

## Locating the Self: Narratives and Practices of Authenticity in French Clown Training

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### Abstract

This paper explores clown pedagogy in relation to authenticity, taking as its starting point the clown workshop at the École Philippe Gaulier in June 2008 in which I was a participant-researcher. I explore how and where an analysis of French clown training both reveals reinscription of authenticity—the idea that the “true self” is revealed through the mask form of clown—and exposes fissures in these ideas. Within this training, I argue, a construct of the authentic self exists alongside techniques that disrupt conventional notions of stable, linear identity by utilising techniques of disorientation to shift the locus of the self from the core of the body to a negotiable space between performer and spectator. Examining the ways in which gestural style was both linked with and contested the idea of authenticity within the French mime tradition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I examine how such conflicting ideas of authenticity continue to circulate within the contemporary clown classroom. Specifically, I look at how the pedagogical language used by Gaulier and the descriptive language of students, as well as embodied classroom practices, discursively reinscribe the idea of a stable, unified self while simultaneously disrupting it. By juxtaposing and drawing connections between an older mime tradition and a current pedagogical practice, I wish to highlight the ways in which the idea of the “self” has been and continues to be contested, altered and redefined within a specific site of performer training.

### Keywords

Clown, Self, Authenticity, Gaulier, Lecoq

*De belles choses débutent au pays des mauvais.*

*Beautiful things begin in the land of the bad.*

Philippe Gaulier 2007, pp.129 & 289

The drum beat comes with no warning. Philippe Gaulier has a reputation as the mean clown, the teacher whose pedagogical techniques involve throwing students up on stage with minimal instructions, glowering at them, and if they fail to be ‘beautiful,’ sending them offstage unceremoniously with the bang of a drum and a gruff ‘Thank you

for that horrible moment. Goodbye.’ The four-week Clown workshop is gruelling; after the tenth time hearing in elaborate detail how ‘shit’ one’s performance is, accompanied by a suggestion for ‘how we kill you’ (Gaulier’s favourite phrase for conveying disapproval), even the most resilient performer faces – significantly for Gaulier’s pedagogy – a crisis of ego.

This paper explores clown pedagogy as in dialogue with authenticity, taking as its starting point the clown workshop at the École Philippe Gaulier in June 2008 in which I was a participant-researcher<sup>1</sup>. Within this training, I argue, a construct of the authentic self exists alongside techniques that disrupt conventional notions of stable, linear identity by relocating consciousness to embodied processes that can be externally read and insisting on a moment-to-moment awareness of a continually shifting performance. Examining the ways in which discourses of authenticity intersected with the French mime tradition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries<sup>2</sup>, I examine how such notions continue to be revealed within the contemporary clown classroom. Specifically, I look at how the pedagogical language used by Gaulier and the descriptive language of students discursively reinscribe the idea of a stable, unified self, while Gaulier’s descriptions of his pedagogy as well as specific classroom practices simultaneously disrupt it. By juxtaposing and drawing connections between an older mime tradition and

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<sup>1</sup> The workshop took place at the École Philippe Gaulier in Sceaux, France, for four weeks in June 2008. I attended the workshop both as a participant and as a researcher; my observations are drawn from direct experience in the classroom and interviews with students and Philippe Gaulier.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that Philippe Gaulier strongly disavows any connection to the mime tradition; his school is not considered a ‘mime school’, although the mask forms he teaches are drawn from Jacques Lecoq’s pedagogy which was heavily influenced by French mime. The connections I draw between the French mime tradition and Gaulier’s pedagogy are therefore not technical, but ideological.

a current pedagogical incarnation, I wish to highlight the ways in which the idea of the self has been and continues to be contested, altered and redefined within a specific site of performer training.

### ***Re-framing failure***

Philippe Gaulier's career as a clown teacher began at the École Jacques Lecoq in Paris where he taught between 1976 – 80, helping to develop the school's clown pedagogy. In *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre* Jacques Lecoq describes the appearance of clown in his school in the 1960s when he explored the connections between the Commedia dell'Arte and circus clowns. The discovery was rooted in failure: he asked students to sit in a circle, and one by one to stand up and do something to make the others laugh: 'The result was catastrophic. Our throats dried up, our stomachs tensed, it was becoming tragic' (2001, p.143). The students returned to their seats 'feeling frustrated, confused and embarrassed':

It was at that point, when they saw their weaknesses, that everyone burst out laughing, not at the characters that they had been trying to show us, but at the person underneath, stripped bare for all to see. We had the solution. (p.143)

Lecoq describes the realisation made collaboratively by himself and his students that day as the inherent ridiculousness of the human condition:

We are all clowns, we all think we are beautiful, clever and strong, whereas we all have our weaknesses, our ridiculous side, which can make people laugh when we allow it to express itself....This discovery of how personal weakness can be transformed into dramatic strength was the key to my elaboration of a personal approach to clowning, involving a search for 'one's own clown', which became a fundamental principle of the training. (p.145)

While Lecoq's distinguishes between this approach to clown and the clowns found in the Commedia dell'Arte and the circus, the quality of failure had been central to clowns throughout their long and varied history.

Lecoq's innovation was to make clown into a pedagogical method. The paradox at the heart of this method is found in the juxtaposition of the clown's failure with the structuring of the classroom, in which a student is expected to succeed at learning whatever technique or lesson is being taught. For in order to "succeed" in clown—success that is defined in Lecoq-based clown courses as making the audience laugh—the student must fail repeatedly to make the audience laugh. This repeated failure forces the student to abandon techniques she has acquired to please both spectators and teachers, leaving her with whatever is left after these learned techniques have failed. In Gaulier's Clown workshop in which I was a participant, 'whatever is left' was frequently understood by students as the authentic self.

This was true despite the fact that Gaulier himself is expressly uninterested in the inner self of the student; unlike other Lecoq-based clown teachers including Giovanni Fusetti<sup>3</sup> and Angela de Castro, Gaulier does not emphasise finding one's inner clown. Rather, his pedagogy is focused on pleasure, beauty and failure (all of which are found in other Lecoq-based pedagogies; Gaulier however gives them more centrality than a search for the inner clown). His techniques, correspondingly, are designed to disorientate the student, including encouraging students to transgress type (Peacock, p.38). However, language that invoked authenticity frequently crept into the classroom, both from Gaulier—when he praised a student for being 'himself' or 'herself' on stage—and more frequently from the students, whose post-class discussions nearly always defaulted to an assumption that "being oneself" on stage was the goal of the workshop; indeed, the phrase 'being myself' was frequently used interchangeably with 'being beautiful' (an expressed aim of Gaulier's pedagogy) in both interviews and discussions. Gaulier repeatedly positioned beauty in opposition to the practice of acting, deriding a performance with such phrases as 'he is horrible actor, no?' This led most students with whom I spoke to interpret beauty as that which remains when the masks of socially learned behaviour are stripped away: 'When I'm beautiful is when I'm really being myself, not acting or pretending' (Interview with workshop student, 2008). This language displays traces of a modernist conception of the "true self" that lies within the body, a self strongly contested in nineteenth-century mime when that which lay beneath the

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<sup>3</sup> Describing his clown pedagogy, Fusetti says, 'People can play themselves at the moment that they feel they can play with things that are actually theirs – their bodies, their forms, their perceptions,' emphasising the simultaneous distance that is a result of the structure of play; he contrasts this with other types of performance that rely on distinguishing oneself from one's character (Interview, 2007)

mime's mask was portrayed as a void<sup>4</sup>, but which gained traction in the early twentieth century as psychoanalysis gained increasing influence, positioning the self deep within the body, accessible only through indirect external symptoms.

***Gesture and interiority: 'the mirror is an enemy for the mime...'***<sup>5</sup>

The belief in a hidden interiority and its complex relationship to the mask gained strength in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French mime, a tradition that was one of the chief influences on Lecoq. Realism in the theatre of the late nineteenth century rested upon an assumption of representative transparency, in that meaning was directly linked to outer manifestation. "Reflection" is perhaps an apt word for this brand of representation; in the same way that sets, costumes and lighting were configured to produce an effect of "everyday reality", so too were the bodies of actors on the stage choreographed to look visually identical to the everyday, as in the Meiningen Players' famous crowd scenes<sup>6</sup>. The intersection of psychological realism with this pictorial realism builds a second layer onto the use of the body as representative of meaning: not only was the body strategically placed and choreographed on stage to mirror the everyday, the recognizable meaning of physical movement and gesture, but the exterior of the actor's body was increasingly used to represent, or signify, interior states.

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<sup>4</sup> See Louisa E. Jones for a detailed account of this iconography.

<sup>5</sup> G. F. Séverin (1929), p.125 cited in L. E. Jones, L.E., 1984. *Sad Clowns and Pale Pierrots: Literature and the Popular Comic Arts in 19th-Century France*. Lexington, KY: French Forum, p.171.

<sup>6</sup> The Meiningen Players toured Europe between 1874 – 90, pursuing an aesthetic of pictorial illusionism meant to duplicate reality with great accuracy (Brockett and Hildy 2003, p.389).

In the early twentieth century, the famous French mime Gustave Fréjaville Séverin described why he chose to eschew the use of mirrors as training tools in favour of cerebral process: 'The mirror is an enemy for the mime, at least for the mime who thinks....His mirror should be his mind: his eyes, mask, body should be always in direct contact with his thought' (ibid p.171). The use of mirrors had long been encouraged for actors. In the eighteenth century the predominant acting method was to strike one of six "attitudes" that conveyed a clear passion (assumed to be universally legible to audiences), holding the tableau for a length of time before quickly transitioning to the next attitude. This reflected a strong connection between acting and fine arts; each passion was given an idealized physical representation that was understood to impress its template upon the human form. As the passions were considered "universal," the performer's body had to achieve a state of "harmony" in order successfully to convey the idealized template. In order to achieve the physical representation of this template, the actor was encouraged to practice meticulously in front of mirrors, a technique that Goethe later encouraged (Roach 1985, pp.69-71 & p.167).

French mime Raoul de Najac's endorsement of the use of mirrors in his *Souvenirs d'un mime* is differently inflected than Goethe's, for while the latter was concerned with precision of movement conferred on the actor by an all-controlling director, Najac encouraged the development of individual gesture. For him mirrors were useful not for achieving an ideal physical position through comparing the reflected image against an outwardly-available one (via drawings or directorial description), but for testing the effects of one's own individual creation. The difference between his

technique and Séverin's, therefore, lay not in the emphasis on outer-directed versus inner model, but in the locus of the performing self in relation to that self which judges the performer's gestural accuracy, a process that could be called self-awareness. While Séverin's cognitively-experienced sensations of his body (his performing self) were judged by his thinking mind—'His mirror should be his mind: his eyes, mask, body should be always in direct contact with his thought' (op cit p.171)—Najac externalized his performing self by placing it onto the reflective surface of the mirror, positioning his judging self as literal spectator. His eye looks outward from the surface of his body to view the surface of his performing body—an image made two-dimensional on the reflective surface of the mirror. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the mimetic technique of copying what one literally sees was dominant among actors, most of whom came from acting families in which the craft was passed down; those new to the theatre had to learn to imitate attitudes and stage positions quickly, as there was very little rehearsal time (Taylor 1999, p.73). By the late nineteenth century, however, this technique was increasingly connected to an idea of the dissociation of the self.

The shift that occurred in psychology with Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious and the symptom deepened and further layered this understanding of the body as legible locus of interior meaning, for his theory of psychoanalysis ruptured the formerly assumed one-to-one connection between perception and representation. No longer was a marker on the body a reliably transparent pointer to underlying psychological meaning; the symptom had replaced the mirror as a *symbol* rather than a reflection, and only a new methodology—psychoanalysis—could unlock its meaning.



That the meaning hidden within the unconscious could be made legible within the correct methodology, however, does not negate the severity of the paradigm shift vis-à-vis meaning and the comprehensible subject ushered in by Freud. One need only look to the tenets of nineteenth century realism—particularly its naturalist manifestation—to perceive the disorientation Freud’s theories inaugurated for the stability of the subject. Whereas within naturalism the subject was understood to be transparent and readily legible, once Freud’s psychoanalytic theory took hold the notion of “underlying psychic reality” became unanchored from a one-to-one correspondence of inner reality to outer manifestation. Even within the methodology of psychoanalysis, the process of uncovering unconscious meaning was a long, multifaceted one, as any of Freud’s own narratives in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1965) will attest. The increasing popularity of Freud’s psychoanalytic theory had refigured the idea of “double consciousness” formulated in Diderot’s *Paradoxe* (1949) by positioning the truest, deepest self in the realm of the only indirectly-accessible unconscious.

In his explicit positioning of self-awareness within the thinking mind, Séverin reiterated the concept of the “inner model” that had gained hold in late nineteenth-century acting theories. The idea can be traced to Diderot’s concept of the “*modèle idéal*” or “*modèle intérieur*,”<sup>7</sup> which referred to the creation of an image within the mind of the artist that he then copies to create a sculpture or painting. In contrast to the exteriorizing action of the literal mirror, the “inner model” placed the faculty of sight not

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<sup>7</sup> When translated literally as ‘ideal model’ or ‘type,’ ‘*modèle idéal*’ conveys Diderot’s neoclassical view of art improving on nature; Roach suggests connecting the term to Diderot’s later ‘*modèle intérieur*’ since both terms refer to an image in the mind’s eye of the artist.

within the eye (which sees outward from the edges of the body) but within the mind, spatially located in the interior of the body. Instructing artists on the rendering of nude figures in drawings, Diderot writes, 'Try to imagine, my friends, that the whole figure is transparent, and to place your eye in the middle...' (1775-77, p.466 cited Roach, 1985, p.126). This spatial shift is tied to a concurrent discourse of authenticity, in which the individual is answerable only to himself, as there exists a negative relation between crafting one's actions to conform to the opinions of others and being authentic. In theatre this translates into the artist's reference only to himself or to a transcendent power rather than to the approval of the spectators (Trilling 1972, p.97). The gaze of spectators upon the surface of the performer's body has no power to determine or create authenticity—a possible reason behind Séverin's explicit rejection of the externalizing function of the mirror ('The mirror is an enemy for the mime, at least for the thinking mime...').

Lecoq's reworking of his pedagogy around a deliberate distancing of the performer from the role, however, foregrounded and privileged the two-facedness of acting; sincerity became linked to the presence of the actor behind the mask of the character. This presence was detected through spontaneous reactions to external stimuli:

But true play can only be founded on one's reaction to another....to react is to throw into relief suggestions coming from the external world. The interior world is revealed through a process of reaction to the provocations of the world outside. The actor cannot afford to rely on an interior search

for sensitivities, memories, a childhood world. (2001, p.30)

The key distinction here between Najac's use of mirrors and Lecoq's expressed pedagogical aim is that while in the former the actor himself judges his own performance, in the latter the performance is fundamentally dependent on the reactions of others. Lecoq's linking of interiority to 'the provocations of the world outside' produced pedagogical techniques designed to disrupt the student's habitual reliance on his own sense of interiority.

### ***The flop and disorientation in Gaulier's pedagogy***

Lecoq embraced the notion of a necessary crisis in the re-construction of the self, putting forth the flop as the core of clown training: 'The clown is the person who *flops*, who messes up his turn....Through his failure he reveals his profoundly human nature, which moves us and makes us laugh' (2001, p.146). Gaulier frequently referred to '*Monsieur Flop*' during the clown workshop as the clown's best friend; when the clown senses a flop, she should think to herself 'Ah, I sense *Monsieur Flop* is near—I thank you, Monsieur Flop, for you will allow me to save the show' (my paraphrase of Gaulier's in-class description, 2008). The flop is the mistake. In a clown performance before an audience, it is a rehearsed mistake; in the clown classroom, it is genuine—the student truly messes up and faces a moment—often unbearable—of not knowing what to do next. The authoritarian structure of Gaulier's classroom facilitated frequent opportunities for flops; as students frantically attempted to please the teacher, an irony was that they were not performing these roles from a distance, they actually *experienced* themselves

as fumbling fools grasping after praise. This irony was pedagogically intentional (Interview with Gaulier, 2008).

The intensive focus on redefining success and failure in the clown classroom is predicated on the belief that the student's body is disciplined within traditional classrooms to perform in a rigidly codified manner, thereby calcifying the persona into a set of approved behaviours. The act of failure, correspondingly, creates a rupture or a break in this persona. Gaulier's classroom is deliberately structured to produce disorientation through ensuring the failure of any pre-existing strategies for pleasing the teacher that a student brings with her. The use of "impossible" exercises (throwing a student onstage and demanding she instantly 'be funny'), the drum that could strike, startlingly, at any moment, and the culture of harsh critique were the chief strategies for producing disorientation amongst students. The sudden, often fear-inducing techniques employed by Gaulier links these states of disorientation to what Roger Caillois identifies as vertiginous games:

The last kind of game includes those which are based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind. In all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness.

(2001, p.23)

The shock element of vertiginous games resonates with one student's description of the flop, which she linked to Gaulier's description of the "necessary crisis":

Gaulier talks a lot about the beautiful process, and having this crisis where you're in a tunnel and you don't know what you're doing. He feels, it's his opinion, that you need that, to then come out of that, because that's the time when you really struggle with yourself and figure out what you're doing and why you're doing it. (2008, unpublished interview)

Gaulier describes his pedagogy in physically harsh terms, pitting himself against the habits of performance and persona:

When I teach clown, I box. An uppercut on the face of the nice little character, a right hook in the gums of will, determination, resolution and volition. A smack in the stomach of the cheap comic, a left hook to the thorax for someone who thinks they're funny before they really are and three pile drivers for conventional ideas. (2007, p.290)

His expressed aim is to dismantle the student's sense of self accrued through imitative habits, forcing her to fall back upon what exists underneath this mask of the persona. While Gaulier does not use language that evokes the "natural" or "pre-inscribed" body, students nevertheless tended to link the idea of successfully following an impulse on stage in the midst of disorientation with being in touch with the "self"—a common

elision, as Mark Evans points out, in actor training that focuses on reacting on impulse rather than habitual response (2009, p.84).

The inevitable paradox that is created by such an approach is that students quickly learn that to succeed in the course they must fail in a way that is pleasing to the teacher. This was a tricky proposition, however, as Gaulier was extremely inconsistent with his expressions of approval, both across behaviours and across students. A student could perform an action during an exercise that would be met with 'Ah, beautiful,' only to be told she was 'Horrible' the next time she performed the same action. Similarly, rarely did one student consistently receive positive feedback; while one or two students could be said to be "doing well" in the workshop, this was meant generally, and at the first sign of a student becoming overly-confident Gaulier would shoot them down. While Gaulier's clown classroom was structured around the idea of failure, his harsh authoritarian demeanour simultaneously structured a space in which students felt compelled to figure out how to succeed in pleasing the teacher. Students quickly learned that there was a right way and a wrong way to fail: if the failure produced laughter, it was correct; if the failure resulted in the sound of a drumbeat followed by Gaulier's muttered 'Thank you, goodbye,' it was wrong.

This assumption, however, was directly challenged by Gaulier at the end of the third week of the course, when the classroom had been implicitly divided between those who were doing relatively well (a tiny minority) and the remaining students who were increasingly frustrated over their ability to fail correctly. On Friday afternoon at the end

of the third week, all forty-three students from the two groups that the class was divided into were gathered together in the classroom studio for the weekly group session. Shoulders were slumped, faces were pinched, and the general sense was that of dread mixed with increasing despair. Gaulier banged his drum and said, 'So. I want a bad student now to get up.' After a brief pause Paula<sup>8</sup>—a thirty-three year old professional clown from Brazil whose English abilities were sparse—sighed, stood up and took centre stage. 'Now,' Gaulier instructed, 'tell us about your flops, when you have flopped here.'

Paula began to describe the attempts she had made over the past three weeks to be funny, describing the exercise instructions ('We were to come on and save the show because the clowns had been in plane crash'), her attempt to do something funny ('And I came on and danced and presented show' – this accompanied with a slight smile as she recalled the fun she had had in the exercise), and her subsequent failure ('...and no one liked it.'). At moments during her recounting scattered laughter broke out in the room, usually during her transition from describing her efforts into stating that they had failed. Her spirits, along with her shoulders and facial expression, seemed to droop as she carried on recounting her flops, until Gaulier stopped her with a bang of the drum, looked around and asked the room at large, 'She is beautiful now, no? She has something,' to which the room at large murmured consent. He then turned to Paula, leaned forward, and said, 'Why you not be like this, like you are now? You are yourself – you are beautiful, this woman here is beautiful. Why you do this awful performing, be

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<sup>8</sup> All student names have been changed.

this horrible actress, instead of this beautiful woman?’ Paula shook her head and murmured ‘I don’t know.’

### ***The beautiful/true self***

That evening over drinks at Au Claire de Lune, the buzz of conversation revolved around the beauty of people when they were “really themselves” onstage. ‘You can see it in their eyes, when they’re themselves,’ Zoe, a twenty-three year old student from England, told me. When I asked what she thought “being oneself” meant, she hesitated for a moment, then responded, ‘It’s when they exist for us in our imagination, when they are strongly in our imagination.’ This response resonated in light of a question raised earlier in the day by David, who had asked how he could know when he was being himself – ‘I *think* I’m being real, and being myself, but apparently I’m not, because I’m not beautiful.’ This observation was underscored by the apparent surprise shown by students when the audience laughed as they recounted their flops; these moments of laughter were understood as being signals that they were being their true selves, but the signal was external and dependent on the other people in the room; nothing about the moment registered for the performers as more “real” than the moment before. And Paula, who hadn’t registered the laughter, was confused as to when and how she was “being herself.” The “true self” was functioning in this event as an external, visible marker that produced a particular reaction in the audience without necessarily being recognised by the person observed.



In subsequent interviews with students I raised this question of the “true self,” asking how they would define that concept, and how or whether one could know when one was being one’s real self. The answers were varied and vague, though everyone with whom I spoke had a strong sense that they knew when these moments occurred, that *something* happened to signal the emergence of the real self, the visible marker usually being the eyes. And everyone I spoke to had at least one story of a moment in Gaulier’s class when they knew they were being beautiful – which was nearly always interpreted by students as being themselves – before receiving feedback. The eyes emerged as the locus of self and beauty—specifically, a kind of “gleam” in the eyes. Many students described non-beautiful eyes, the eyes of a performer who was “performing” instead of being herself, as ‘dead’, and beautiful eyes, which were taken to signify the presence of the performer’s self, as ‘alive’. While most initial descriptions of what distinguished the two placed the markers on the performer’s body (particularly the eyes), secondary responses tended to relocate the markers within the spectator: ‘I *felt* more connected with him’; ‘When she became alive and beautiful she existed for me in my *imagination*.’ Interiority takes on two aspects here: a generalized sensory feeling located within the body but without a clear locus, and the imagination, where the performer’s true self existed within the spectator.

Corporeal and cognitive perceptions were often described in tandem, the boundaries between the two frequently elided. When I spoke with Liz, she explained how she knows when a performer is being truly themselves by ‘sensing it.’ I asked her if she could be more specific about this sensing – where on or in the body did she

perceive the sensation? And what was the sensation *of*? She hesitated, her brow furrowed, and replied, 'I don't really know.' As she attempted to articulate responses to my questions, her body enacted a movement that I was beginning to recognize during conversations on these topics: one of her hands went to her chest and hovered there, moving out and back as she said 'You just *know*, you *feel* it, in here...'

The idea of being rooted in the present in Gaulier's course was consistently tied to the idea of "vulnerability." The performer who was vulnerable was completely open and able to respond to what was happening both onstage and in the audience.

One student linked this openness to the senses:

We talk about the same thing that you get through meditation, as in a way similar to what Gaulier is teaching, the idea of being very present, of being here, and being open, and being, your senses being alert and awake and aware of what is going on around you. And that makes you sensitive. And being vulnerable. And being open to whatever, whatever happens. (2008, unpublished interview)

Given the structure of failure and criticism that Gaulier set up in the classroom, however, this level of vulnerability was extremely difficult to access if approached as a concomitant of relaxation. The persistent threat of the loud deep resonance of the hand drum signalling one to leave the stage immediately kept the level of tension high on

stage. This was linked by one student to the difficulties of being open and vulnerable while dealing with the pressures of living in Paris:

And [vulnerability is] quite a difficult thing to keep up, I think, particularly in everyday life, because you have so many situations where you can't, you have to have a bit of a front, just to survive. Particularly like in Paris [laughs]. And I remember talking to Colin, and this is the kind of paradox, I find, of a school like Gaulier is being in Paris, is that I think, I've never felt like I need to tougher than when I've lived in Paris, and at the same time I'm going to a school that's trying to teach me to be sensitive and open.

(2008, unpublished interview)

Yet the vulnerability that Gaulier sought was not the relaxation achieved through feeling safe and secure in one's habitual persona, but the openness of disorientation, of being between thoughts, caught in the moment of the mistake. Simon Murray draws a useful distinction between the openness and pleasure of play and a feeling of self-satisfaction:

[F]or Lecoq and Gaulier, the *pleasure of play* is not simply some kind of self-indulgent tomfoolery where having a wonderful time is the key to creativity and effective acting. Rather, an ability to play is more about *openness*, a willingness to explore the circumstances of the moment without intellectual 'editing', but within a set of rules or expectations germane to the style or form of theatre under investigation. (2003, p.50)

In pursuit of creating genuine if uncomfortable moments of disorientation, Gaulier frequently set up situations within exercises to confuse the student. On the second day of the workshop he asked ten students to dance around the stage with red noses on to vibrant music taking pleasure in imitating fish. We had been dancing for about half a minute when the drum was hit and Gaulier called out to Miho, a young Japanese woman, that she was imitating the wrong animal; he then instantly hit the drum again and shouted 'Go!' Five seconds later he stopped the exercise once again to tell Miho she was doing it wrong, and then had us continue dancing. The high-paced nature of the exercise and intermittent and confusing criticisms led Miho, who had some difficulty understanding Gaulier's English, to be thoroughly confused as to what he was asking her to do; she latched on to me and tried very hard to imitate my movements, which were impeded by an injured knee and looked more like a strange sort of dancing horse than a fish. The intensity of her concentration on "getting it right" while inadvertently getting it completely wrong led to immense laughter from the audience, and a final pronouncement from Gaulier and several students that her performance was beautiful and open.

### ***Conclusion***

Miho's experience of confusion over the reason for the audience's laughter points to a feature of disorientation that challenges conventional understandings of the self as located within the core of the body (as represented by the gesture of pointing to the chest), accessible and recognisable. It points to a self that was negotiated externally, in

the space between the performer and spectator, as the performer's body signified a self that caused the spectator to respond with laughter, even as the performer was unaware of this communication. During the flop exercise in the third week, David had addressed this issue directly; his question pointed to a shifting positionality of the self in Gaulier's classroom: at times the student felt the emergence of his or her "true self" from within; at times the self seemed to be located externally, in the gaze of the spectator. Whether or not the student *believed* he was being himself in this latter case did not matter; this was a "self" located in the eyes of the beholder – specifically, in the perceptions of the spectators watching the performance. The external cue marking the successful performance of the self was the audience's laughter; the only way for the performer to know he was being himself was to hear spectators' laughter. This shifting locus of the self in Gaulier's classroom contains traces of the self's multi-positionality in Najac's mirror exercises, in psychoanalysis in which the patient's symptoms were read by the external analyst, and in Lecoq's discovery of the moment of a student's confusion, a moment that provokes audience laughter. The tendency for student self-narrative to reposition the self as authentic, as firmly within and directly accessible simultaneously reveals the endurance of narratives of authenticity in contemporary clown training, narratives that circulate within and around the classroom.

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