and assisted me in articulating Randal's emotional turmoil.

This bouffonesque and grotesque notion of uncovering what is hidden constituted a key factor in the overall aesthetic and theatrical style of the work in the creation of *Untitled.* Unlike the clown, in the case of the bouffon, as Wright so neatly puts it: "The question isn't 'Who am I?' so much as 'What do I want to hide?'" (Wright 2006: 307). Through prior experience, I had been alerted to the extent to which the creation of bouffon work requires detailed and thorough research into the chosen subject/area of ridicule. It requires a critical engagement with the world/subject, effectively viewing any subject as an outsider; finding and exposing contradictions; and revelling in exposing what lies beyond the surface. Lecoq's approach to clown, which utilizes our vulnerabilities to highlight what it means to be human, is undermined by the bouffon who uses our weaknesses as ammunition against us in his/her desire to ridicule. The perspective of the bouffon inserted the scope for bouffonesque self-mockery and encouraged a harsh, if seemingly playful self-critique. This approach encouraged

me to uncover the hidden aspects of my own narrative (themes of guilt, loss, jealousy, neglect and loneliness) which promoted the creation and exploration of fictional material around specific themes. This in depth examination of my personal narrative further allowed me to contextualise myself and my narrative within a broader socio-political context: my subject identity as a middle-class, gay, white South African male, directly inspired the creation of the persona of Randal.

Gaulier implies the bouffon's readiness to address subjects that invite critical debate when he says "I have the impression that the 'bouffon world' would be a wonderful starting point today for anyone wanting to talk about the world, politics, ecology and the massacre of peoples" (Gaulier 2012: 219). When bouffons appear on stage, it is always to depict our society (Lecoq 2002: 125). Their performance serves as reflection of humanity in which we are confronted with all our human inconsistencies, contradictions and half-truths. In this way, bouffon work is always a strong comment on (or critique of) particular aspects of society. The bouffon's desire to critique society and look at the world with critical eyes, crucially motivated how I approached this theatre project.

As my creative trajectory attests, I am committed to developing theatrical work that serves as social observation and commentary on issues related to my subjective experiences and position in society. My own experience and knowledge around spiritual bypassing would thus prove an ideal behavioural strategy for the bouffon to critique: highlighting the ways in which people use spirituality as a tool of avoidance, and then using humour to critique and mock it. My critical exploration of new-age spirituality was done by investigating the contradictions and the ridiculousness sometimes found in it: silly rituals; absurd ways of "cleansing one's aura"; the healing nature of rice; incorrect usage of self-help books; terrible drumming/guitar playing; and Randal's overt bohemian persona. All of these elements a façade aiding in his emotional avoidance. I additionally explored the notion of the commodification of spirituality, which lead to Randal's relationship with Bernice, his newest friend and owner of "Psyche Truth", a store from which he purchased all his spiritual paraphernalia. His relationship with Bernice additionally allowed me to highlight the notion of white, middle-class privilege and escapist tendencies. Working with this parodical slant not only allowed me to be critical of my

subject matter, but also assisted in the development of narrative material which supported the creation of the artistic heterocosm.

The bouffon emerged as a training tool in Lecoq's school when he began interrogating ways of performing parody. His initial exercises and work around the bouffon dealt with mimicry and students making fun of one another, constituting as "...a friendly stage in the explorations of 'bouffonesque' mockery" (Lecoq 2002: 125). He then moved from mimicry, to students mocking one another's deepest convictions – what they believed, desired and held sacred. Through these initial stages of his investigation, he noted that these exercises and games seemed too spiteful and hurtful for his students, something needed to shift (Lecoq 2002: 125). This led to Lecoq's discovery of the bouffon body: the person doing the mocking had to be entirely different from the person being mocked.[20] The student's body was then masked by the use of stuffing and padding in order to create the misshapen bouffon body. Randal's grotesque body and overall physicality marked by its difference is a direct reference to the bouffon body.

Wright proposes that "the Bouffon is primarily a visual form. As an audience, we respond first and foremost to what you look like, and this image is amplified by how you move" (Wright 2006: 308). The use of bouffonesque padding in the development of the persona of Randal, allowed me to discover the mask of Randal which informed his physicality and vocal quality/patterns. The padding used to create his overly tensed shoulders, which gave the impression of him being in constant tension, dictated the way in which Randal's physicality was expressed: it directed the movement of his arms and torso, as well as influencing the way he walked. The impact of Randal's grotesque figure resulted in Randal's expressions and range of movement being highly stylised and bordering on the absurd. Wright highlights the effect of the grotesque bouffonesque body saying "If you look "worse than life" from the outset, you tend to feel less inhibited about making comments about somebody else, especially if they look socially more acceptable than you do" (Wright 2006: 304). Gaulier expands on Wright adding that "physical deformation helps express the pleasure of blasphemy and parody" (Gaulier 2012: 218). Hidden behind this grotesque mask, the performer is more able

20. My training bouffon at the *Helikos International School of Theatre Creation* is directly influenced by this Lecoqian approach to the bouffon.

to make crude jokes and poke fun at his subject because he is so different from them. The mask of Randal's physical appearance served as a tool which allowed me to safely mock and ridicule my subject, angrily expressing his dejection, without fear of personally offending the audience. It further assisted in the physical exploration and expression of internal sentiments: articulating Randal's anxieties and stress through his gestures and movements, rather than through the text or naturalistic-based psychological processes.

The performance and creation of Randal, which demonstrates both bouffon and clown qualities, parallels the work of Karen Hines, and her notion of the *neo-bouffon.* Hines, whose bouffon training is based in the work of Gaulier, acknowledged the conflict between the reactionary world of the clown and the confrontational world of the bouffon, and was drawn to fuse them. Like the Lecoqian *personal clown,* Hines developed the *personal bouffon,* who is based strongly on aspects of ourselves (Hines 2004: 15). Like the bouffons of Gaulier, who are afflicted in some way, her personal bouffon persona, Pochsy, is afflicted with mercury poisoning. Pochsy further demonstrates clown-like qualities with her love for the audience and her constant acknowledgement of the constructed theatrical experience. Crucially for my research into clown and bouffon, Hines highlights that the combination of clown and bouffon allows her to explore "horrific territory" while locating her work in the realm of comedy (Hines 2004: 20). The constant physical and emotional dissonance displayed in my performance of Randal strongly echo's the conflict Hines has explored between bouffon and clown: "The performance walks a very fine line between innocence and cruelty, sweetness and acidity, darkness and light" (Hines 2004: 20). My use of the bouffon in the approach to my personal narrative, which encouraged a self-reflexive critical examination, was a significant component in the creation of the persona of Randal. This process directly parallels Hines' notion of the *personal bouffon* who "is inspired from within, based on the aspects of oneself that one is repelled by, or on more external horrors" (Hines 2004: 15). Randal's departure from a traditional bouffon persona; his fusion with clown performance modalities; the development of *Untitled* and the creation of Randal in accordance with autobiographical fragments and personal material; and the emotional and physical dissonance identified in Randal's performance leads me to assert that he can be termed a *neo-bouffon.*

Gaulier highlights the outsider status of the bouffon with its origins in a pre-modern society:

> In the middle ages, bands of outcasts huddled together in the forests or near the marshes. The outcasts were hunchbacks, the legless, freaks, queers, prostitutes, Jews, witches, heretical priests, madmen, depressives, down's syndrome sufferers, ripples and so on (Gaulier 2012: 211).

Wright expands on this proposition, stressing the degree to which the bouffon, as a marginalised character is further dispossessed of normative quality of life saying "a buffoon is marked and set apart from society: never to get the beautiful girl, and never to share the social achievements of those of us who don't have two humps" (Wright 2006: 300). Like the clown, the bouffon living out an existence outside of society, had been instrumental in the way in which the persona of Randal developed within the rehearsal process. The bouffon is forced to the edges of society for being who he is and is filled with rage and resentment to those who sent him there. Alone on stage, Randal is an outcast, separate from his audience, his family and friends, and society. His position as an outsider, which emphasises his bouffonesque quality, also draws our attention to a distinctly atypical mode of bouffon performance within *Untitled*: the solo performance and presence of the singular actor on stage. As Wright asserts, bouffons most frequently appear in a collective or ensemble of outcasts: "They stick together because there is an obvious safety in numbers" (Wright 2006: 308). They have the capacity to make use of the ensemble and shared perspectives to explore their chosen theme, changing between characters, and creating various scenarios, songs and games (Fusetti 2014). Conversely, *Untitled* departs from this traditional bouffon modality by exploring a central narrative through the journey of a singular protagonist.

This digression of *Untiled* from traditional bouffon performance aligned with my initial objectives of not attempting to create a "pure" bouffon persona or a traditional bouffon work. My experimentation with the bouffon's critical engagement with its subject – in conjunction with my clown-like approach to a developing narrative – rather, revealed the opportunity for an earnest and honest engagement with my story. Using the mocking and playful nature of the bouffon, along with the grotesque notion of uncovering what is hidden, I was able to identify ways in which to infuse my personal narrative with an element of objective criticality. In contrast to forms where personal narrative is attempted to be portrayed on stage as realistic or true, the combination of the bouffon and clown proved to be useful tools in

liberating me from the emotional connection to personally sensitive material. These personae enabled me to be playful with my autobiographical fragments without a strong emotional attachment to it, effectively serving as strategies for eliminating risks of inhibiting play, comedy and creation of material. This approach allowed me to move away from the raw, unaltered and sentimental emotionalism of autobiographical storytelling, towards creating material in a theatrically heightened space where style was as important as content.

CHAPTER 3: *Untitled:* Reflections on The Audience Encounter and Modifying a Performance.

3.1) The Audience Encounter.

The creation of *Untitled*, as complete as it may have seemed at the end of the rehearsal process, would only be finalized when the last component was added: meeting and playing with the audience. The use of the personae of the clown and the bouffon in the creative process required a continuous and acute awareness of this crucial element on my part. The narrative material that had been established was created with the presence of the audience in mind. This approach promoted an outward focused modality of performance, shifting focus away from the self, and encouraged scope for potential audience response/reaction.

Jerzy Grotowski, in *Towards a Poor Theatre (1976),* asks whether or not theatre can exist without an audience. He answers his question, saying:

> At least one spectator is needed to make it a performance. So we are left with the actor and spectator. We can thus define the theatre as "what takes place between spectator and actor". All the other things are supplementary – perhaps necessary, but nevertheless supplementary (Grotowski 1976: 32).

Grotowski's definition places the actor-audience relationship at the centre of the theatrical endeavour and enhances his view that theatre is an encounter between spectator and performer.[21] He advances his stance by adding that "The theatre is an act engendered by human reactions and impulses, by contacts between people" (Grotowski 1976: 58). The implications of Grotowski's proposition are that theatre depends on an active presence in the same place and time of both performer and audience member. Reactions, impulses and contacts ignite the theatrical encounter and provide the space for interaction and dialogue. The implication here is that the audience plays an active role in the encounter. Adopting Bert O. States' model of the collaborative theatrical encounter encourages a deeper understanding of the role of both parties: as a performer, it is my responsibility to tell you the story/perform for you; as the audience, it is your responsibility to engage with the theatrical piece and how I (the performer) am conveying it. Given the notion, however, that theatre is a collaborative encounter, it is obligatory for me, as a performer, to respond actively to you

21. Jerzy Grotowski was a seminal polish theatre director and theorist who was most notably known for his text *A Poor Theatre (1976)*.

and improvise around what you, as the vital and constitutive participants of the theatrical encounter, "offer" me.

Expanding on the notion of audience, Samuel Weber in *Theatricality as Medium (2009),* uses the scene of the cave in Plato's *Republic (381 BC)* to explore and expand on propositions regarding theatricality and the theatre. Acknowledging that Plato's text is not explicitly focused on interrogating theatre but has far wider ramifications, Weber mobilizes Plato demonstrating that the audience in the cave, fixed in place, are thus deluded into thinking that the shadow play is in fact reality. They remain unaware of the artificiality and set-up of their context. Plato proposes (and Weber stresses) that this misapprehension is a consequence of being particularly situated: the audience is in a fixed position unable to negotiate and unaware of alternative readings of the shadow play taking place before their eyes. In the development of *Untitled,* this self-reflexive line of thinking informed my choices regarding the extent to which the performance would allow the audience to be "taken in" by a theatrically heightened presentation and persona, or not.

The audience as a phenomenon is, according to Samuel Weber, a constitutive element of theatre. The audience's position can be thought of as both literally and phenomenologically either "inside" or "outside" the diegetic world, or perhaps, as in *Untitled,* oscillating between both polarities, dissolving the distinction between them. The position of the audience fundamentally affects the way in which events and/or representations are received and interpreted, and meanings constructed (Weber 2009). Taken literally, this proposition draws attention to the configuration of the playing area since designated areas construct spaces – and roles – for performers and audiences. In other words, the identity of the text (and the experience of the theatrical encounter with the performance) is partly determined by the script but also through the spatial configuration of the theatrical space, in addition to the established style and mode of address. Randal's presence, as host of his own farewell party, situates him at the centre of the theatrical encounter, metaphorically and physically. Having situated the audience directly in front of the shrine, the sense of continuity between an informal personal shrine which flowed into the more formal seating area, was suggested by the seating circle created by cushions on the floor. These functioned to blur the line demarcating the separation of stage and auditorium and also signalled the direct implication

of the audience within the performance as a necessary component of the narrative construction.

The register of audience participation varied from night to night over three performances and also within the course of a single performance: the overall mood established each evening, and audience member's readiness to participate actively as acquaintances or performers themselves were crucial factors to the impulse and response (and dynamic) of the relationship between audience and performer. Crucially, the direct implication of the audience as key characters within the narrative and the participatory nature of the work were significant departure points from my previous work.

The identity of the audience also constituted as a key factor in the reception and understanding of the material and socio-political critique I was attempting to convey. By virtue of the performance taking place on a university campus, and the collective identity of those in attendance – which comprised a combination of invited friends, colleagues, *Wits* students and staff – the demographics of this audience was representative of a relatively privileged Johannesburg middle-class constituency. A majority of the audience knew me personally and had prior exposure to my work as a theatre-maker and performer, which encouraged a certain expectation about the type of work that they were about to encounter.

The interactive nature of the performance of *Untitled,* the solo performer, and the deliberate use of clown and bouffon modes of performance, risked disturbing or even shattering expectations of audience members who expected to see similar work to that which I had created in the past. These expectations may well have varied depending on who the audience was: friends and colleagues anticipated a clear continuation of a stylistic and aesthetic treatment of material based on their familiarity with my previous work, particularly as *Untitled* was created with the help of my collaborators (Toni Morkel and Joni Barnard); *Wits* students and staff, may have expected *Untitled* to be executed directly in relation to the rigorous academic research and writing I had been conducting throughout the year. A compelling question arises from these observations: to what extent is the writer-performer obliged to comply with or meet these expectations? Correspondingly, to what extent does the encounter offer an opportunity to challenge established norms?

3.2) Randal: The Audience meets The Clown.

As set out earlier, the presentation and performance of a clown persona explicitly depends on a response-based mode of interaction and play. Identifying core proposition regarding the clown's interactive relationship with the audience, I examine each in turn and their relation to the performances. In so doing, I highlight how my use of the clown as a tool in the rehearsal room, resulted in a rigorous interdependence in the performer/audience relationship. In the analysis of the extent to which these propositions were tested in *Untitled,* I focus on the following: the audience presence as an integral component of the performance text; the interactive and improvisational nature of the performance; the clown's existence in and continuous sense of the present moment; the pleasure of play and the autotelic quality of clown performance; and John Wright's notion of bafflement.

In as much as the clown has liberty to select from a repertoire of themes and gestures, Lecoq proposes that the clown's performance is dependent on the audience presence. He writes, "as the clown comes on stage he establishes contact with all the people making up his audience and their reactions influence his playing" (Lecoq 2002: 157). The creation of the performance text, which was specifically structured to include the audience as participant and characters in the narrative – underpinned by my understanding of States' notion of the "collaborative" mode – enabled me to test this mode of performance in my own capacity as improviser and clown. I extended on this premise of interactive performance as a form of exposition and introduction to the production style from the outset, greeting audience members as they enter the theatre as familiars. My aim was to go beyond simply breaking the fourth wall convention and to reinforce a reactionary clown-like connection and contact with the audience. The nature of this audience-performer connection suggested to audience members that they would be defined, from the very first moments, as individuals with different relationships within the diegetic world of Randal's life: his friends and family entering into his home for the big spiritual farewell celebration.[22]

22. An alternative interpretation of the performer and audience relationship within *Untitled*, might be that the entire evening is nothing more than a figment of Randal's imagination and that he is in fact alone all along, fantasizing about this farewell. In this case, there would be an ambiguous understanding of the dual identities of audience/friends within the fictional world of *Untitled.*

The interactive dialogic dynamic was consciously adopted as a permutation of a clown mode of performance in which the clown needs the audience in order to exist. The clown's interaction and relationship with the audience is immediate, as Lecoq observes: "he comes to life by playing with people who are looking at him" (Lecoq 2002: 157). What this observation implies is that without an audience, the clown would be unable to do anything, unable to generate a performance or, in other words, the clown would be unable to shape a plot or identity that is independent of the ephemeral on-stage encounter. The presence of an audience taking pleasure in and acknowledging his/her performance is the only rationale for his/her being. Applying this dynamic to my performance encouraged a strong interactive and participatory element in the relationship between Randal and the audience.

Launching the production with the opening drumming sequence served three purposes: to set the style of the encounter in terms of actor-audience modality; it created the opportunity to introduce the comedic tone of the work as a whole; and most crucially this introduction embedded the improvisatory play at the heart of the performance. This opening sequence relied strongly on deploying a range of improvisational and clowning techniques that I had been introduced to: observation and response; listening and awareness; and finding/acknowledging and developing a theme/game. I would deliberately discover ridiculous and silly ways of using the drum – using the djembe like a turn-table, drumming with different parts of my body, indulging in completely arrhythmical rhythms – listening to whether or not it had an impact on the audience. If the audience responded with laughter to my drumming, I would continue to delight them until the laughter subsided and then change tactic with another absurd drumming technique. The audience's response to my drumming fundamentally shaped the overall structure of the opening sequence of *Untitled.*

Wright states that clowns play "to have an effect on the audience rather than to serve a text" (Wright 2006: 217). This proposition draws attention to my experimentation of fusing clown performance with the obligations of relaying a personal narrative. It was crucial that I was able to incorporate clown-like improvisation in reaction to audience response, accepting or, as Keith Johnstone might put it, *overaccepting* the offers made by the audience and responding in the register and tone of the idiolect already established for Randal in order to sustain a developed character. Jacques Lecoq says that the clown "should always be in a state

of reaction and surprise" (Lecoq 2002: 155). The challenge was not to allow the audience/performer dialogue to stray too strongly from the script or detract from the narrative, but to find the balance of these opposing forces. Johnstone's notion of *overaccepting* requires the improvisor to use any external offers (in the case of *Untitled*, given by the audience) in a way that makes them as interesting as possible (Johnstone 1989: 101). Directly responding to these external offers proved to be surprising and satisfying for the audience as it overtly intervened with the expectations of a rehearsed and stable performance. This element activated the popular theatre tradition of Commedia dell'Arte and the scope for spontaneous expansion on what any given audience might enjoy. Commedia dell'Arte performers had a number of rehearsed lazzis which they were able to choose from and incorporate within a performance, depending on the audience's response.[23] Following on this established freedom for improvisation in response to the audience, I applied this practice during the short season of three performances. Rather than regarding the performances as entirely fixed and settled, I embraced the novelties and playful moments presented to me as singular and particular to each constructive audience. Doing this allowed me to discover fresh, new absurdities with each performance.

These considerations invite distinguishing between the connotations of the terms actor and player: the term actor has associations with realist theatre, naturalist performance and Stanislavsky's notion of character, implying that acting is studied and is a reproduction of set, rehearsed dialogue and action on stage. The term player, conversely, implies the presentation of self on stage as a response-based performer, ready for the variables that the "game" of theatre might bring. The spontaneity inherent in improvisation is a declaration to the audience that what they are experiencing is contrary to expectation and is an honest and direct encounter instead. This distinction between registers of self-presentation can be viewed in relation to the tension found in the varying performance techniques employed in *Untitled,* as my performance oscillated between moments of acting and playing: Randal as a character within the narrative; and the clown/bouffon as player, open and available to interact with the audience. I maintain, however, that my performance in *Untitled* tended

23. *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis (1998)* defines lazzi as: "An element improvised by the actor, used for comic characterization (originally of Harlequin). Contortions, grimaces, burlesque and clownish behaviour and endless stage business are its basic ingredients" (Pavis 1998: 196).

towards that of a player, as my use of the clown and the bouffon – at the foundations of my performance – situated me in a consistent, reactive state, ready for any unknown factors that a performance might bring.

The improvisational nature of *Untitled* together with the audience-performer relationship, are fused and inter-twined in respect of another crucial aspect defining clowning as a distinctive mode of performance: the clown's existence in the present moment. As Wright so astutely observes, "Clowns come from a pre-literary tradition where meaning is of secondary importance and where what happens in the 'here and now' takes precedence over everything else" (Wright 2006: 216). Like the Commedia dell'Arte sketch in which the performance itself, for its own sake as it were, is privileged over literary content, the clown does not exist in an imagined future or the distant past but is shaped entirely from what occurs in the here and now. Clowning thus might be defined as the art of immediacy. *Untitled* is not a story about a farewell that has happened, or one that will happen, it is taking place in the present moment. The audience of *Untitled* find themselves at a farewell which happens only because they are present and participating in the ephemeral theatrical encounter.

Jon Davison, speaking about Phillipe Gaulier's approach to the clown, says the following: "Performers must play and have pleasure, otherwise, for Gaulier, they cannot be actors at all, and much less clowns" (Davison 2013: 10). This idea leads me to the next element of clown performance: playing for the pleasure of it and playing for the audience. As Wright states: "clowns don't act, they play for the audience" (Wright 2006: 203). In the construction and scripting of *Untitled,* I ensured the space and opportunity for improvised responses to the audience input. These gaps in the text were left open to facilitate or allow for the liberatory and anarchic aspect of play as a primary component of the performance. As a performer, I am required to truly find joy on stage and have fun in what I am doing. This joy needs not only be a result of my actions and presence on stage, but also in response to the audience's reactions. Sequences that accommodated improvisation enabled me to enter into a state of clown-like playfulness and a heightened awareness of the audience.

Following Huizinga's seminal and lengthy study of play as a form and/or quality of activity, Miguel Sicart writes, "Play is autotelic – an activity with its own goals and purposes with its

own marked duration and spaces and its own conditions for ending" (Sicart 2014: 16). An autotelic action explicitly implies that the reward is contained within the activity itself rather than being located exterior to that activity. Likewise, the autotelic quality of my performance in *Untitled* allowed the games being played on stage to be presented solely as proof of a desire to generate pleasure. The enjoyment in performance is two-fold as it is mutually experienced by audience and performer alike. The pleasure that I experienced in my own performance encouraged the audience's enjoyment of my performance, as expressed by their laughter.

The audience's laughter is a crucial element of the clown's performance, as it allows the clown to understand that what he/she is doing is "working" (Davison 2018). As Lecoq observed, the audience's laughter at the clown comes from being in a position of superiority, they recognize the failure and ridiculousness of the situation and so they laugh at how silly it all is (Lecoq 2002: 156). This response can be noted in *Untitled* where the audience's laughter was in response to Randal's constant shortcomings within his tragic situation. They understood that although he was trying hard to host the perfect farewell party, and to be someone who is "spiritual" and at peace with himself, his attempts were feeble or even abject failures. Their response to Randal can be seen as an expression of *schadenfreude.*[24] The superior position of the audience in relation to the performer not only encouraged laughter, but also opened the space for dialogic interaction, talking down to the clown-like performer as seen in the numerous outbursts from audience members. I considered it crucial to relay Randal's lack of self-consciousness or self-awareness in order to highlight the comedy and accentuate the clown-like status imbalance between audience and performer.

In contrast to defining the theatrical encounter as a continuous and flowing present and its aleatory or chance-based quality as a result of audience-dependent improvisation, the demands of playing out a pre-existing written narrative suggest a performance also grounded in a far more conventional use of acting techniques.[25] What emerges is the performative demands of presenting a text and negotiating the tension of oscillating sets of performance

24. *The Cambridge Online Dictionary* describes *schadenfreude* as "a feeling of pleasure or satisfaction when something bad happens to someone else" (Cambridge Online Dictionary 2019).
25. *The Oxford Living Dictionaries* defines aleatory as "Depending on the throw of a dice or on chance; random" (Oxford Living Dictionaries 2019).

techniques. There are clear precedents for resolving the demands of rehearsed and improvised delivery: the most immediate reference point is the performance of the South African autobiographical narrative performance form, Izibongo.[26] The written praise poem is performed not only by the individual who is the subject of the poem, but also by his/her community – family and contemporaries (Coullie cited in Brown 1999: 68).[27] Unlike Western modes of autobiographical writing, which are "privately composed and privately 'consumed'", Izibongo are privately composed, and publicly consumed (Coullie 1999: 65). As Coullie observes, in her essay *(Dis)Locating Selves: Izibongo and Narrative Autobiography in South Africa:* Izibongo are essentially community affiliation rites, with auditors participating in the performance and interruption at appropriate moments with expressions of encouragement (Coullie 1999: 67). This strong collaborative nature of Izibongo results in the performance being both improvised and rehearsed: where lines are repeated, omitted and new content created by the performer or as a result of audience participation. This template of a flexible performance text would seem to offer contemporary theatre makers a valuable tool for reassessing the extent to which a performance is obliged to be fixed or stable as an index or demonstration of its crafted quality. In *Untitled,* I was testing the degree to which each performance might differ depending on the unique audience/performer dynamic established for that performance. Being able to playfully engage with the audience and stray from the "written" script resulted in the fusing of a text-based structured approach to acting with the improvisatory element of clowning and theatrical performance-based improvisation.

The historical perspective of clowns suggest that clowns are outsiders and are marginalised from their community (Davison 2013: 32). In the multi-cultural local context, I elected to focus on the notion of community as defined by immediate family and peers rather than aiming to represent relationships across the rich diverse urban communities of Gauteng. Restricting the parameters of Randal's world served to stress the narrow confines of a tightly-knit (predominantly white middle-class) group from which he perceived his exclusion. The

26. Izibongo auto/biographical praise poems are practised amongst South African cultural groups such as the Sotho, Tswana, Swazi, Ndebele, Xhosa, and Zulu. Izibongo are performed in social circumstances and subjects range from chiefs and important people, to children and ordinary individuals. The purpose of these praise are to identify the subject, giving them significance and substance within the community (Coullie 1999: 61).
27. The audience's role in *Untitled* (as friends and family) echoes the Izibongo with its representation of self as inseparable from family and community.

narrative is confined to revealing his internal conflicts and anxieties as a result of the true nature of his relationships with his friends and family. Ultimately, the audience was invited to realise that Randal is far from the spiritual and happy façade he displays, but rather a very lonely and unhappy person. *Untitled* concluded with Randal alone on stage, his family had not arrived to celebrate his farewell, and the friends that had initially joined him for his farewell party had all left. He was not in fact part of his spiritually orientated – if decidedly commercially astute – community of friends and remained isolated and excluded from his absent family unit. As the house lights dimmed, Randal's clown-like contact with the audience changed and the *tragic clown* was revealed as he contemplated the events of the failed farewell party alone. The theatrical fourth wall emerged, shifting the collaborative dynamic between performer and the audience. This new dynamic accentuated Randal's final solitary moments, suggesting that he was alone in his private space with the audience becoming voyeurs outside of the fictional world of *Untitled.*

Wright explicitly addresses the quality of bafflement so strongly associated with the clown. Not only is the pattern of a clown's routine structured to promote a pivotal moment at which this bafflement is shared, but the impact of cumulative instances suggest that the clown is more or less constantly operating from a position of being baffled by the world as constant mode of being. He says that "they come from occasions when we are flummoxed, caught out, or taken by surprise…basically you are in the shit" (Wright 2006: 195). The climactic point of revealing bafflement can be likened to the moment of vulnerability when we see a child caught eating with his/her hands in the honey jar. So too, in performance, this moment allows for sharing the impact of a façade being dropped to reveal a child-like naïve guilt. This moment of bafflement occurred within *Untitled* when Randal went into an introspective space of anxiety and stress after registering that his family had still not, and probably would not arrive. The rhythm of *Untitled* was ordered around habits, routines and comfort patterns to ease Randal's discomfort: the lavender oil, self-help books and his favourite comfort food - mayonnaise. Ultimately, even these did not have the power to placate his inner turmoil. He began to compulsively eat scoopfuls of mayonnaise with his hands and lost contact with the audience, on which he so depended to maintain his façade. After a moment, he remembered that he was not alone and once again established his connection with the audience/friends. He stared at them awkwardly, not knowing what to do. This particular moment constituted

as Randal's expression of bafflement. Bafflement has the potential to evoke laughter, however this particular moment had the opposite effect: over the course of the three performances, Randal's moment of bafflement produced a silent reaction, in which the audience get their first glimpse of Randal without the façade of spirituality. This strangely sobering moment served to remind the audience that beneath the comedic moments and silly situations found in *Untitled*, there are alternative, more disturbing and sombre layers. Like Hine's Pochsy, who explores "horrific" territories in a comedic way, the clown has the ability to not only make an audience laugh, but also to unsettle them, revealing poignant and profound thematic expressions.

The presence of the clown and clowning techniques in *Untitled* located the tone and register of the performance within the realm of comedy. This comedic aspect discouraged the theatrical endeavour from being one based purely on the inward, artistic exploration of self on stage, but rather promoted an outward focused, response-based mode of performance with the audience as a crucial component. This commitment to an outwardly focused and interactive mode of performance, however, was in contrast to the creative process employed in the development of *Untitled,* which made use of internal personal reflection together with the revelation of self and personal fragments. The generative tension between these polarities can be likened to Lecoq's development of the *personal clown*, in which personal introspection is externally explored in front an audience, who crucially assist in shaping the clown persona. Ultimately, the audience's role within *Untitled* was fundamental in promoting and shaping the performance text, activating the clown's existence in the present moment, and stimulating the playful, autotelic nature of clown performance.

3.3) Randal: The Bouffon confronts The Audience.

The reflexive analysis thus far has highlighted the collaborative nature of the *Untitled* as a result of the use of clown modes of performance. As crucially, the persona of the bouffon is equally and fundamentally dependent on the audience and a response-based performance. For the bouffon, if there was no audience, there would be no one to mock: "They are consistently monitoring audience response, continually reacting to that response, and don't make any attempts to hide these reactions" (Wright 2006: 311). Like the clown, bouffons come alive when they encounter an audience. They are filled with joy when they see someone

or something they can mock or make fun of (Fusetti 2014). The confrontational quality of the bouffon's interactions with an audience create the opportunity for, and encourage a collaborative and immersive theatrical encounter. It is the bouffon's reliance on the audience, and the nature of this relationship, that will inform the next segment of my analysis as I identify and analyse the impact of bouffonesque performative modalities on the audience. I expand on the bouffonesque use of parody and the bouffon's confrontational energy and pleasure in ridiculing the subject of its mockery, both characteristics and dispositions may be regarded as an extension of assessing theatre as an interactive encounter between audience and player.

I am interested and stimulated by contesting propositions regarding the bouffon: the difference in approaches to bouffon's developed through Gaulier's formulation and that of Lecoq's approach. Gaulier's bouffons "are vulgar, ordinary, rough, uncouth, mad, homosexuals, whores, Jews: the types that honest people pushed off to the swamps, the ghettos the forest, the types who met in fascist camps" (Gaulier 2012: 210). These bouffons seem to have a personal vendetta against us and return with revengeful rage to mock and attack those who outcast them. In contrast, the bouffon's developed by Lecoq have a different approach: "Their function was not to make fun of a particular individual, but more generally of everyone, of society as a whole" (Lecoq 2002: 126). These bouffons should not be taken personally as they do not target any particular individual, but address larger societal concerns. Wright expands on the difference in approaches to bouffon work between Lecoq and Gaulier by referring to them as oblique parody (Lecoq), and confrontational parody (Gaulier).[28] Oblique parody critiques a certain area of society, targeting a large number of people, whereas confrontational parody would be more direct and concentrated on its subject. He notes that confrontational parody is used when the subject being parodied is very specific – there are no questions or doubts around who/what is being ridiculed (Wright 2006: 322). Using this understanding, the criticality expressed through the performance of *Untitled* can be construed as oblique parody as it critiques anyone who has had any contact with some sort of spiritual practice, rather than confronting any one person, or specific group of people. Within the creation of *Untitled,* however, the use of oblique parody can be identified by my

28. *The Oxford Living Dictionaries* defines parody as "An imitation of the style of a particular writer, artist, or genre with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect" (Oxford Living Dictionaries 2019).

playful self-mockery, expressed through the bouffon's ridicule of my personal narrative, effectively directly mocking me.

Traditionally, parody as a form of comedy is a "critical and aggressive way of ridiculing the 'original'" says Beate Müller (Müller 1997: 127).[29] This makes parody a useful tool and creative technique in the creation of bouffon theatre. Wright says "A bouffon is a grotesque parody of a human being" (Wright 2006: 300). Karen Hines reinforces Wright's definition by saying the bouffon is a "dark form of clowning, which prescribes the use of bodily affliction in combination with parody to achieve its theatri-political effect" (Hines 2004: 14). Parody implies a sense of self-reflexivity, as there is an awareness of what is being imitated, and how it is being ridiculed and brought into focus. "It legitimizes [acknowledges] and subverts [critiques] that which it parodies" (Hutcheon 2003: 97). In order for parody to be successful and effective, however, an audience needs to understand and recognize that which is being parodied (Hutcheon 2003: 105). It is through this recognition that they are subjected to the artist's parodical strategy and the ironic and critical dimension of the work.

The impact of parody on the audience as a comedic device is twofold: laughter is evoked as a result of recognition; and the space for critical debate and judgement as a response is opened as a result of the artist's critique. The parodical propensity of the bouffon's approach to my personal narrative is a brave departure from the customary tone of representing the personal, as one is ultimately undermining one's subjective experience. The exaggeration, imitation and mocking of my personal narrative, however "difficult" it may have been, resulted in the discovery and exploration of broader socio-political themes. It was through these themes, and the expression of them through the narrative and the persona of Randal, that the audience were given the opportunity to connect with and recognize the parodied subject. The audience's position results in the capacity for critical detachment - functioning in a similar

29. For the purposes of this essay, I will not investigate the historical evolution of parody and relative issues of representation, as my use of the bouffon contains parody only to the extent that it is utilized as a tool of imitation and ridicule.

manner to Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*.[30] Parody's impact on the audience, like the grotesque notion of uncovering what is hidden, consequently results in a tension between the lightness of laughter and comedy through recognition, and the sombreness of critical reflection of the parodied subject.

Randal, who is a grotesque parody of a spiritually enlightened person, was crafted though the use of imitation and exaggeration in order to advance a magnified version of an archetypal hippie: breathy and controlled vocal inflections; vocal mannerisms with the reiteration of the word "blessings"; his hands consistently returning to the prayer position; excessive beads and jewellery around his arms and neck, bare feet, and "organic-looking" clothing. The excessive use of spiritually loaded symbolic objects in the set design also served as exaggerated representations of the home as shelter and shrine, locating it firmly in the world of bouffonesque parody. By virtue of the audience's laughter as a response to the persona of Randal and his world, I assert that there was a distinct recognition of the archetypal hippy persona and the bohemian new-age spiritual world that I was critiquing. This social commentary on spiritual bypassing may not have resonated with all audience members, particularly those who did not have a direct connection to new-age spirituality, however it may have opened up other questions regarding their own use of alternative strategies for emotional avoidance, be they drugs, alcohol, sex, or exercise.

Unlike the clown, whose response to the audience is more accommodating and reactive, the bouffon adopts a far more confrontational mode in encountering others. As Wright claims: "Bouffon is a form that allows you to be as confrontational as a political extremist" (Wright 2006: 328). I was interested in the scope of this relationship with the audience as a mechanism and strategy through which I could accentuate the climax of Randal's crisis, when the pretence of total well-being could no longer be sustained. I drew on Gaulier's model of the bouffon in order to emphasize Randal's sense of wrath as a result of his feelings of alienation and loneliness. The register of the bouffon enabled a confrontation with his friends

30. Brecht's *V-Effekt* is a performance and writing technique that reminds an audience that what they are witnessing is a spectacle. In so doing "the key aim was to discourage the audience from empathizing with the events on stage and instead incite them to real-life action" (Dickson 2017).

(by now well established as individual audience members) about past slights and offences delivered as accusations while messily consuming a bar of chocolate. The revelation of hidden bitterness and resentment directed towards audience members, became the tool through which I could express the intensity of dejection, of having been offended and abandoned. This intense bouffonesque confrontation reinforced the collaborative and interactive nature of *Untitled* and created the space for dialogic interaction, as demonstrated by the numerous audience members who spontaneously spoke out against Randal's accusations. Despite Randal's aggressive verbal attacks on certain audience members and the uncomfortable position this might have put them in, there seemed to be a persistent acknowledgement of the fictional theatrical encounter, and as a result, Randal's wrath was met with some form of laughter.

In *Postdramatic Theatre (2006),* Lehman asserts that the "irruption of the real" in theatre (in the form of accidental mishaps, or unintentional moments) can be seen not only as a disruptive element, but also as a "co-player" (Lehman 2006: 100). The dialogic relationship between performer and audience, and the improvisatory nature of *Untitled,* generated the potential for the inclusion of these "real" external offers. Lehman furthers his proposition arguing that the interplay between the overtly fictional and "the real" "forces spectators to wonder whether they should react to the events on stage as fiction (i.e. aesthetically) or as reality (for example, morally)" and that the tension generated by the interplay between these two modes of response, aesthetic and moral, unsettles them into a space where they are never able to fully relax into a comfortable and safe position that is customarily adopted in response to overtly fictional accounts (Lehman 2006: 104).

Gaulier states: "For the bouffon – who lets rip with his desire, pleasure, exquisite joy and delights in mocking and imitating – wishes in all his heart and his body that his victim, the turd who outlawed him, will, on seeing himself mocked in this way, promptly die of a heart attack" (Gaulier 2012: 210). This statement highlights the critical view the bouffon has towards the community that he no longer is a part of. Gaulier's approach to the bouffon, which simultaneously combines the qualities of immense pleasure and extreme loathing, encouraged me to explore a similar duality. Bouffons are continually in a state of pleasure

and enjoyment “for their whole life is spent having fun imitating aspects of human life” (Lecoq 2002: 126). The joy experienced by the bouffon’s mocking of what he knows, surprisingly resembles the pleasure the clown takes in naive, autotelic play. The pleasure derived from the bouffon’s mocking also brings to light the notion that bouffons are knowledgeable in the subject they are making fun of. Bouffons are constantly breaking character to giggle and express their joy at their sardonic mocking. My sense is that a kind of cruelty lurks in this type of encounter, if only at the level of asserting a sense of superiority over the audience. The bouffon’s knowledge equips him/her with a vast amount of “ammunition” ready at his/her disposal, to be hurled at the audience purely for his/her own pleasure.

The bouffon’s cynical yet thorough knowledge of the subject that they are ridiculing is in strong contrast to the clown’s bafflement, which conversely presents a sense of stupidity through being stumped or bewildered. The constant shifting and fluctuation of status dynamics between audience and performer is a consequence of the inherent differences proposed by the personae of the clown and bouffon. Experimenting with these opposing tendencies and contradictory impulses may have produced a corresponding reaction of unsettling the audience. An audience may find themselves in a position of ease, laughing at the performer and his/her clown-like antics, but are then caught off guard by the bouffon who confronts them hurling insults and disturbing their comfortable position. This shifting status dynamic can be seen in *Untitled* when Randal received a cleaver as a gift from his best friend, Michelle. The audience laughed in shock at the violent nature of the gift and what it illustrated about the friendship; Randal was also clearly taken aback by the symbolism of this gift. He then changed tactic and confronted Michelle about their friendship, insulting her in saccharine tones and highlighting her with extreme condescension for her over materialism. The audience moved from a position of power, laughing at Randal, to awkwardly laughing at one of their own. The fluctuating status dynamic between audience and performer, as illustrated in the above example, meant that the audience was never truly able to relax and disappear in the illusion of the theatrical encounter, rather, they were constantly being surprised into remaining present in the collaborative theatrical encounter.

My practical implementation of the bouffon's presence in the rehearsal room allowed me to craft a unique, collaborative theatrical experience not only for myself, but also for audience members. Like the clown, the presence of the bouffon located the performance text in the territory of comedy, with an inclination towards parody. *Untitled's* critical and parodical slant allowed the audience to experience theatre that is not only entertaining, but is also a critique on society from the creator's point of view. This criticality allowed scope for the audience's identification and reflection on the questions and themes raised within the work. The persona of the clown, who encourages the audience to sit back, relax and enjoy a clearly theatrical performance, was constantly undermined by the persona of the bouffon, who playfully made sure the audience never felt too comfortable in their seats. The bouffonesque desire to ridicule, confront and mock resulted in a highly interactive performance text, with an acute focus on the audience-performer relationship. This enhanced the improvisatory nature of the text which produced a unique set of performances, dependent on the dynamic of audience-performer relationship established. The overt theatricality of the bouffon allowed me to assert a non-naturalistic and heightened performance style, which further aided my expression of the bouffon's wrath.

CHAPTER 4 *Untitled:* Revealing The Theatrical Mask.

4.1) Lecoq and the Mask.

> The mask is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself. The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries...Of course it would be impossible to exhaust the intricate multiform symbolism of the mask (Bakhtin 1984: 40).

By way of introduction, Bakhtin's text from *Rabelais and his World (1984*) highlights the dual aspect function of the mask: it conceals or hides a self which effectively disappears and constructs a new façade or persona. Bakhtin locates the mask as an element of medieval carnivals. These carnivals, which were numerous and varied in form – from the "feast of fools" to church carnivals – were a period of licensed transgression in which social norms were abstracted and inverted:

> The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was of particular significance...all were considered equal during carnival…People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced (Bakhtin 1984: 10).

The transformative power of the mask to create a new persona and conceal the self, thus situates it neatly within the transgressive nature of the carnival. This understanding of the mask forms a useful framing device for the way in which I will discuss mask and theatricality in relation to the theoretical and practical implementation of my research.

The Helikosian pedagogy, crafted by Giovanni Fusetti in 2010, follows a similar trajectory to the pedagogy of the *l'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq.* Crucially, it is the work on the mask which binds the pedagogical trajectories of both that will be of most importance to me.[31] My cross-cultural training encounters with the mask as a performative tool is anchored in the legacies that *Helikos* (after Lecoq) explores. It is essential to outline the mask-

31. Jacques Lecoq's pedagogy prioritizes skills development in physical theatre and mask work. He promotes the use of a range of different masks; the revival of popular theatre traditions (commedia dell arte; clowning, bouffon); and classical elements of chorus work through an exploration of Greek tragedy (Evens & Kemp 2016: 40).

based pedagogy as it is this theatrical training that has been at the foundation of my creation of *Untitled* and the development of the persona of Randal: the larval mask – which has its origins in Basel, Switzerland – was used in the exploration of character movement, shape and direction; the full expressive mask – which was used in the exploration of physical sentiments and non-verbal performance; the half mask – directly inspired from the Commedia dell'arte tradition, was used to explore human comedy, looking at themes such as hunger, food, sex and money; and lastly the red nose, also referred to by Lecoq as the smallest mask in the world (Fusetti 2013). The bouffon can also be understood in terms of masking which extends beyond the covering/transformation of face, to that of the transformation and masking of the body – as identified in the padding used to create the bouffon's grotesque figure.

The use of the mask in the creation process can be a liberatory tool for the performer as its transformative force discourages a self-awareness that could become an obstructive element while crafting material. Fusetti furthers this proposition of mask as a tool for creation, saying the following:

> Play is a particular state of consciousness and each theatrical genre flows from a specific "state". The ability to reach this state in order to play and to create from it, is the essence of the shape-shifting vitality of the actor. Each form, each character, each mask, each movement, each story, is the threshold into an altered state of consciousness. To play is to participate to an enhanced state of vitality, to be aware of connections and to constantly "re-act" to movement (Fusetti 2019).

The use of the bouffonesque full-body mask of Randal was a crucial component in the creation process of *Untitled,* as it not only allowed me to explore his physicality but encouraged me to indulge in the autotelic playful spirit of improvisation, creating material from Randal's "state". Crafting material in this way allowed for free-flow improvisation where the director/writer part of the self did not hinder the creative process. This was an effective approach as I was freely able to create material around my theme, which was video recorded and used as the foundations for the construction of the narrative.

My use of masking as a mode in which presentation and theatricality is heightened can be traced back and identified within the creation of my previous work – *KidCasino (2017).* Previously, I have made use of bouffonesque padding to develop the mask of the characters

– their physicality and movement vocabulary – and to reveal the world of the grotesque in relation to the thematic content. Both *KidCasino! (2017)* and *Untitled* have made use of the persona of the bouffon as a tool to explore mask and theatricality. This approach, in conjunction with the academic objectives of this research, can be seen as an expansion and development of my previous methodologies. In *KidCasino! (2017)*, the notion of the mask had been developed and extended from its use as a tool in the rehearsal room, and was clearly identifiable on stage: the performers were dressed from head to toe in white clothing, including white shoes, white nails, and white contact lenses. This monochromatic costuming, against a sparkling backdrop (a silver glitter curtain and reflective plastic flooring) resulted in a defined aesthetic and treatment of the visual aspects of the work. The creative decision to adorn the characters in white costumes was a direct reference to the full-body masking of the bouffons found in the pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq, whose puffed up bodies are traditionally white with additional costume pieces, as seen in images 3 (traditional bouffons) and 4 (*KidCasino! 2017*) below:



Image 3



Image 4

The extension of the mask from its use as a tool in the rehearsal room to its appearance on stage, as seen in the characters of *KidCasino!(2017),* could also be identified in *Untitled* as seen in Randal's grotesque form as a result of the full-body mask of the bouffon.

The use of the red nose and my established clown persona Randal FaxMachine in the crafting of *Untitled*, constitutes another permutation of mask work. Lecoq noted that the use of the red nose in his exploration of clown helped in allowing his students to "expose their nativity

and their fragility" (Lecoq 2002: 154). Wright reinforces this by saying that the red nose is used to "amplify your expression of bafflement" (Wright 2006: 212). According to Davison, it seems that the red nose has come to signify the clown itself (Davison 2013: 65). Improvising in red nose allowed me to access the clown-like nativity and bafflement of Randal when crafting material around my chosen theme. It functioned as a key into Randal Faxmachine's "state" and allowed me to playfully improvise with his foolish persona. The red nose in contemporary clown training is, however, a recent phenomenon, as re-established by Jacques Lecoq, and is in fact derived from the figure of the auguste clown.[32] The use of the red nose, however, is not essential in order to perform clown, as is demonstrated in *Untitled*, which contains clearly defined moments of clowning, yet is performed without the red nose.

The seminal nature of *Woza Albert! (1983)* asserts the presence of the red nose as mask into the South African theatre paradigm in the 1980's, locating its use within this much celebrated South African text.[33] The red nose is used symbolically, when the performers play the roles of their suppressors: white men. The immediate association of the red nose is with the comedic persona of the clown, which highlights the creator's attitude towards the characters of the oppressors. In effect, the red nose is not being used to explore the traditional clown or clowning techniques, but rather as a tool of mockery and social commentary on the white man and the apartheid regime. This contrast between comedy and commentary situates the work within the territory of satire. Traditionally, satire, like parody, is used to mock and ridicule, seeking to "persuade an audience that something or someone is reprehensible or ridiculous" (Griffen cited in Street 2010: 82).

In contrast to a Stanislavskian, method-acting approach to theatre, which "focuses upon psychology and emotions as well as a personalization of the role" (Kerber 2016: 6), working with the mask reverses this method, encouraging performers to approach the creation of

32. In the early 19th Century, the persona of the auguste clown began to emerge within the circus. He emerged as a counter point to the already established white-faced clown. "Next to him the white-faced clown seems like an aristocrat" (Remy cited in Davison 2013: 70). The evolution of the august clown, which saw the addition of a prosthetic red nose and oversized clothing, established contemporary understandings and ideas of what "clown" was (Davison 2013: 65).

33. *Woza Albert! (1983),* created by Percy Mtwa, Barney Simon, and Mbongeni Ngema, is a seminal South African theatre work. It follows the story of two prisoners, Mtwa and Ngema who imagine Christ's second coming to apartheid South Africa.

character from the outside in: the mask allows the physicality and movement vocabulary to be discovered and developed first, which is then followed by the discovery of vocality and the psychological components of the character. This mask-based approach, which is at the core of my training gleaned at *Helikos,* places the body and physicality at the centre of the creative process. The transformation and masking of my own body into Randal's grotesque, bouffonesque body can be understood as an overt declaration and expression of theatricality. As spectators, when we watch a theatrical mask being performed by an actor, we do not believe that the performer is the mask, we accept its artifice as part of the theatrical encounter and we observe the performance knowing there is an actor behind the mask and we are watching the character of the mask being played. Similarly, in *Untitled,* the audience were not being asked to believe that my body was Randal's body, but rather to enjoy the persona of Randal and the effect of the overtly fabricated appearance of the mask. The culmination of my training in mask work at *Helikos,* and my understanding of the Lecoqian mask-based pedagogy leads me to assert that the mask in theatre is a useful and valuable tool for expressing and embracing the theatricality and "constructed-ness" of the theatrical encounter.

4.2) Theatricality and the scope for "truth" and sincerity.

Denis Diderot, in *The Paradox of Acting (1883),* argues that nature (the everyday) cannot compete with a pre-arranged show or a work of art.[34] He asserts that within the everyday we find moments of sublimity, however it is the artist who recognizes these moments and feels it with his passion and genius, who is able to preserve its sublimity (Cole & Chinoy 1970: 167). Halliwell echoes Diderot's notion by identifying the central argument of Goethe's article found in art criticism journal *Die Propyläen*: "art must rise above mere illusionism toward a kind of entrancing idealism" (Halliwell 2002: 3). Halliwell's concept of the artistic heterocosm embraces the artist's creativity, emphasizing that the artist is not attempting to recreate/mirror reality, but rather represent it in a way that highlights his/her subjective point of view.

34. Diderot (1713 – 1784) was a French art critic, philosopher and writer. His most elaborate work, *Encyclopedie,* was a French elaboration of the English encyclopaedia. His book *The Paradox of Acting (1883)* asserts the anti-emotionalist notion that actors should be devoid of sensibility (Cole & Chinoy 1970: 161).

Referring to Josette Feral's essay *Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language (2002)* allows me to expand on Diderot and Halliwell's perspectives by looking at how it is the transformation of the quotidian space/subject that allows theatricality to emerge. Feral's position directs our attention to the relationship between spectator and performer: "theatricality appears to be more than a property; in fact, we might call it a process that recognizes subjects in process; it is a process of looking at or being looked at. It is an act initiated in one of two possible spaces: either that of the actor or that of the spectator" (Feral 2002: 98). Feral sees theatricality as a transformative process which is either initiated by spectator, or actor. It may be triggered by the actor who declares his/her potential to perform, or by the spectator who transforms a person into a spectacle. This process of theatricality creates, what Feral refers to as, the "other" space:

> By watching, the spectator creates an "other'' space, no longer subject to the laws of the quotidian, and in this space he inscribes what he observes, perceiving it as belonging to a space where he has no place except as external observer...Theatricality produces spectacular events for the spectator; it establishes a relationship that differs from the quotidian (Feral 2002: 105).

My use of the traditional theatre space allowed me to create the "spectacular event" that Feral speaks of. I was able to initiate the process of theatricality by making use of the theatre facilities and resources available to me (lights and sound), and in effect, creating the "other" theatrical space. It is within this space that, like that of the carnival, both audience and performer briefly suspend their established quotidian roles and understanding of the outside world, and are encouraged to embrace the fictional rules governing the world of the theatrical experience. In so doing, the process of theatricality results in hierarchical structures being abstracted and inverted, and new, fictional relations and dynamics being formed and explored.

In line with Feral's propositions regarding theatricality, Weber's *Theatricality as Medium (2009)* highlights the audience/performer relationship as a key component of theatricality. Weber's interrogation of Plato's cave in order to understand theatricality, calls attention to the position of the audience in relation to the performer/action. The physical positioning of the audience within *Untitled* – which situates them directly in front of the performer and

inhibits them from seeing the mechanics/backstage of the work – invites them to forget about the world outside of the theatre and "buy into" the illusion of the theatrical experience. Unlike the spectators in Plato's cave, who whole-heartedly and uncritically accept the illusion, viewing the shadow play as reality, the audience of *Untitled* do not. Their pre-existing understandings of theatre and metaphorical position in relation to the work prevent them from believing that *Untitled* is a depiction of reality for a number of reasons: their relationship to the performer outside of the work (friends, colleges and acquaintances); their acknowledgement of the framing of *Untitled* as a theatrical work as part of creative research for an MA dissertation; their recognition of the overt non-naturalistic treatment of the performance text; and their understanding of the theatre setting as a space in which theatrical works are staged. This metaphorical and physical positioning of the audience results in two contradictory and opposing forces: the audience are being asked to accept the theatrical illusion; yet are encouraged to recognize what is clearly non-naturalistic and enjoy what is overtly declared as a performance. These opposing forces affect the way in which the audience make meaning and receive the theatrical project. Deborah Griggs, in her essay *Theatricality and Global Theatre (2015),* acknowledges this tension inherent in Weber's concept of theatricality saying "It is a tension between what is seen and what is not seen by the spectators. It is a relationship between the everyday world and the world of the stage" (Griggs 2015: 3).

If *Untitled* can be viewed as an overtly fictional, theatrical experience that embraces a non-naturalistic performance style, how is truth and sincerity conveyed within this encounter? If the audience are being prompted to suspend their disbelief and jointly conspire in the theatrical illusion, but enter the theatre with pre-existing knowledge that what they are about to experience is nothing more than a theatre work, how do they interpret what is clearly fantastical and fabricated in order to decipher that which is the authentic or truthful experience on which the elaborate playfulness and illusion is built? It is these questions regarding the tension between the audience's symbolic and physical position, in relation to the actor/action, that will expand my interrogation into the ways in which truth and sincerity can be negotiated within the *Untitled.*

Antonin Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double (2018),* originally published in 1938, outlines his concept of *Theatre of Cruelty,* which places its audience at the very centre of the theatrical encounter (Artaud 2018: 62). He says the following regarding truth:

> The public, which mistakes the bogus for truth, has the sense of what is true and always reacts to it when it appears…we have been told for too long that theatre is all lies and illusion…we have become accustomed to purely descriptive and narrative theatre, narrating psychology…People exerted their ingenuity to bring to life on stage credible but detached beings, with the show on one side and the masses on the other – and the masses were shown only a mirror of themselves (Artaud 2018: 57).

Artaud alludes to the notion that it is possible we have become accustomed to one type of theatre – in this case naturalism and its exploration of psychology – which has led to the audience's narrowed understanding of what constitutes as truth in theatre. Halliwell's notion of the artistic heterocosm offers similar views to those of Artaud, suggesting that even though a theatrical encounter may be a strong departure from what is understood as authentic and real-seeming, a spectator still has the ability to be "taken in" by a theatrical experience. If an audience member is able to suspend their disbelief by accepting and acknowledging the constructedness/craft as part of the theatrical encounter, he/she would be able to engage with fictive world of the artwork. Engagement in the artistic heterocosm consequently opens up the opportunity for the audience's potential continuum of responses to the work, from empathetic and emotional resonance to a more detached analytical reaction. The audience have the opportunity to find authenticity within the inner-world of the work, without being dependent on veracity as an indicator of truth.

In the post-performance discussion of *Untitled*, a *Wits* staff member who had seen the second performance of *Untitled* – critiqued my performance on the grounds that they had struggled to empathize with the persona of Randal as they felt he was a caricature and mockery of a spiritual, new-age persona.[35] This critique and position highlighted a challenge I faced in the creation and performance of *Untitled.* As Wright proposes, "The grotesque fascinates us

35. "Caricature is a stylised, visual representation of a character" (Wright 2006: 277). Used as a tool in parody and satire, it allows an audience to immediately recognize characters by their larger-than-life representation. Similarly to the satirical use of caricature, the bouffon uses caricature as a tool when playing out small scenes and sketches. Caricature can be useful when a theatre work does not permit time and space for character development and exposition, such as in comedic sketches and bouffon work.

because it repels and intrigues us at the same time...you're too bizarre to arouse our pity and too weird to be a person" (Wright 2006: 306). If the bouffon's appearance and manner is designed and calculated to be simultaneously compelling and fascinating, it is simultaneously capable of repelling sympathetic engagement. I had consciously aimed for an overt theatrical performance style and grotesque appearance throughout the rehearsal period, and my performance of Randal relied on this construction as a central aspect of my characterization. As a theatre-maker and performer, how am I able to illicit a cathartic response from the audience towards a larger-than-life, almost caricatured persona who demonstrates such resentful sentiments towards the audience?[36]

I refer to my reflections and journal documentation regarding the three performances of *Untitled* in order to address this question/concern. The first two performances saw me focus my attention on the overt theatricality and clown/bouffon nature of Randal*,* playing for the laughs, focusing on physical style, and finding joy in audience/performer relationship. On the final night of my performance, however, I chose to focus my performative energy on the narrative aspect of *Untitled.* I did this by removing the padding from my costume, with the intention of making Randal appear more "human-like" and less of a grotesque parody/bouffon. This was premised on the intention of emphasising Randal's emotional journey within the narrative, complying with audience expectations of a "realist portrayal" of character in order to allow for emotional connection. Whether or not this had any effect on the audience's connection to Randal or experience of the narrative is impossible for me to assert and verify, as post-performance conversations with my collaborators yielded conflicting opinions. In my opinion, this decision, however, allowed me to uncover a more nuanced and delicate performance, which may have promoted a balance between my clown-like/bouffonesque performance and my connection with the audience.

36. "Catharsis is a metaphor used by Aristotle in the *Poetics* to describe the effects of true tragedy on the spectator. The use is derived from the medical term *katharsis* (Greek: "purgation" or "purification"). Aristotle states that the purpose of tragedy is to arouse "fear and pity" and thereby effect the catharsis of these emotions" (Kahn 2019: 1). Catharsis results in an emotional event in the spectator in which a "purging" or release of emotions takes place by virtue of the spectator's sympathetic/emotional engagement with character and narrative.

On reflection of the three performances of *Untitled,* together with the rigorous interrogative demands of my research*,* I recognize, however, that the intended audience response to *Untitled* extended beyond merely arousing sympathy and triggering empathetic engagement/identification as the primary and most crucial response in the audience. Rather, *Untitled* encompassed a more complex set of ideas and reactions. Brecht, who strongly rejects empathy in theatre, argues that emotional engagement thwarts critical thought and recognition of the ideological or political forces at work (Cummings 2016: 29). The use of the bouffon can be seen to have functioned as a Brechtian device, as its use of parody and caricature, which are inseparable components of bouffonesque performance, explicitly invited cognitive judgment on behalf of the audience and the opportunity to engage with the work on a critical level. The bouffonesque quality identified in Randal almost precluded any sympathetic engagement with him on the part of the audience by virtue of his grotesque form and vitriolic rage. The satirical and parodical nature of the work, which might have resulted in the audience not feeling entirely sympathetic to Randal as a character, nonetheless accomplished my intentions of creating the opportunity for a rational/reasoned analysis and critical response. This performative testing of the complex demands of playing a persona with strong bouffonesque qualities revealed the capacity not only to engage the audience on an intellectual level (through the bouffon's parodical point of view), but also to arouse sympathetic engagement from an audience, despite the bouffon's malevolent nature. This range of possible responses can be unsettling for an audience as they are continually having to question and reassess their position and responses to the work, ultimately never being able to completely relax into the theatrical encounter.

Artaud's assertion that theatre should satisfy the senses and be affective, is reflected in his model of *Theatre of Cruelty*, which made use of violent action, amplified sounds and excessive lighting, which, "far from imitating life, communicates wherever it can with pure forces (Artaud 2018: 62). Artaud asserts that truth can be found not only in the mirror-reflecting performance of the actor, but also in the audience's response to the theatrical encounter. This affectivity identified in Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* might be useful in accounting for the range of responses to *Untitled.* The forceful and affective nature of the theatrical experience on the audience, in order to elicit visceral and physical responses, constituted a form of truth found within the theatrical encounter. The effect of the actor's performance (the persona of

Randal) on the audience (his friends), which resulted in a highly interactive audience/performer relationship, demonstrated the authentic nature of the audience's response.

In *Tricks of The Trade (1991),* Dario Fo says the following about authenticity in theatre: "in theatre – only the false is authentically real" (Fo 1991: 178). His statement suggests that the artifice of the theatrical experience is a greater indicator of veracity than the reflection of the "real". Traditionally, the theatre has been established as a space where one expects to witness fictional stories and experience the illusion of the theatrical encounter. The attempt to present reality or "truth" on stage then seems to negate and discount the theatrical experience in itself. Is the declaration of the theatrical artifice and illusion not more truthful and authentic than the attempted portrayal of the "real" on stage?[37] I assert that it is my understanding and use of the clown and the bouffon, who are inextricably linked to the mask, in conjunction with my world-constructing approach to the creation of *Untitled*, that defines it as a truthful and authentic theatrical experience. That is not to say that the "real" or truth does not appear in *Untitled,* I maintain that my use of personal narrative and the revelation of universal themes as the impetus for the creation of material, situate my theatrical treatment of *Untitled* in the real/authentic experience.

37. Dario Fo was an Italian actor, director and playwright. The political and satirical nature of his works, as demonstrated in his seminal *Mistero Buffo (1969)*, made him an "influential playwright and theatre-maker" (Mazzilli 2018).

CHAPTER 5: Untitled: A Personal Narrative Transfigured: A Conclusion.

The objective of my practice-led research creative project has been to test the impact of adopting the masks of the personae of the clown and the bouffon in order to shift the idiom, register and tone of personal narrative in theatrical encounters. It is worthwhile addressing what would have emerged had I not pursued the enquiry into the impact of these personae on issues and experiences directly embedded in personal family dynamics. The emotionally sensitive themes (the death of my father, my mother's relocation and the fracturing of the family unit) would lead one to assume that the performance text that would have emerged would have taken on a more dramatic, somber tone; the narrative content would possibly have been directly derived from the personal narrative; and the tone potentially corresponding more closely with a confessional, therapeutic relaying of personal issues on stage. This imagined version, which contrasts significantly with what did emerge, would have made use of autobiographical fragments and experiences in a more literal and unembellished manner to achieve this effect. This possible version leads me to assert that the use of my methodology and approach to creating theatre yields unique results: the interactive nature of *Untitled,* the strong dialogic relationship with the audience, and the heightened theatrical style of the work, are all strictly a result of a clear engagement with and commitment to a theatrical method with its associated stylistic implications, particularly my exploratory and generative use of the clown and the bouffon.

5.1) A theatrical heightening of personal narrative.

A reflection on the meanings and connotations of the term "personal narrative" allows for the setting up of a concluding overview of the achievements and outcomes of my project. Personal narrative refers to a fragment or experience within a person's life as told by that person. This definition can be linked to the term autobiography, which, refers not only to fragments/experience, but to the full scope of a person's life. In literature, autobiography refers to the self-written record of one's life, whereas in theatre, it refers to the self-performed stage production of one's life. Correspondingly, semi-autobiographical is also worth deliberating as it implies the use of autobiographical content, but only to a certain extent as there is also scope for the inclusion of fictional content. Here I also differentiate

between works that are autobiographically inspired, versus works that are exclusively autobiographic/personal narrative: the former implies that there is no obligation for the inclusion of "real-life" content, or any direct connection to autobiography, but events/characters in the narrative can be inspired by "real-life" situations and experiences; the latter presupposes that narrative is an unmediated, comprehensive and authentic testimonial or recounting of the person's life. These terms and understandings, in relation to theatre and performance, suggest the personal/self being performed on stage, or that the play-text is based on the life of the author.

This use of personal narrative as a story-telling strategy can be traced within the South African theatrical paradigm from protest and resistance theatre in the 1970's, through to contemporary South African theatre examples. Works such as Athol Fugard's seminal *The Island (1973), Asinimali (1985)* by Mbongeni Ngema, and the work of Barney Simon, all demonstrate a strong connection to personal experience and the use of autobiographic or testimonial fragments in order to create the play texts. These works reflected on life within South Africa under the apartheid regime: "Simon's use of the personal was political. His plays about South African realities (apartheid, race, class etc.) made 'stories, memories and social struggles visible'" (Coleman 2014: 7). Subsequently, from 1996, the world witnessed The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which saw 1674 public hearings take place over two years, where victims and perpetrators were given the stage to tell their personal accounts of crimes committed under the apartheid regime. "The TRC essentially developed and nurtured a desire to explore personal truth, truth telling and memory" (Middeke et al. 2015: 5). The public nature of these hearings, where audiences were allowed to attend and watch, transformed the TRC into a form of theatre. Designed to affirm the significance of the individual subjective experience, the exploration of truth and memory developed as a theatrical "trend" that then carried on long after the end of the TRC (Middeke et al. 2015).

Homann writes "Between 2002 and 2008 we saw a rich and diverse mix of new plays. The flood gates had been opened and what emerged were new playwrights and new works that detailed personal stories rather than exclusively social and political conditions" (Homann 2009: 13). The significant shift in focus might be described as a movement away from representations of collective, shared experiences of the theatre of testimony, forged during

the late Apartheid years, to theatrical forms that, like the TRC hearings, actively embraced the presentation and affirmation of personal experience (Middeke et al. 2015). The impact of the TRC was reflected in works such as *Ubu and The Truth Commission (1997)* a collaboration by Jane Taylor, William Kentridge and the Handspring Puppet Company; Yael Farber and Thembi Mtshali-Jones's collaboration, *A Woman in Waiting (1999)*; and *Tshepang (2003)* by Lara Foot Newton. Personal experience, largely expressed through detailed personal accounts, verbatim text and the dramatic representation of real-life events on stage, constituted key elements in the story-telling strategy of the above works. This exploration of truth and authenticity on stage can be extended to include more contemporary theatrical examples like *The Line (2013)* by Gina Shmuckler and *The Fall (2017),* a collaboration of *The University of Cape Town* theatre students. These works, which can be located in a docu-drama style of theatre, both contain the use of verbatim text, video footage and imagery as part of the performance text: Shmuckler interviewed perpetrators, victims and journalists involved in the xenophobic attacks of 2008 (Shmuckler 2013); and *The Fall (2017)* utilized documentary footage and student's personal experiences of the Fees Must Fall student protests of 2015 (Samson 2017).[38]

Although only partially representative of South African theatre, these texts highlight the use of personal experience and autobiographic material being developed for narrative treatment and presentation. It is crucial to note that this strategy is not distinctly South African or an unmistakable characteristic of South African theatre, rather, the widespread use of the verbatim model is a current global phenomenon (Norton-Taylor 2011).

Personal narrative can be seen as a story-telling tool, whose appeal and dependence lies in the degree to which the theatrical project is represented as unquestionable veracity, integrity and truth. For example, in works found in the protest theatre of the 1970s and 1980s, personal narrative was used to highlight and reflect the state of South African society. The

38. Docu-Drama, or documentary theatre is "a style of theatre performance and /or theatre making or performance making where documentary material such as interviews, reports, media material and transcripts are used as the primary source for the script" (Eckersley 2015). Similarly, verbatim theatre is defined by verbatim practitioner Alecky Blyth as theatre that is created "from interviews, collected with real life people about an event or maybe a subject…and then those real life people are then portrayed on stage by actors" (*An introduction to verbatim theatre* 2014).

formal associations of presenting "truth" from the position of witness is embedded in the form of theatre of testimony. The narrative gains credibility as a socio-political critique and a declaration that acknowledges the subject position of the person presenting "evidence", as can be seen in works such as *The Line (2013)* and *The Fall (2017).*

It could be argued that the above examples, which overtly celebrated the embeddedness of personal narrative as appropriate material for public presentation, may well have fostered a set of expectations and assumptions for local audiences and requirements on the part of the story-teller, who is obliged to demonstrate and declare a sincere presentation of self. These assumptions and expectations were highlighted in my post performance discussion when I was asked the following question: "when was it [*Untitled*] personal narrative and when was it a character study?" (Pombo 2018). The issue embedded and raised in a question such as this, points to the assumption that the performance is, at least in part, interpreted according to what would seem to be measurable signs and guarantees of veracity. The discussion participant had previously revealed that they had struggled to identify what was "supposedly a personal narrative" within *Untitled* (Pombo 2018).

What responses and observations of this nature signal is the reluctance to embrace the potential for fictional and even highly theatrical constructs to embody thematic concerns. I readily concede that *Untitled* does not seem to fit into the neatly defined category of autobiography and the performance of "self" on stage. It was developed and crafted from the use of personal experience, which I submit has led to my profound understanding and personal connection to all the themes and issues addressed in the narrative. It is this connection to the personal that leads me to assert that despite the aspects of exaggeration, heightening and selective emphasis in *Untitled,* the text is still deeply embedded in personal testimony and sought to discover a new form for its expression.

One could interpret personal narrative and autobiography in theatre as a form of self-presentation on stage. Coullie, referring to Izibongo and narrative autobiography, amplifies what is at stake in this kind of proposition saying that "both narrative autobiography and praising seek to define a self...a desire to fix, to define, identity...Both are essentially attempts to communicate this *interpretation of self* to others" (Coullie cited in Brown 1999: 62). Viewed

this way, my creative choices in developing *Untitled* in their own right are a declaration of self as an artist: the construction and presentation of myself on stage constitutes a public display of how I wish to be perceived as artist and performer. A distinct artistic style and particular treatment of content is able to highlight an artist's subjective way of viewing the world and has the possibility of revealing multiple layers of his/her identity.

In the case of *Untitled,* the comedic register and playful tone are qualities that I aimed to explore as tools for addressing emotionally sensitive issues. My evolving artistic and stylistic signature, as established and developed over the past 10 years as a theatre-maker and performer, communicates multiple aspects of my being and sense of self as a psycho-sexual personal and social subject: the theatrically heightened style and comedic treatment of material not only communicate to an audience that I enjoy humor and comedy, but reveals the *type* of humor that asserts my subject identity; the bouffonesque and satirical nature of my work further reveals my critical voice and publicly presents issues/content that I find important and worth talking about. It is through the presentation of *Untitled,* that audiences are exposed to the way in which I view and approach the world around me, and in so doing, understand more about me. The careful and considered crafting of *Untitled* thus not only assists in the development and definition of my theatrical style but can also be seen to constitute a type of performance and representation of self on stage.

Johnstone problematizes the notion of art/performance as self-expression, saying:

> We have this idea that art is self-expression – which is historically *weird.* An artist used to be seen as a medium through which something else operated. He was a servant of the God. Maybe a mask-maker would have fasted and prayed for a week before he had a vision of the Mask he was to carve, because no one wanted to see *his* Mask, they wanted to see the God's…Once we believe that art is self-expression, then the individual can be criticised not only for his skill or lack of skill, but simply for being what he is (Johnstone 1989: 78).

What is useful about Johnstone's proposition is that he alerts us to the need to guard against assumptions embedded in the notion of regarding art purely as "self-expression" and judging accordingly: we are rendered cautious as any critical judgements are in fact directed at the individual. Potential criticism is further impacted on by pre-established

relations with perceptions of the individual. Johnstone's stance highlights the need for dramatic transposition and theatrical craft and a separation of artwork, and self.

The "autobiographical pact", a term coined by Phillipe Lejeune, expands on issues associated with audience assumptions and expectations in relation to autobiography:

> Lejeune's pact is a sort of contract or promise made by the author for the benefit of the reader: it attests to the authenticity and veracity of the work. The author pledges (implicitly or explicitly) to the reader, that the author, the narrator and the object narrated refer to the same person (Hewitt 1992: 27).

This "pact" between author and reader, or in the case of the theatre, between performer and audience, assures the audience/reader that what they are seeing/reading is a true and authentic representation of the author's/performer's life. Canadian playwright, performer and director Robert Lepage writes about his father – a taxi driver in Quebec – who, in the 1970s, offered tours around the city and neighbouring towns.[39] On these tours, Lepage's father would explain the history of Quebec and stories about the various neighbourhoods. Lepage would accompany his father on these tours and began to note that the content of these stories, would often change and shift: "He would add details and fiddle around with the facts to make sure there was enough material. Exaggeration and embellishment are essential tools for both guide and story-teller" (Lepage 1998: 26). It was on the long stretches of open road, between the towns and cities, that Lepage's father would embellish, pad and embroider these stories about the history of Quebec. Though they contained fabricated material and were not entirely historically accurate, they were nonetheless engaging: "His most beautiful stories were often told in the empty spaces" (Lepage 1998: 26). These stories challenged the "autobiographical pact", as importance was placed on the story-telling experience rather than on the accuracy of facts.

The opportunity to transform, embellish and invent are *essential* tools for the theatre-maker, and in my opinion of greater value than the historical authenticity/accuracy of the material. Using autobiographical material was a crucial strategy of the devising process, as it allowed me to ground my work in a real and authentic experience. What was of greater importance

39. This was taken from Lepage's Book, *Connecting Flights (1998),* in which he addresses a variety of topics in reflection on his creative practices as a theatre practitioner and makes the case for heightened theatricality.

to me, however, was the artistic treatment of my material and the theatrical experience/journey that I was able to create for the audience. Once an audience are enticed into accepting the artifice of theatricality and release expectations around what theatre should/shouldn't be, the assumptions regarding the importance of the "autobiographical pact" could be tested. Like Lepage's father's stories, *Untitled's* emphasis on stylistic and formal aspects encouraged the audience to embrace and enjoy the theatrical experience, without having to question of the authenticity of what they were witnessing, effectively taking focus off the "autobiographical pact". Applying Lepage's understanding of the "story-tellers" license to embellish material in the interests of holding the attention of his/her audience, I submit that my understanding and application of the methodology proposed in this research, resulted in the enhancement and abstraction of my personal experience to a theatrical level.

The use of verbatim text and real-life footage in docu-drama, together with the portrayal of "truth" and "authenticity" on stage as a primary tool for securing the audience's engagement, might have the effect of negating the scope for theatrical expansions and abstraction of narrative material. Docu-drama, with its goal of collating and archiving personal data – for the individual and the community – might be considered inseparable from the project of preserving histories. Via this proposition, along with the way in which personal story-telling embraces the individual honouring and recounting their own life, personal narrative story-telling can directly be linked to how memory functions for both individual and community. Lepage acknowledges the interplay of memory with the public archives of "history" and "myth":

> we have lost our oral memory. People document and write things and photograph in order to record the past. So our memory has no need to work. So our memory no longer distorts fact by filtering them, which makes it harder for history to be transformed into mythology (Lepage 1998: 6).

Lepage's commitment to transforming history into myth aligns with the scope and outcomes of my enquiry into the practice of fusing clown and bouffon with personal narrative. The use of these personae have allowed me to avoid "authentic" representation of personal experience in favor of dramatic and theatrical representation, where illusion and mythology become tangible and real.

It is through Lepage's writing about his production that I make the connection between personal narrative/autobiographic content and memory. Memory and the act of remembering involves a process of recounting the past. Personal narrative/autobiographical content can thus be seen as inseparable from memory as it is constructed and built up through a recollection of one's life. Memory, however, is not wholly reliable as it involves selection, emphasis, abstraction and omission inevitably embedded in the process of remembering. In *Connecting Flights (1998),* Lepage points to the way in which memory operates, distorts facts and filters them, by virtue of the flaws inherent in the way in which we recount events (Lepage 1998: 16). Lepage, who has been described as an "avant-garde auteur", has gained "international critical and popular acclaim for his epic and visually striking stage works" (*Looking Ahead to Robert Lepage's Coriolanus* 2017). In a completely different register, working in the field of applied theatre, Helen Nicholson reiterates the concerns that Lepage addresses. She draws our attention to the inseparable link between fiction and reality, highlighting what is at stake in probing this relationship. She writes: "autobiography [as an act of remembering] often blends the fictional with the real, and over time, fictionalized narratives found in myth and legend are integral to narratives of selfhood and community" (Nicholson 2005:66).

The propositions of both Lepage and Nicholson acknowledge that the process of memory inherently contains the interplay of abstraction and distortion. The "raw content" of experience is also subject to deliberate shaping into a story designed to capture and hold the attention of a specific audience: the way in which I regale my friends with a story, may shift and change when I tell the same story to my grandparents.[40] Both are equally true, but selective mechanisms filter content, tonality and the mode of address. Abstraction and distortion thus occur in personal narrative/autobiography as a consequence of the story-teller's intentions and deliberations and also as an unintended outcome of which they not consciously aware.

40. The various ways in which language is used by virtue of who is speaking, and who is being spoken to can be referred to as multilanguageness, or heteroglossia. The term, heteroglossia, first used by Bakhtin, describes the "fact that a person is a 'social person' and a 'speaking person' and that language…is influenced by and carries the impact of 'future and former' languages from street languages to aristocrat language to the various languages of casual, daily discourse" (Hardison 2009).

Lepage, viewing the unreliability of our memory as something to celebrate says that "People complain about the unreliability of memory, but we should rejoice in it, *use it as a creative tool"* (Lepage 1998: 17). It is the imperfections of our memory that enable us to exaggerate, emphasise, and distort whether intentionally or not. Like Diderot, Lepage is not concerned with the perfections of memory in order to portray life on stage as "true" and historically correct. On the contrary, he is interested in and relies on the imperfections of memory in order to create his art:

> Poetry and art depend on our ability to recount events through the imperfections of our memories…What really counts is how we transform events though the distorting lens of memory. It's the blurred invented aspects of story-telling that give it its beauty and greatness (Lepage 1998: 16).

The transformation of my personal narrative in the creation of *Untitled*, involved multiple levels of abstractions and distortions: the deliberate abstraction as a result of my editing of the personal experience for the purposes of this research; the unintentional distortions in the remembering process; and the intentional theatricalization in the application of my proposed commitment to experiment with the theatrical personae of the clown and bouffon. The effect of this multi-layered distortion resulted in the primary focus being taken off any overt declarations or attempts at literal representation of the personal narrative, in favour of the theatrical treatment of experience. Like the guitarist in Wallace Stevens' poem *The Man with The Blue Guitar (1937),* who says "Things as they are, are changed upon the blue guitar", the bouffon and the clown have served a similar function. The guitar, which serves as a metaphor for perception and imagination "…does not express reality, but instead creates or decreates a new reality as perception" (Callahan 2003).[41] Correspondingly, personal experience is impacted on and altered when combined with these popular theatre personae, creating a new reality and creative expression.

My objective throughout this project in both its creative and discursive components has been to test the scope and range of approaches to material that might be defined as personal

41. Wallace Stevens' poem *The Man with the Blue Guitar (1937)* "is not one poem, but thirty-three poems tied together by a common concern with the relationship between life and art, reality and the imagination (Nissen 2000).

narrative, effectively testing the limits of the obligation to restage events, and incidents, as accurately and authentically as they take place in everyday life. When events and experiences become part of the theatrical experience and life is seen to be represented on stage as authentically as possible, the need for distortion and theatrical expansion seems to dissolve and dissipate. The commitment to a heightened presentation via the overtly theatrical personae, I suggest, operated as a mechanism to enhance and abstract the truth in a way that reveals hidden themes, alternative artistic heterocosms, and underlying metaphorical layers. This kind of informed creative approach (as tested and demonstrated in the creation of *Untitled)* is obliged to accommodate and acknowledge the risks of shattering expectations in the interests of expanding assumptions of what personal narrative might be in South African theatre. For performers and theater-makers, it allows an objective distance away from emotionally sensitive material, where the personal is theatrically transformed through the fabrication of a heterocosmic environment in which the performer encounters an audience. For audiences, the theatrical treatment expands what one expects to see from personal narrative material, where focus is taken of the presentation of self/personal and importance is given to the theatrical experience itself.

REFERENCES.

Core Texts:

DAVISON, J. 2013. *Clown*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

DAVISON, J. 2015. *Clown Training: A Practical Guide.* Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

GAULIER, P. 2012. *My Thoughts on theatre, ex Tormentor.* Editions Filmiko.

JOHNSTONE, K. 2012. *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre.* New York: Routledge.

LECOQ, J. 2006. *Theatre of Movement and Gesture.* New York: Routledge.

LECOQ, J. 2002. *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre*. New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama.

STATES, B O. 1985. *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre.* Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

WRIGHT, J, 2006. *Why Is That So Funny?.* London: Nick Hern Books Limited.

Secondary Texts:

ARTAUD, A. 2018. *Theatre And Its Double.* Richmond: Alma Books.

BAKHTIN, M. 1984. *Rabelais and His World.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

BAILEY, B. 2003. *The Plays of Miracle & Wonder: Bewitching Visions and Primal High-jinx from the South African Stage.* Cape Town: Juta and Company Ltd.

BELL, D. 2015. *Mask Makers and Their Craft: An Illustrated Worldwide Study.* North Carolina: McFarland and Company Inc. Publishers.

CALLAHAN, B. 2003. *www.writing.colostate.edu* The Abstract Imagination: Decreating reality in “The Man with the Blue Guitar”. https://writing.colostate.edu/gallery/parataxis/callahan.htm Accessed on 7 March 2019.

Cambridge Online Dictionary, 2019. *https://dictionary.cambridge.org/* Cambridge University Press. Accessed on 4 March 2019.

CASSIRER, E. 1972. *An Essay On Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture.* Yale University Press.

COLE, T. and Chinoy, H. K: 1970. *Actors On Acting.* New York: Crown Publishers Inc.

COPEAU, J. 1990. *Texts On Theatre.* London and New York: Routledge.

COULLIE, J L. 1999. (Dis)Locating Selves: *Izibongo* and Narrative Autobiography in South Africa. In: BROWN, D. (Ed.) *Oral Literature & Performance in Southern Africa.* Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.

CUMMINGS, L B. 2016. *Empathy as Dialogue in Theatre and Performance.* New York: Springer.

DAVIS, T C. and Postlewait, T. 2003. *Theatricality.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

DICKSON, A. 2017. *www.bl.uk.* Bertold Brecht and epic theatre: V is for *Verfremdungseffekt.* https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/bertolt-brecht-and-epic-theatre-v-is-for-verfremdungseffekt. Accessed on 4 March 2019.

DIDEROT, D. 1883. *The Paradox of Acting.* London: Chatto & Windus.

EVANS, M. and Kemp, R. 2016. *The Routledge Companion to Jacques Lecoq.* London: Routledge.

FO, D. 1991. *Tricks of The Trade.* London: Methuen Drama.

FUSETTI, G. 2019. *www.helikos.com.* Bouffons and the Ecstasy of Mocking. http://www.helikos.com/pages/workshops-details.php?post=81&lang=en. Accessed on 4 March 2019.

FUSETTI, G. 2019. *www.helikos.com* Giovanni Fusetti. http://www.helikos.com/pages/blog.php?lang=en. Accessed on 4 March 2019.

FUSETTI, G. 2019. *www.helikos.com.* Pedagogy. http://www.helikos.com/pages/sede.php?lang=en. Accessed on 4 March 2019.

GALE, Cengage Learning. 2016. *A Study Guide For Athol Fugard's "Sizwe Banzi Is Dead".* Michigan: Gale Group.

GROTOWSKI, J. 1976. *Towards a Poor Theatre.* London: Eyre Methuen Ltd.

HALL, E. and HARROP, S. 2013. *Theorising Performance: Greek Drama, Cultural History and Critical Practice.* London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.

HALLIWELL, S. 2002. *The Aesthetics of Mimesis Ancient Texts And Modern Problems.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

HARDISON, K P. L., 2019. *www.enotes.com.* Heteroglossia. https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/whats-meaning-heteroglossic-text-126637 Accessed on 6 March 2019.

HAUPTFLEISCH, T. 1997. *Theatre and Society in South Africa. Some reflections in a fractured mirror.* Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik Academic.

HENRICKS, T. 2015. *Play and the Human Condition.* Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press.

HEWITT, L D. 1992. *Autobiographical Tightropes: Simone de Beauvoir, Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras, Monique Wittig, and Maryse Condä.* Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.

HINES, K. 2004. *The Pochsy Plays.* Toronto: Coach House Books.

HOMANN, G. 2009. *At This Stage, Plays From Post-apartheid South Africa.* Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

HOMANN, G. and Maufort, M. 2015. *New Territories, Theatre, Drama Performance in Post-Apartheid South Africa.* Brussels: P.I.E Pieter Lang.

HUIZINGA, J. 1950. *Homo Ludens.* Boston: Beacon Press Books.

HUTCHEON, L. 2003. *The Politics of Postmodernism.* London and New York: Routledge.

JOHNSTONE, K. 1989. *Impro: Improvisation and The Theatre.* London: Methuen Drama.

LEBANK, E. and BRIDEL, D. 2015. *Clowns: In conversation with modern masters.* New York: Routledge.

LEHMAN, H. 2006. *Postdramatic Theatre.* New York: Routledge.

LOGAN, B 2016. *www.theguardian.com. '*Once you can handle the insults, you begin': inside Phillipe Gaulier's clown school. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/aug/02/philippe-gaulier-clown-school-emma-thompson-sacha-baron-cohen-edinburgh-festival-interview. Accessed on 8 March 2019.

Looking Ahead To Robert Lepage's Coriolanus! 2017. https://www.stratfordfestival.ca/SceneNotes/2017/October#Looking . Accessed on 7 March 2019.

LOUE, S. and SAJATOVIC, M. 2008. *Encyclopaedia of Aging and Public Health.* Cleveland: Springer Science & Business Media.

MAMBROL, N. 2016. *www.literariness.org.* Homi Bahbah's Concept of Hybridity. https://literariness.org/2016/04/08/homi-bhabhas-concept-of-hybridity/. Accessed on 4 March 2019.

MARTIN, C. 2013. *Theatre of the Real.* Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

MAZZILLI, M. 2016. *www.theconversation.com.* Dario Fo, controversial playwright and satirist, takes final bow, aged 90. http://theconversation.com/dario-fo-controversial-playwright-and-satirist-takes-final-bow-aged-90-67083. Accessed on 4 March 2019.

MCMANUS, D. 2003. *No Kidding. Clown as Protagonist in Twentieth Century Theatre.* Newark: University of Delaware Press.

MIDDEKE, M.,SCHENIERE P., HOMANN G. 2015. *The Methuen Drama Guide To Contemporary South African Theatre.* London: Bloomsbury.

MÜLLER, B. 1997. *Parody: Dimensions and Perspectives.* Amsterdam – Atlanta: Rodopi.

NISSEN, A. 2000. *www.tandfonline.com*. Perpetuum Mobile: Reading Wallace Stevens's 'The Man With The Blue Guitar'. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1076/0013-838X%28200005%2981%3A3%3B1-M%3BFT227?needAccess=true Accessed on 4 March 2019.

NORTON-TAYLOR, R. 2011. *www.theguardian.com.* Verbatim theatre lets the truth speak for itself. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2011/may/31/verbatim-theatre-truth-baha-mousa. Accessed 8 March 2019.

NICHOLSON, H. 2005. *Applied drama the gift of theatre.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2019. *https://en.oxforddictionaries.com.* Oxford University Press. Accessed on 4 March 2019.

PAVIS, P. 1998. *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis.* Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press.

PEACOCK, L. 2009. *Serious Play: Modern Clown Performance*. Chicago: Intellect Books.

ROWE, N. 2007. *Playing the Other: Dramatizing Personal Narratives in Playback Theatre.* London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

SAMSON, L. 9 2017. *www.designindaba.com.* Ameera Conrad on the joy and "realness" of telling the stories of unheard voice. www.designindaba.com/articles/creative-work/ameera-conrad-joy-and-realness-telling-stories-unheard-voices. Accessed on: 22 March 2018.

SCHECHNER, R and WYLAM, L. W. 2013. *The Grotowski Sourcebook.* London and New York: Routledge.

SCHLECTER, J. 2003. *Popular Theatre: A Source Book.* London and New York: Routledge.

SCHULZE, D. 2017. *Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre and Performance: Make It Real.* London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishers.

SICART, M. 2014. *Play Matters.* London: MIT Press.

STEPHANOU, I. and HENRIQUES, L. 2005. *The Word In an Orange. Creating Theatre With Barney Simon.* Johannesburg: Jacana Media.

STREET, J. 2010. *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy: Second Edition.* New York: Macmillan International Higher Education.

SWAN, T. 2019. *www.tealswan.com* Spiritual Bypassing. https://tealswan.com/resources/articles/spiritual-bypassing/. Accessed on: 4 March 2019.

TOBIAS, A. 2007. The Post Modern Theatre Clown. In: Robb, D. (Ed.) *Clowns, Fools and Picaros. Popular forms in Theatre, Fiction and Film.* Amsterdam and New York: Brill. Pages 37 – 56.

TOWSEN, J. 1976. *Clowns.* New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc.

WEBER, S. 2009. *Theatricality as Medium.* Fordham University Press.

WETHEIM, A. 2000. *The Dramatic Art of Athol Fugard: From South Africa to the World.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

WRIGHT, J. 2017. *Playing The Mask.* London: Nick Hern Books Limited.

Journal Articles / Academic Papers

NISSEN, A. 2000. *www.tandfonline.com.* Perpetuum Mobile: Reading Wallace Stevens's 'The Man with the Blue Guitar'. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1076/0013-838X%28200005%2981%3A3%3B1-M%3BFT227 . Accessed on 7 March 2019.

COLEMAN, R. 2014. *The significance of Barney Simon's theatre-making methodology and his influence on how and why I make theatre : an auto-ethnographic practice as research.* Theatre and Performance. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

GRIGGS, D. 2015. *www.academia.edu.* Theatricality & Global Theatre. https://www.academia.edu/11229333/Theatricality_and_Global_Theater. Accessed on 4 March 2019.

FLEISHMAN, M. 1991. *Workshop Theatre in South Africa in the 1980s: A Critical Examination with specific reference to Power, Orality and the Carnivalesque.* Theatre and Performance. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

FERAL, J. 2002. *Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language.* Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.

KAHN, M. 2019. *www.academia.edu. '*Catharsis' in Aristotle's *Poetics.* https://www.academia.edu/7853397/Catharsis_in_Aristotles_Poetics. Accessed on 4 March 2019.

KERBER, T J. 2016. *The Vocabulary of Acting: A Study of the Stanislavski "System" in Modern Practice.* Theatre and Performance. Birmingham: University of Birmingham.

SCHMUCKLER, G. 2013. *Trauma on Stage: Making theatre about xenophobia in South Africa using the 'structures' of trauma.* Theatre and Performance. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

Workshops/Lecture Notes

FUSETTI, G. 2013. *Helikos International School of Theatre Creation.* 2nd Year Lecture Notes. Florence, Italy.

FUSETTI, G. 2014. *Helikos International School of Theatre Creation.* 3rd Year Lecture Notes. Florence, Italy.

DAVISON, J. 2017. *How to Create Clown Material.* 23 – 27 January 2017. Lecture Notes. AFDA, Johannesburg.

Interviews

POMBO, R. 2018. VIVA Recording of Untitled (2018) with Roberts, S., Bester,G., Kabwe, M. and Jacobs, P on 1st October 2018. University of The Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Cellular phone recording in possession of Roberto Pombo.

Appendix A.

Untitled: Production Stills:













Appendix B.

List of devised theatre and Productions /collaborations (2009 – 2019):

Babbelagtig (2018-2019)
– directed by Jenine Collocott, created by cast.

Untitled (2018)
- directed by Toni Morkel, created by Roberto Pombo

KidCasino! (2017)
– directed by Toni Morkel, created by Roberto Pombo and Joni Barnard.

ReChoir! (2017)
- created Roberto Pombo and Anthea Moys.

Rat Race (2016)
– created by Kyla Davis, Ameera Patel and Roberto Pombo.

We didn't Come to Hell for The Croissants (2015)
– directed by Lindiwe Matshikiza, performed by Jemma Kahn and Roberto Pombo.

Father, Father. Father! (2014)
- directed by Toni Morkel, created by Roberto Pombo, Joni Barnard and Rachael Neary.

Non Succede Mai Due Volte (2014)
– created by Roberto Pombo.

The Lost Couple (2013)
–created Roberto Pombo, Kyla Davis and Daniel Buckland.

Princey and Queeny (2013)
– created by Roberto Pombo and Anja Beslova.

The Last Show (2012)
– created by Toni Morkel, Jemma Kahn and Roberto Pombo.

Buck (2009)
– created by Roberto Pombo.

Appendix C.

Untitled: DVD and Script:

Untitled

Written and Devised by Roberto Pombo

Directed by Toni Morkel

As the audience enter the theatre, they are met by the free-spirited Randal, who is seated centre stage, playing a djembe drum, dressed in a "bohemian" style – baggy yoga pants and shirt, lots of jewellery and barefoot. He is surrounded by two large theatre flats, covered in colourful fabric to create a shrine-like setting, adorned with dream catchers, bells, and other "spiritual" ornaments. Downstage right, a small table is covered with fabric. On it is a vase of plastic flowers and a cell phone. A guitar leans against it. Downstage left on a bigger table covered with fabric, is another vase of plastic flowers with a portable cd player next to it. There are also some self-help books scattered on the table. Upstage centre is a shelf that serves as Randal's alter. Once the audience has entered, Randal concludes his playing. The atmosphere should be sacred and ceremonial.

Randal (*addressing the audience*)
Some beautiful African rhythms, thank you.

He stands up in silence and walks upstage centre to his alter that has various ornaments on it. He ceremoniously lights some incense. As he does so music begins playing. He walks around the audience blessing them with his incense. He then blesses himself with the incense. He puts the incense down and picks up a Tibetan singing bowel. He walks around the audience ringing the bell. He places it back down on the shelf. He then grabs a handful of flower petals, walks downstage centre and throws the petals over himself. He coughs and splutters as some get into his mouth. The music fades.

Wow, what a beautiful way to start the evening. Thank you. Firstly, thank you all so much for taking the time out of your busy schedules to make it here tonight for my big spiritual farewell. As you all know, I will be leaving on a three-month pilgrimage to India next week to study that ancient art of yoga, meditation and mindfulness, under some incredible Indian gurus. Like Guru Ashraf Garafna, Baham Baramba, and Alala Bamba. I am super excited as this all about my personal self-improvement and enlightenment. You know, so that I can

become the best possible version of myself that ever lived possible. Because my enlightenment… *(He pauses)* …is your enlightenment. My self-improvement is the world's self-improvement. Okay this isn't about me guys, this is about you. So…thank you.

He initiates an applause.

Thank you so much! WOW! Thank you! It is an absolute honour and pleasure to see so much of my community here tonight. And also, to see so many of my best friends!

He spots someone in the audience.

Guys look who is here, it's Michelle! Hi Michelle!

He waves at Michelle for an awkwardly long time. He continues to wave to her as he speaks.

(To Michelle)
Hey howzit going! Haven't seen you forever? How's the new house? How's the new car? How're the new dogs? How's the new husband? How are you? You are looking amazing.

He waits for her response and improvises around it.

(To the audience)
Michelle and I go way back guys! We have been friends for like ever. It hasn't always been the best friendship but underneath it all there is so much love! Right Michelle?

He spots another one of his friends in the audience.

And look who else is here, its Georgie! Hi Georgie!

Again, he waves at Georgie for an awkwardly long time, and continues to do so as he speaks.

Georgie is my new housemate and friend. And he/she is also an incredible poet, watch this. Georgie, what rhymes with cat?

He waits for Georgie's response.

See? Wow! Amazing!

He spots someone else he knows in the audience.

And look who decided to arrive tonight, it's Mark! Hi Marky Mark!

He continues to wave as he speaks.

No Marky, there is no alcohol here tonight and no, I am not coming out with you afterwards to pick up random guys for sex and to take cocaine and get drunk okay!? I am not about that life anymore.

He excitedly spots another friend.

And look who else is here, it's Bernice! Hi Bernice! I am so happy you came tonight!

He walks over to her and gently grabs her hands.

Guys, Bernice is my newest, dare I say best-est friend. We met about a month ago at a crystal healing conference and struck up the most incredible connection. I don't know if it was spiritual, or physical or emotional or what it was but we just BOOM! Connected! I mean she's an Aquarius and I'm a Gemini so we just *(he makes a slurping sound)* connected.

He does some mental connection gestures to her, like they understand each other without talking.

Also, everything you see here tonight was purchased at Bernice's cute little store Psyche Truth. It's an amazing little shop that sells a whole bunch of spiritual paraphernalia...*(he walks around the space as he names things)* like, handmade clothing, jewellery, beautiful flowers, American-Indian fabric, dream catchers, crystal quarts, lucky cats, Tibetan singing bowels, peace and harmony incense, self-help books, African drums and anything else you need on your road to enlightenment. She also has an online store that you can visit at www.psychetruth.com and if you enter the offer code "make me spiritual now", you will receive a 10 percent discount on all purchases. So please do support.

He scans the room.

Now who else is here…Oh look it's Sonja from work at the call centre, Hi Sonja! And my next-door neighbour Steve! Hi Steve! Thanks so much for coming! And who else…

He pauses shocked.

(to Linda)
Linda? Linda oh my gosh I am so sorry I didn't even recognize you! Wow! Hi! Sjoe…you are looking different. I am so sorry I heard about your father, how terrible. Oh gosh, and I also heard about you and Dan. Sorry man! And lordy…I heard about your car…just BOOM! Blew up? Crazy! And also…apparently you are diabetic now! What?! Madness! Sjoe…when it rains it pours right? It's like you've got this black cloud over your head and it is just pouring down and you can't escape it! But I must say, even after everything that you have gone through, you are looking amazing.

He shakes his head.

(to the audience)
Guys, let's give her a round of applause she has gone through a lot.

He initiates a round of applause and takes position upstage right.

Friends, when we see someone who isn't doing well in life it really makes us realise what we have. I have my friends and family, I have my direction in life, I have my good looks. So, it is so important that we look at our own lives every day and think about what we have to be grateful for.

(to Linda)
So Linda, actually thank you so much for being here for putting everything into perspective for us.

He grabs her hands, as he does so he pulls back in shock.

AH! Gosh. I can just feel all the negative energy, and pain, and anger and sadness in your hands. So much negativity.

He has an idea. He runs over to the CD player, and presses play. A self-help, motivational track begins playing. He performs a cleansing ritual on Linda which ends with him pouring rice over her.

WOW! Your aura has literally gone from a dull grey to a bright yellow and you are looking amazing!
He runs to get the CD cover.

That track was from the album, "1000 positive affirmations for a more fulfilling life" also purchased at Bernice's store. So thank you Bernice!

The phone rings. He runs to pick it up.

Hi Darryl are you guys outside? Mhmm. Mhmm. No! No worries, not a problem at all. Don't even stress. We are all here waiting for you so not a problem. Mhmm. Okay, well just let me know when you guys are on your way. Okay…tell Mom and Dad I say…okay, okay bye, bye, bye!

He hangs up the phone.

That was my family, and they are running late. As usual. Probably my mom's fault. She is always late. But it's fine! I am totally okay with it! Also…because everything happens for a reason, right?

Eerie music begins playing softly.

What if they were on their way here right now. And there was a stationary truck in the road, and my father only saw it last minute and he swerved and flipped the car and the BOOM! They all died! Gosh. I wouldn't want that to happen. That would be terrible. No. I love my family I don't want them to die. So, I am actually happy that they have not left yet.

He puts his cell phone back down and begins tapping his chest.

Everything happens for a reason, I love my family, I do not want them to die.

He pauses still tapping his chest and looks at the audience.

When you tap heart centre everything you say becomes truth. Everything happens for a reason, I love my family, I do not want them to die.

He stops tapping and resumes his position centre stage. He reaches into a little bag hanging at his waist, and takes out a small bottle. He opens it and takes a big sniff. He breathes out. It clearly relaxes him.

Lavender oil, free from Bernice's store with every purchase of two-thousand rand or more. Thank you, Bernice.

He puts the little bottle away and checks the time.

Alright friends, I have some incredible stuff lined up for us this evening. Let's just sit back and relax and let's try connect okay? Because this is the last time I will be seeing a lot of you for a very, long, time.

Traditional Indian sitar music begins playing as he takes his seat on the ottoman centre stage. We see him attempt to sit cross-legged in the iconic yoga position, but his attempts are feeble and he settle for sitting down with his legs in front of him.

I thought we would start the evening with a poem, written by my housemate and friend Georgie. Georgie, I hope you don't mind if I read this out loud, it is just such a beautiful poem. Also…I am going to ask you to come sit next to me just for the connection okay?

He motions for Georgie to sit next to him. Once seated, he mentally and emotionally connects with Georgie. He takes the hand-written poem out of his pocket and begins reading.

The Traveller, a haiku by Georgie.
Goodbye my dear friend,
Travelling, travelling, tra
Velling my dear friend.

He erupts into applause.

Wow! Amazing! Some people know words rights! Sjoe! Thank you, Georgie!
Guys, just some background about Georgie and I. Georgie is actually my brother's ex-girlfriend's cousin. So, we have actually known each other for a while but it is only over the last couple of months that we have become real friends. And wow! What a friendship right. We have been through a lot. Georgie has been in and out of rehab…and I have been there to support him/her. Financially. He/She also just moved into my house so YAY! House mates! But I will say Georgie is now sober, so congrats!

He initiates an applause.

What Georgie...it's been eleven…twelve hours now? And I just want to say we are so proud of you. So, we wish you all the luck on your road to sobriety and continue to inspire us! Thank you!

He initiates another round of applause and motions for Georgie to leave the stage.

Friends, it is so important that we look around at our community and find those in need and help them out. Just like I have helped Georgie out. Which is why I am asking you, if you have not already please, please, please can you log onto my crowdfunding campaign website for my trip to India and donate some money. I am still quite far off my target and it is stressing me out. I am aware that some of you have already donated, so thank you Steve, thank you Sonja, and thank you so much Bernice for your huge contribution. I am aware, however, that some of you have not donated. Which is weird because we're supposed to be best friends right? So, if you haven't donated please can you log on and donate now, it is so important that we support our community.

The doorbell rings. Randal walk over to stage left and picks up the intercom receiver next to the vase of flowers.

Hello? Hello my friend, no thank you. I don't need any brooms today. No thank you my friend I don't need a broom today. No sorry I don't have any old clothes for you today my friend. No sorry I don't have any old shoes for you today. No sorry I don't have any old bread for you today. Sorry my friend. No, but what I do have is this…

He picks up a book of motivational quotes off the table. He opens it on any page and reads the quote.

Just as rain will not ravage a well-thatched house,
So craving will not ravage a well-trained mind.

He pauses waiting for a response.

No, no, no, I am sorry my friend I don't have any money for you today. Sorry my friend, goodbye.

He puts the receiver down and walks back to centre stage.

I am sorry, where was I? Oh yes please long onto www.crowdfund.com/randalgoestoindia to donate.

An alarm goes off. Randal rummages through his bag, as he does so a packet of cigarettes and a lighter falls out. He eventually finds a remote and presses it. The alarm stops.

I am so sorry, we have a problem with the alarm system. Every time the doorbell rings, the alarm goes off.

The phone rings. He walks over to answer it.

Hello? Hello my friend, everything is fine, thank you so much. The password is Lotus flower. Lotus Flower. Lotus Flower. Flower. Flower. Like a Lotus Flower. Lotus Flower. Yes, thank you so much. Goodbye.

He hangs up. As he is about to put the phone down he spots a message on his phone. He reads it and begins tapping his chest clearly irritated.

I am sorry, I have just seen a message from my brother saying that they are still going to be another 40 minutes because my mom just wanted to stop past my aunt's house on the way. And that is fine. That just means we are not going to wait for them anymore, and we are just going to have to carry on with the evening's proceedings.

He quickly reaches into his pocket and takes out his lavender oil. He takes a long sniff and relaxes. Gentle music begins to play. He walks to his alter upstage centre and picks up a large plate of raw kale leaves. He takes the plate into the audience and distributes the

leaves. Once distributed, he takes a seat on his ottoman and produces his own plate with a single kale leaf. The music fades.

Alright, just before we have dinner. I would like to give a huge thank you to Bernice for doing the catering tonight. It looks amazing! Thank you so much Bernice!

He initiates a round of applause.

Boun Apetito everyone!

Music starts playing again while everyone eats. He begins munching away on his kale leaf. His face clearly shows that he is not enjoying it but he gestures to Bernice saying it is delicious. After a couple of bites, he reaches behind him and produces a salt shaker. He covers the kale leaf in salt and offers the audience. He then produces a mayonnaise bottle from behind the ottoman and dips the kale leaf into the mayonnaise. He offers the audience mayonnaise. He then devours his kale leaf, clearly enjoying it much more with the mayonnaise and salt on. As he finishes eating, he begins to become agitated. His hands begin reaching towards his phone. He gets up quickly and checks his phone and then sits down. He does this again, becoming more irritated seeing that there are no messages on the phone. He checks one last time and eventually sits down highly agitated. He makes eye contact with Linda and gestures to her, asking if she is ok. He repeats this gesture three times until eventually he becomes completely flustered.

I am sorry everyone I am sorry!

He gets up and the music stops abruptly.

(to Linda)
I am sorry to disturb dinner everyone, but Linda! You have hardly touched your food. You are just sitting there with this frown on your face, sucking the negative energy out the room and it is killing me! Now listen here. They are gone. Your dad and your boyfriend and your car are gone. You need to stop thinking about them okay?

(to the audience)

Friends, it is so important that we concentrate on what we do have, not on what we don't have okay? We need to stop thinking about that dark cloud over our head, and concentrate on the mountains, with the sun coming up. You know why? Because after a storm, there is always the sun! Winter always turns to spring! Rough roads lead to positive destinations. You can't control the waves but you can learn how to surf! A positive attitude is a small thing that makes a big change!

(To Linda)

And Linda that is all you need! A shift in attitude, a smile on your face and a song in your heart! A song in your heart!

He has an idea. He runs to get his guitar. He strums it but it is out of tune. He tries to tune it but is unable to. He spots his djembe drum, grabs it, and begins his terrible drumming.
He starts singing to Linda.

(singing)

Don't worry my friend,
It's going to be okay my friend,
Your father's dead, it's true,
You're watching Netflix in bed, that's true too,
Your life really sucks,
But that's okay the sun will come up,
The sun will come up, the sun will come up my friend. x 4
Save tonight, fight the break of dawn,
Come tomorrow, tomorrow I'll be gone,
Save tonight, fight the break of dawn,
Come tomorrow, tomorrow I'll be gone. x 2

He initiates a round of applause for himself.

See Linda? All you needed was a smile on your face and a song in your heart and your aura….is…it's now huge!

The phone rings. He runs over to get it.

Hi Daryl, are you guys outside? Mhmm. No but I said there was going to be dinner here tonight. Daryl why does she always do this!? I know I know…okay, well, let me know when you guys are on your way. Ok, tell mom and dad I love…okay, okay bye, bye, bye.

He slams the phone down. Eerie music begins to play softly.

I got the cutest family ever. I have the cutest mom, and the cutest dad, and the cutest little brother and I just want to hold them and squeeze them and love them so much because they are so cute! And they are still going to be about another hour because my mom loves her Italian food. And that's fine. I am totally okay with that. Because…everything happens for a reason right. I mean, what if they ate here tonight and my mom choked on a kale leaf and died? I wouldn't want that to happen. Or what if they were on their way here right now, and they stopped at a robot, and another car pulled up behind them and four guys jumped out and pulled them out the car and shot them and they all died! Why did you say that!? I wouldn't want that to happen! I love my family, we are all so close-knit and tight and supportive of each other, and I don't want them die. So, I am actually happy that they are not here.

He walks to put his phone down while tapping on his chest.

I love my family, I do not want them to die everything happens for a reason.

He repeats this mantra as the tapping on his chest becomes more violent. He is clearly upset and becoming overwhelmed. The music swells. He eventually stops the violent tapping and reaches for his lavender oil bottle. He takes a big whiff, and then empties the contents into his mouth. He runs over to a pile of self-help books and begins reading a passage from A New Earth *by Eckhart Tolle. He begins hitting himself with the book as his read, he collapses*

to the floor and discovers his mayonnaise behind the ottoman. He begins eating the mayonnaise with his hands directly from the jar. He circles the ottoman. He eventually lands upstage left with his back to the audience still eating the mayonnaise. The music fades out quickly. He slowly turns to see the audience, who see him with mayonnaise all over his mouth and lips. He smiles sheepishly, puts the jar down on the alter, and slowly walks over to the ottoman. He sits down. He composes himself, smiles at the audience as if nothing has happened, and as he does so, the traditional Indian sitar music begins playing.

They say one should not run away from the storm, rather one should learn to dance in the rain. So, let's keep the positive attitude up, and carry on with the evening proceedings by moving onto the opening of gifts! YAY! Gifts thank you so much!

He walks over to the downstage right table and picks up four gift bags which are placed in front of the table. He takes a seat on his ottoman and begins opening gifts.

Okay, this first one is from Linda. Thank you, Linda.

He takes out a slab of chocolate.

Chocolate, obvious. Thank you, Linda. How sweet but unfortunately, I don't do sugar anymore, but thank you so much anyway. Georgie, you can have this. And who do we have next? This is from…Marky! Thank you, Marky!

He takes out a bottle of Gin.

Thank you so much Marky! So sweet. But I don't drink anymore. Georgie, you can have this. Alright, and this next gift is from…Bernice!

He unwraps a mindfulness colouring in book.

Oh my gosh! It is one of those adult colouring-in books! I love these! Thank you so much Bernice! And the last gift…oh look there is a card. *(Reading from the card)* Dear Randal, we

hope you will enjoy your time and distance away from us, as much as we will from you. Love Michelle.

He smiles at her. He reaches into the gift bag and takes out a cleaver.

Oh look! It's a cleaver. Thank you so much Michelle. You clearly remember how much I loved our weekends away by the pool and a nice braai. I can't wait to cut up all my little vegan veggies in India. Thank you.

He puts the gifts down next to him and stands up. As he speaks, he is unconsciously pulling out his box of cigarettes from his bag.

(to Michelle)
Michelle, I just want to quickly, publicly state here, if you think that I am at all jealous of you, and your amazing life, really, you got it all wrong, I am not at all!

He realises he has taken a cigarette out and stops himself and puts it back in his bag. He then walks to get the incense stick and begins incensing the space around him as he talks.

I saw your little trip away to the coast to visit Brad's parents on Instagram, and your cute little girls-only weekend away and I am totally cool with that. People change whatever.

He begins "smoking" the incense stick.

I am not about the fancy house, or the amazing husband, or the cute little dogs or the new car…you know…chasing and chasing material objects…I am not about that anymore Michelle. I have found a new direction in life….

He moves towards Bernice and grabs her hand briefly smiling.

And I am happy okay…for the first time in my life I am truly happy.

The doorbell rings. He runs to pick up the receiver.

Hello my friend, no thank you I don't need a broom today. I already told you earlier on I don't need a broom.

He hides behind the little table and screams into the receiver.

I don't need a fucking broom! Now just fuck off or else I am going to call the fucking police!

He hangs up the receiver. The phone rings. He rushes over to pick up the phone.

Hello? Everything is fine, thank you so much. The password is Lotus flower. Lotus Flower! Lotus fucking flower!

He hangs up the phone.

You know, when I was younger, I would always say to my mom, "Mommy mommy, please can you pick me up?" And she would say "Fuck off Randal, I'm busy!". And you know what, now I am fucking off. Far off. Away from my loving family, my beautiful friends, and my amazing job at the call centre. And I am going to miss you all, so I thought it would be a nice thing to share couple of memories. Memories between friends. Memories of me and you. Memories anyone? Memories? Fun memories of times together? Me, you, fun memories?

He waits and give the audience time to respond.

Come on, there must be one or two memories?

As he speaks, we see his hands moving towards the colouring in book. He begins colouring in violently.

Memories? Sorry Bernice, what was that? Yes, I do remember that. YES! I do remember the invoice you sent me. I have not forgotten. I told you I was going to pay you as soon as the

money came through. Gosh, no need to get angry now Bernice! It's not a productive emotion!

He puts down the colouring in book and his hands move to the slab of chocolate. He opens it and begins eating it as he speaks. Chocolate spit pouring out his mouth.

Oh wait, Marky Mark! I have a memory! Remember that time that we went out to Crisco, and we all got so drunk? And you guys left without me? And my battery had died and I had to get a lift home with some random guy? And then later on I found out that you fucked my boyfriend? Wow! That was fun! Or Georgie! Remember when I had to come bail you out of jail at five o'clock in the morning after you took my car without asking me and were caught drunken driving? That was INCREDIBLE. Or Michelle…remember when you got that whole new group of friends and married Brad and stopped talking to me? That was really amazing.

The phone rings. He runs to pick it up.

Hey Daryl, are you guys outside? No Daryl! You guys know this is the only time I could see you! No! She knows I can't Daryl, I told her! Can I just speak to Mom please? Hi Mom, howzit going? I'm sorry that you not feeling good. Ja, shame. Well maybe just go home and take some neurofen and relax. Ja. No worries Mom, I'll call you from the airport. Okay, I love...okay, okay bye.

He hangs up the phone. Eerie music begins to play.

So, my family is not going to make it here tonight, as usual. They are never here for me. But you know what, I am okay with that. You know why? Because everything happens for a reason. What if they did come here tonight, and they drove all the way here safely and they parked their car. And then all of a sudden, the guy selling brooms jumped out the car from behind a bush and started attacking them with his broom. My dad and my brother managed to get away though, and he managed to get hold of my mom and start hitting her with the broom and left her bleeding on the pavement for dead. And then I would hear all of this, and I would run downstairs and find her bleeding on the pavement. And I would pick her up

and she would say “Fuck off Randal, I am busy dying!”. And behind her I would see my father and my brother, running towards me, screaming “Just leave her alone Randal! This wouldn’t have happened if we had come here tonight! Now please leave us alone!” And they would pick her up and drive her off to the hospital and I would say good bye guys! Thanks for coming!

He pauses as he watches the car drive off.

But you know what, that is not going to happen, because they are not coming here tonight. But what if they die while I am away in India? Or what if they die on the way home tonight? Or what if when they arrive home, there is someone waiting with an axe to chop them all to pieces? No. That can’t happen! But what if it does? But it won’t! But what if it does? But it can’t! But what if it does?

The doorbell rings. Then the alarm goes off. Then the phone rings. Randal becomes overwhelmed! The music swells as he runs to grab the CD player. He presses play and the self-help motivational track begins playing. The CD starts slowing down and speeding up and eventually begins skipping. The whole CD player begins moving away from him. He tried to hold it close to him. As he does so it begins hitting him in the stomach. He gives up against the CD player, puts it down begins starts stripping off his shirt and jewellery to reveal a black sleeveless vest underneath. The positive affirmation music has now morphed into a heavy-metal-electro track. He walks to the shelf upstage centre and pulls the fabric of the centre flat down. He turns around and takes a seat on his ottoman. Next to him is the bottle of gin from Mark, he opens it and takes a large sip straight from the bottle. He then reaches into his bag, pulls out the box of cigarettes, and takes out a cigarette. He tries to light his cigarette, but the lighter won’t work. The hanging ornaments around him then begin falling one by one. Once they have all fallen, the fabric covering the tables begin to slowly be pulled, and disappear behind the flats, sending the vases of flowers and books crashing to the floor. Lastly, the fabrics covering the flats are pulled and disappear behind the flats. Randal sits centre stage taking sips from his gin. The music slowly fades out and we hear the sound of rain. Randal slowly gets up and looks outside the window to see the rain clouds. He sits back down on the ottoman. He notices the cleaver next to him. He looks at it, and then looks

away. The lights begin to fade. Before it fades to black, we see him look over at the cleaver and slowly reach for it. Black out. The sound of rain slowly fades out.