

Send in the clowns!

An ethnographic study of the humanitarian clown



By Rebecca Ann Hill

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University of Bergen,

Department of Social Anthropology

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The picture on the front page is an illustration made by © Julie K. Kvamme in consultation with me after I asked my informants “What would your clown do to this logo if they could?” It is a compilation of the suggestions that they made.

ABSTRACT

The following study seeks to illustrate the role of humanitarian clowns for people in a situation of crisis. The study draws on data collected through participant observation in a multi-sited fieldwork in Colombia, Norway and digitally. Drawing on the concept of liminality where ritual subjects may experience a temporary space betwixt and between identities, I argue that this is where the clown holds permanent residence. During a performance, the clown invites its audience into a liminal space not only to observe, but to become a full participant, as clowning is a dialogical relation. As well as being a figure dependent on social interaction with its audience, the clown is also presented by my informants as an amplification of the self. While it is easier, as professional performers to release their clown than others, they maintain that everybody may have an ‘inner’ clown. The thesis illustrates through thick ethnography how the clown seeks to connect to its audience by creating a *communitas* and engaging in play. Play is discussed as more than “just for the fun of it”, but rather as a place to experience vulnerability and humility together with the clown, as the clown acknowledges and encourages failure. Through the realm of play, the clown disrupts the social environment and seeks to create connections which intersect with the audiences’ everyday roles as doctors, guards, patients, relatives and refugees. Using humor to communicate, the clown plays with boundaries of norms and taboos and disrupts social hierarchies. By acting as truth-tellers of society, the clown may express, uncover and disrupt existing societal structures. In terms of the audience in question, the clown can relate and empathize with their situation through acknowledgement and connection by inviting them into a space of liminality. Being a figure which expresses an exaggerated amount of emotion and energy, the clown creates an outlet for the audience to react and express themselves differently than otherwise. Humanitarian clowning is about human connections in a space of *communitas* where the audience in question can experience a moment of relief of energy, a moment of release of emotions and a moment of disruption to make more autonomous decisions in a life situation which is often controlled by someone or something else.

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Rebecca Ann Hill

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Bart invited me to come and join him on a tour, on the condition that I participate as a clown. Almost every informant through my fieldwork has insisted that I clown as well, that I actively participate to deeply understand what is happening and why. Bart picked me up at a bus stop in a little town on the coast of Norway. Our first show was scheduled at a nearby asylum center which houses 30 kids and their families. He greeted me with a smile as he pulled up in his red van full of colorful costumes, feathery hats, food for the road, and around 15 vintage suitcases filled with circus games, magic tricks and instruments. I felt a wave of nervousness wash over me as we talked about the show. Luckily, I thought, we have some hours to prepare first, so he could teach me the basics. We only drove for about five minutes before he pulled into a petrol station, jumped out and went to open the trunk. I joined him to see if I could help with anything. He sized me up and down for a moment and started going through a suitcase filled with clothes. “Would you consider yourself a dark or a more colorful clown?” he asked, as he was head deep in a suitcase rummaging through piles of clothes, grabbing some leggings and holding them up towards me. After a year of talking to, studying and attempting to understand clowning, my field persona had shifted quite a bit from my first day in Colombia. The khaki-colored, research outfit I used to wear to “fit my part” was replaced by my most colorful clothes as they seemed to express the right energy towards my interlocutors. As he asked, he looked at me and my bright yellow and pink sweater and smiled “never mind!” The leggings were three sizes too big, but Bart handed them over along with one green and black and one red and black striped sock, a blue vest and a red, silk scarf, gesturing for me to go and change. I asked him where we were going to rehearse as I walked away. “No time for that, we have a show in fifteen minutes!”. My stomach turned and my heart jumped instantly, my insides shifting into a solid state of panic as I went to change. “But I don’t know what to do! Who am I? What am I? What is my story? How is this going to unfold? What have I gotten myself into?” I thought to myself as I stared at the character in the restroom mirror.

I got back into the car and Bart smiled at me approvingly as he handed me a hat. “Try this on, see if it feels right”. The hat was way too big, so he handed me three more and chuckled as I tried them on one at a time. We settled upon a tiny, round, burgundy, velvet number with a golden drawstring. It quite reminded me of a famous Disney monkey which was kind of how I felt as well. “This might not be your hat; you’ll just have to see what it does for you. You’ll know if it feels wrong. Don’t worry, you’ll find your hat in the end!”. I sat in the seat next to him feeling the adrenaline rush through my body. I asked him what I was going to do as I didn’t have a clown story, a back story (or anything for that matter) ready. He reassured me, saying he would take charge and I really could not do anything wrong as long as I put enough energy into it all. I had to react to what he was doing, follow his lead and always, always, always have ten times more energy than the audience so that I could transfer that energy onto them and still have loads to spare. No reaction could be big enough. The bigger the better! “You need a name...” Bart stared as if he was analyzing me “I think I want to see you in action first and make something up when I introduce you. We might have to try out a few names before we land on anything. Leave it to me.” My outfit, the hat, my name. I realized that nothing was arbitrary. The name must feel right, the hat must sit right. It seemed like something that would appear from within, something quite different from when you are given a role, a costume, a manuscript, and they tell you who you are supposed to be on a stage, like what used to happen during my former amateur acting.

*

What occurred over the course of the next week I could never have imagined even just a few months earlier. I was performing magic tricks using a toilet brush for newly settled immigrants and asylum seekers most of whom spoke little or no Norwegian. I found myself singing my hometown’s anthem for a group of hospitalized children in one show and later singing it in front of a whole retirement village the next, accompanied by one of the residents (who had to correct me since I only remembered the first three lines of the anthem). And little did I know that my non-existent skill of tying balloons would ever come back to haunt me until I was standing there in front of a bunch school kids bursting one balloon after another while they were waiting for their swords and poodles This was followed by a world record juggling attempt (even though I can barely throw a single ball at a time). Never have I felt more out of place or made more of a fool out of myself but then again never have I felt more fit for the part I was playing – or rather – being. The event above became the beginning of my pursuit as a clown performer, but also

the final days of my official fieldwork. It was the perfect way to complete the circle in my passage to experience the depth of the clown as I connected to my own - Backqua¹.



Picture 1: Ten minutes before my first performance as a clown © Rebecca Hill



Picture 2: During a performance, attempting to break a world record in juggling ©Terje Nilsen

¹ Bongo introduced my name as Backqua “The latin word for the sound a chicken makes”. And yes, I had to make the chicken noise as he introduced me.

In the spring of 2020, I was set to start my six-month field research. My initial scope was to uncover the effects of humor on people in situations of emergency. The idea unfolded after my mother read a magazine article in the dentist waiting room about humanitarian clowns performing for displaced people in the Middle East. I had recently volunteered in a refugee camp in Greece, witnessing the plight of children and families firsthand, however, I also have a passion for dramatic arts from my childhood and youth. I spent the second half of 2019, organizing, and contacting several international organizations working as humanitarian clowns to patch together a larger tour to several of their projects and partners around the world. Flexibility and adaptability became the first skills to master, as my plans to where, when and what project I would travel to first, changed several times over the course of the first weeks of January 2020. My bags were half packed, and I was ready to buy a ticket and travel anywhere on short notice. Initially, I thought I would be going to Greece, but as the contact with some of my informants was sporadic at times, this changed to Romania for a few days, followed by England. Suddenly I was informed that I could travel to Colombia for a longer period and spend time with the partnering organization of my primary contact at the time. I was on a plane shortly after and arrived in Cali, Colombia by the 31st of January 2020. Although the period of planning and constant change locations demanded a lot of flexibility on my part, these months of preparation enabled a smooth kick-off for the fieldwork. Meetings with all key informants were scheduled within three days of my arrival in Cali, Colombia. Little did I know that it would all change again after six weeks due to a worldwide pandemic.

In this thesis I will present several clown performers who work for various clown organizations around the world. The three primary informants Laura, Jane and Bart² each hold leading administrative positions in three separate organizations located on three different continents. These will be presented further below, but for contextual purpose here, they are all part of humanitarian clowning organizations who travel to places upon invitation through local, partnering organizations and aim to spread joy and create resilience for people in situations of crisis. Laura's organization, Red Nose Coop (RNC), was one of my first contacts and through her I was able to arrange the trip to Colombia as this was via their partner Jane and Payaso Payaso³.

Originally the layout of my fieldwork once I arrived in Colombia was to stay there for about three months and visit refugee camps along the border to Venezuela with RNC and

² All informants and organizations have been anonymized for security reasons (See further below).

³ Payaso is Spanish for 'clown'.

Payaso Payaso. Next, I would travel to an RNC project in Mexico for a month, followed by a two-month journey to Palestine with RNC's partners. For my research, I was going to travel ahead of RNC and meet their partners and observe their day-to-day activities as well as getting an overview of the situation in the area and for potential audiences. RNC would arrive afterwards and we would proceed on a planned tour to various regions. At the time I wished to study the effect of clowns for people in a state of crisis, how they communicated with audiences speaking different languages and if there was such a thing as a universality in laughter. This is still central in my final thesis, but how the clown comes into being, both for the individual clown and in relation to their audience, rather than the *effect* of their work will be the primary focus throughout this thesis. Some of the questions which will be raised in this thesis are the following: What is a humanitarian clown and why does clowning matter? How does one become a clown or what does it mean to be a clown? How and in what way may clowning provide relief for people in a situation of crisis?

Unfortunately, my fieldwork was thrown into disarray by a global pandemic (COVID-19). What began as a six months tour became six weeks. Even worse – the day RNC's team was scheduled to leave for Colombia was the day the US president closed the borders, effectively cancelling the tour only hours before take-off. Norway recalled its overseas citizens as did the University of Bergen. After agonizing over whether to return home or not (I was even invited by my informants to flee to their finca⁴ in the mountains and ride out the storm of the virus), I decided to travel back to Norway in the hope that I could return after a short wait and continue my research. Since March 2020 I have spent the past year and a half conducting digital field work as well as minor trips with a Norwegian organization that I discovered during the summer 2020. The reason for this elaboration on my journey for the past two years is to show the nature of how my research came to be. It also explains how the data is a composition of events, conversations, and observations gathered over the past year and a half.

The vignette in the introduction occurred only two months before handing in my thesis in the fall of 2021 which indicates how the fieldwork took place over a longer period than usually required for such a thesis in order to collect a sufficient amount of material. The impact of the pandemic demanded continual adaptation and adjustment requiring a reevaluation of my data and reanalysis of my experiences, notes and thoughts. Topics, events, and questions I thought I had months to enlighten and understand in the field were left untouched and other

⁴ Spanish reference to a cottage/cabin or farm house.

happenings I never thought would be relevant, have become the essence in this thesis. Upon returning to Norway in March 2020 I took a long break to cope with the disappointment of my entire fieldwork project being turned upside down. A lot of time was spent consulting my advisor as well as family and friends to reassess the situation and shed new light on what I regarded as “failed fieldwork”. Although the pandemic certainly threw my fieldwork into disarray, there was a silver lining. It pushed me past my boundaries, made me think “outside the box” and discover topics and issues that I would never have considered under “normal” circumstances.

THE CLOWN AS A FIGURE OF STUDY

The clown figure has existed for centuries across the world in various shapes and purposes (Davison 2013: 18). Though it might be difficult to specify its traits due to its ironic incongruity in nature as a being, and the multiple names it is also known as (jester, trickster, harlequin etc), Richard Weihe describes seven distinct paradoxical manifestations of the clown (Jürgens, Hietalahti, Straßburger & Ylönen 2019):

1. It plays with borders (the clown is a border crosser, a liminal character, who transgresses boundaries for example between audience and stage);
2. The clowns age and genealogy: clowns can be both child-like and senile (generally one can seldom tell their age);
3. The ability to totally control their body, and to completely lose this control;
4. Gender ambivalence (Their gender and sexuality may take on ambiguous forms);
5. Emotional extremes: clown make-up and/or mimic can express both crying and laughing;
6. The play with languages (clowns tend not to speak at all or to speak in lunatic or “alternative”;⁵
7. Their play with mortality, expressed in the clowns’ ambivalent position between “good” and “bad”.

These seven traits mentioned above were all apparent when I observed my informants perform as well as my encounter with my own clown. The seven traits above provide a basic, fundamental framework on how the clown-figure in general shall be understood here. Through

⁵ “Gibberish” as it shall be referred to in this thesis.

this thesis I shall illustrate how the use of play, energy, gibberish language and extreme emotions are common tools for a clown to communicate and connect to its audience. I shall also discuss the implications of the clowns oscillating behavior betwixt and between identities which allows them to connect to the audience in question here – people in a state of emergency, as they too find themselves in a liminal situation abiding by rules often stated by someone or something else.

Not only are there traits to a clown to distinguish and comprehend its nature, but the purpose or context of the clown can also vary. In the special themed journal issue on violent clowns, authors Ylönen and Keisalo present and elaborate on some of the forms in which a clown appears (2019). They explore the liminal positioning of clowns in aesthetic terms by looking at the distinctions and similarities of circus clowns, horror clowns and ritual clowns. Paul Boissac notes that circus clowns often profane the sacred, thereby bringing out into the open what was secluded and protected by taboos. He depicts one of the most common circus clown characters, August, who traditionally is clumsy, slow-witted and usually mocked and victimized by its paired and more skillful Whitefaced clown (2019: 14). While the circus clown challenges the normalcy, taboos and limits of culture and society at large, the ritual clown generally mock sacred acts, performers and objects, act obscenely and cause chaos within ceremonies. By contrast, while the ritual clown can be seen in a dualistic pair to the sublime and the grotesque, the circus clown in the sacred and profane, the trait of a horror clown can be placed with fear and disgust, for example with Pennywise in Stephen King's *It* (Bouissac 2019: 20; King 1986). Although in shifting ways, clowns derive from their liminality or how they operate between two worlds in dichotomies. They cross boundaries, mix categories and in their messiness and ambiguity they call attention to normative systems (Bouissac 2019: 22).

In this thesis I will also discuss the liminal space in which the clown operates, but here in relation to an audience who also find themselves in a liminal space within a crisis of various sorts. The clown that shall be pictured and elaborated on through the coming ethnography is the *humanitarian clown*, as this is the self-declared title of my informants. The term “humanitarianism” is controversial and has been given a critical light by anthropologist in terms of its role and relation to power structures and morality (Fassin 2008, Fassin 2011). I shall not enter into this debate in this thesis, I will only clarify how the clowns are viewed as “humanitarian” in this case. It is humanitarian as my informants' target group is people in a

situation of emergency⁶ where the specific aim of their performance is to create and provide momentary relief through joy and laughter for communities and people in crisis. I shall illustrate how this particular clown plays with, confronts and breaks the rules of norms, topics, agendas etc. in order to connect to its audience who find themselves in a similar space of in-between.

THE CLOWN IN ANTHROPOLOGY

Barnaby King (2017) provides a thorough overview of the clown's engagement within anthropology. King argues that until recently, scholarly research on clowns, primarily done by anthropologists and historians, has "failed to grasp the deeply political and social character of clowning without dismissing or idealizing it", which has contributed to reduce it to 'essentialized and functionalist cultural interpretations' (2017: 14). Earlier, one of the focus of anthropologists towards clowning has been on the ritual context of certain North American native people. During the 1930s and 1940s comparative approaches were offered to understand and explain the behavior of the clown. By comparing the *Kachina* clown of the Pueblo with the *Mayo* and *Yaqui* clowns of the Sonora people, Elsie Parsons and Ralph L. Beals (1934) uncovered a coherent pattern to the social purpose of their transgressions: "the clowns have a punitive and policing function in ceremonial matters and through their license in speech and song a somewhat similar function in domestic matters, ridicule being a strong weapon among the Pueblos" (King 2017: 15; Parsons & Beals 1934: 499).

In the 1980s and 1990s, anthropologists have provided clowning with a more ambivalent and agential potency under the influence by Victor Turners theories of social process and the emerging field of performance studies (King 2017: 15). Don Handelman (1981) discusses how previous studies of the ritual clown have attempted to demonstrate the relation between the clown's behavior and themes of everyday life external to the ritual context. He argues that "if clown figures are fixtures of certain rites, then a parsimonious (although partial) explanation of their presence should look first for their contributions to the working of such rites in *organizational* and *symbolic* terms" (1981: 21). He examines the phases of a Pakistani wedding rite, segments of the Easter rites of the Mayo, performances of the Pueblo Indian Ritual-clown and the Dance of Man ceremony of the Tewa (1981). He presents attributes and affinities to the clown to the type of boundaries and its reflexivity as a consequence of existing in an ongoing

⁶ Refugee camps, hospitals, orphanages, sites of natural disaster, etc. (see below)

state of self-transformation. This enables the clown to help transfer the ritual subjects through the ritual's sequential phases (1981: 21).

Semiotician and scholar of circus Paul Bouissac (1990) argues that clown performance are rather benign rituals that do little to disrupt or question dominant values, emphasizing stability and stasis over conflict and change. He contradicts Turners "social drama" model by applying "a Lévi Straussian binary to clown routines that reduced them to ahistorical reflections of stable cultural systems, without considering that stability itself was not inert but the product of certain power relations and agendas" (King 2017: 19). In his later work Bouissac (2015) takes a more attentive approach to the role of the clown by looking at its material significance. His focus is primarily on circus clowns and he suggests that the "clowns symbolic transgression may both function to uphold systems of power and also potentially upend them" (King, 2017: 20). Bouissac acknowledges the emerging movements of clowning breaking free from its traditional space within the circus ring, however he does not provide a substantial description of such work. Barnaby King argues that the analysis of social clowning should be just as relevant and researched upon as the clown within the circus. In his research he shows that in Colombia more and more clowns are finding alternative stages to perform beyond the circus ring creating a flourishing space of innovation and creativity (2017: 20).

"Hospital clowns, street clowns or humanitarian clowns may be driven by 'commendable concerns for the well-being of communities,' as Bouissac suggest (2015: 18), but they may also be experienced professionals retooling elements of clown tradition to engage in a socially progressive agenda that denounces injustice and empowers oppressed communities" (King 2017: 21).

Alternative stages outside the circus ring is what is used by my informants as well. The humanitarian clown which shall be the scope of this thesis takes place and performs in various locations. What shall be the focus of my analysis is not so much the physical location of the clowns, but rather the space of *liminality* where I will argue the clown holds permanent residence. The concept of liminality shall be introduced and viewed as the place where the clown invites its audience to connect and interact with each other. I shall discuss how the clown, by being in a state of in-between categories, plays with social norms and hierarchy, which intersect in people everyday roles to create new connections between them across these daily roles.

MEET THE CLOWNS

This research would not have been possible without the incredible support of my “gate-keeper” informants, Laura, Jane and Bart. Their contacts within the clowning network opened many doors streamlining the planning and execution process. Being administrative leaders in their respective organizations, they vouched for me within their network in addition to sharing insights and experiences within clowning.

Laura put me in contact with the organization I met in Colombia. Numerous hours have been spent videoconferencing over the last eighteen months discussing her organization and clowning while coping on either side of the world with the Covid restrictions. Laura is administratively connected to the organization which will be presented as Red Nose Coop (RNC). For the purpose of anonymity and ethics I will not provide more detail on each organization as they are quite substantial and easily found online. To secure their anonymity, I will only disclose for contextual purposes what they do in terms of humanitarian work, as clowning professionals and their collective goal.

RNC is an international, non-governmental organization who sends professional clown and circus artists on tours around the world to perform for people in situations of crisis. Laura introduced me to Jane who I met on day three in Colombia. She is the head of her own clown organization in Colombia ‘Payasos Payasos’ who has partnered with RNC to share and develop their clowning skills as well as travel on tours together to perform. Jane and I developed a strong friendship over the course of my field research. We had regular dialogue after I returned to Norway and shared both laughter and tears during lockdown times. During my time in Colombia, we attended rehearsals, performances and workshops, and Jane also invited me into her home to meet her family and friends.

I came to know Bart after returning to Norway and reaching out to his organization Latterlig Lett! (LL) They generously invited me to join them on tour as they set out to perform for Norwegians under lockdown by turning a bus into a mobile theatre and traveling around the country. We spent hours on the road during which I could freely question Bart and his team. People in LL also insisted that I actually perform with them because they believed it would provide a much deeper insight into their clowning. On one of our tours, it was only Bart and I traveling, performing and sharing experiences within clowning and humanitarian work. LL is the only one of the three organizations I studied that does not use the iconic red clown nose during performances. Otherwise, they all identify and present as clowns. The use of the red

nose is something I would have wished to explore if I had the time. However, since many of my informants implied that it is not essential to their performance or character I have chosen to not go into detail about the nose. The nose thus seemed not to be a must for a performer, although it could make them more easily recognizable to audiences when performing. Most of my interlocutors maintained that the true essence of clown is made apparent and obvious through their performance style, energy and spirit.

The three organizations have worked across the world in crisis zones, sites of natural disaster, schools, hospitals, for patients, refugees, homeless people, people with special disabilities, the elderly etc. One rule they have in common is that they only go where they are invited as they do not wish to impose on people already under a lot of stress. The teams are composed of volunteer circus artists and clown performers. Though it will be argued in this thesis that anyone may possess the traits or characters to connect to one's own clown, it must be emphasized that the demanding work that these organizations carry out is not for everyone. It requires substantial training, excellent communication skills and the ability to read and adapt to the audience. While on tour they hold workshops and play sessions to provide the audience with the tools and knowledge to continue clowning after they leave. Additionally, these clown organizations will engage the host organization in play sessions and workshops empowering them to continue with this work into the future. The organization's aim is to create temporary relief for communities and people who find themselves in a situation of crisis, through joy and laughter. Using play, magic and laughter they seek to facilitate a safe space to replace fear and insecurity with interpersonal contact based on respect, integrity and empathy.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

While undertaking my fieldwork in Colombia, the main method of data collection was through participant observation. This involved personal involvement in my informants' daily lives over an extended period of time, observing, asking questions and keeping notes (Bernard 2017; O'Reilly 2012; Shah 2017; Zahle 2012). As my research focused on the implications of clowning I needed to become acquainted with the people behind their clown. The plan was to attend and observe as many of their performances as they would allow me and commence my work on "deep hanging out" (Geertz 1998). It was important to let them know that I had a genuine interest in clowning, and was not simply a researcher invading their space. During my first meeting with my interlocutors in Colombia, I was told that other researchers and journalists

had joined them for periods too brief to gain any meaningful insights. This was the first time that anyone would have sufficient time to really understand their work. Jane also told me after some weeks there that they had been surprised when they met me at the door the first day expecting “an old, serious lady, but we were so happy it was just you, Rebel!” as Jane put it.

My background in amateur theatre became a key advantage as my first meeting with the organization Payaso Payaso was during one of their weekly rehearsals. My integration into their rehearsals was made quite easeful by the fact that I knew many of the acting games they played, allowing us to play and connect despite the language barriers (see chapter three). Additionally, this allowed them to understand me and my motives, these being, to grasp and convey *their* skills and ways from *their* point of view (Malinowski 1992 [1922]: 25). I was able to negotiate and de-weaponize my field persona and identity as a researcher, as well as connect better with my informants creating a more open dialogue from an early stage. Our common interest in dramatic arts became the foundation of a wonderful collaboration between us as they quickly adopted me into their group and created a “safe space” for me as an outsider (Schwandner-Sievers 2009). They made it clear that it was important for me to enjoy myself in Colombia. To make friends and feel safe, which often led to them inviting me to various events both clown-related and otherwise. Within the first few weeks of my fieldwork, I had been invited to dinner parties, family gatherings, to pick up children from kindergarten, shopping at the mall and even with extended family to a finca in the mountains.

The security and anonymity of my interlocutors have been of highest priority during my collection of data (Zahle 2017). In line with NSD’s (Norwegian center for Research data) ethical research guidelines I have informed all my interlocutors about my research project, and they have given their (verbal) consent to participate. I have also reassured them that they could withdraw their participation at any time. Most of my informants expressed to me that they did not mind using their real names as they thought this thesis could promote and be beneficial for their continued humanitarian work. This was an ethical dilemma on my part as I wished to support their important work as much as possible. However, due to privacy and security issues, I decided to retain their anonymity. I have chosen to use pseudonyms for all my interlocutors as well as changing their clown names and names of the organizations. Additionally, the notes taken during my research have been written in Norwegian and secured on a password protected computer, along with my informants’ names being altered. Furthermore, there is the matter of a “third-party group presence”, namely the audience. I had no direct contact with the audience members, except incidentally and interactively, during performances. Most of these people are

vulnerable and living in crisis environments (ie; hospitals, refugee centres) so the anonymization of the clowns as a group will also secure their identity. To conduct my analysis, the only audience details necessary was their gender and approximate age. Moreover, for the hospital events covered in the analysis, I have created a “collage” of events during a “typical” visit and not in order of any particular day or time to further secure the anonymity of the patients and others present (Hopkins 1993), as these alterations would not affect the material itself.

During the entire course of my fieldwork, I conducted one official, semi-structured interview with one of my main informants Laura (see chapter two) (O’Reilly 2012: 120). The reason for this was during Covid I had observed various clowns digitally (via video) and had compiled a series of questions. These I posed directly to Laura as one of my main informants and authorities on clowning. Apart from this interview, conversations and questions were raised quite casually during “hang outs” or just generally where topics would arise organically. I would allow them to freely explain details and aspects from previous shows which helped me to make sense of future shows I observed. What I have experienced with my interlocutors both in Colombia, Norway and online is that before and after the show or meetings, the performers will have a Check-in and check-out session. This is their way of letting everyone know how they feel both mentally and physically as they start, and what may have caused reactions or thoughts to arise at the end of the day. On all these occasions, I have taken notes openly without it feeling inappropriate or intrusive which, again, led me having most of my questions answered without it becoming an investigation.

The methodological approach over the course of this fieldwork has been plentiful. I have actively participated and merely observed in various settings as follows:

1. During rehearsals where the clowns develop both their individual and team skills.
2. In workshops conducted as teambuilding for larger corporations and introductory workshops in clowning.
3. Online discussions and interviews with clowns and circus artists around the world⁷
4. During their performances in hospital where I saw them act for both individual patients and wards full of children.
5. During street performances for passers-by.

⁷ These were both closed sessions by invitations, and public, live events for anyone to join

I have observed shows for ordinary school children as well as institutions for the elderly. I have witnessed them lecturing on the fundamentals of clowning at a School of Dramatic Arts. Finally, I have performed alongside them, as a clown, in many of the settings mentioned above. It is safe to say that over the past eighteen months I have completely immersed myself in as many clowning related activities as possible. In doing this, I have invested a great deal of time in coming to understand the many facets of the clown and the depths of their performances for the audience in question. Barnaby King (2017) applied a specific terminology to this particular way for conducting research for his work which he called *ethnoclownography*. He found himself frequently switching hats between academic, teacher, performer, colleague and student: “Indeed clowning itself emerged during this research period not only as the object of enquiry but as the means of enquiry: a way of investigating, learning and communicating” (2017: 9). His description was something I found myself highly relating to as implied through the matters above.

SHIFTING FIELD SITES

Arriving back in Norway, a change of strategy was necessary to gather sufficient data for the research project. My interlocutors and I were all affected by the global pandemic so I decided to continue my focus on the implications of clowns in a crisis – particularly since we were all currently in one. I wished to observe their handling and adaptation to the pandemic and discover how they made sense of the way laughter and clowning matters in dealing with a digital space. The challenge here was that this crisis was airborne and forced people to stay at home, meaning the clowns lost their main tool of existence – their audience (as I shall argue in this thesis, clowns exist socially in relation to the ones they engage). They had to repurpose and change their space of “being” to a digital one to reach their audience. I decided that my method would be to immerse myself in anything clowning related on the world wide web. Essentially, I used a digital way of “go along” attending everything they did in a cyber space (O’Reilly 2012: 99). I thought I could create a larger group of informants and get a better grasp on what clowning was if I could connect the relation to the people involved by taking part in their lives in a virtual world (O’Reilly 2012: 174). I followed numerous clown organizations and performers on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. The more I followed the more I discovered similarities between various groups.

Performers are often freelance workers, working for several projects and organizations simultaneously or previously. I soon realized that a name in one group had a connection to another in a different country and suddenly I had a giant web of performers connecting across continents. Through their open, online (often live) performances, workshops, shared spaces and discussion groups, I was slowly able to see recurring themes and matters which I had noticed during my time in Colombia. These events helped me to gain knowledge and understanding about the meaning of clowning. None of them are directly used in this thesis because they can too easily lead to the identity of my informants, but they were my pathway to recognizing the value of the material I had collected in Colombia. This digital networking also led to the discovery of the Norwegian clown organization *Latterlig Lett!* (LL) who worked with people in states of emergency on an international level too. After contacting LL, I arranged to participate on their national tours. I was present on three separate occasions in different parts of Norway and on the last tour they allowed me to perform as a clown at six individual shows.

The experience of performing and personally sensing the “being” of a clown had a definite impact on my fieldwork. I will thus argue that my own experience of clowning has been a major methodological tool in conducting my research. It has provided the ability to understand and further explain clowning in this thesis with more depth than would have been possible from simply observing. As illustrated in the introductory vignette, my reaction to Bart’s announcement that I would be performing was panic which then forced self-enquiry about why I panicked. I questioned my own ability to perform and believed I was not ready for it yet. However, during the first show I quickly realized that I had been provided with many tools of learning through participating with my interlocuters. It was through my own experience and schooling together with my informants and by taking in subjects on clowning online that I attained the ability of embodied or tacit knowledge in “learning by doing” (Jenkins 1994; O’Reilly 2009: 99; Müller 2000). In their attempt to explain what a clown is or does, my informants have always maintained that I would fully understand once I physically participate. I have used myself as an analytical tool throughout this thesis as my own experiences of certain events led me to both understand and articulate it (Briggs 1970: 6; Müller 2000).

Although one might argue that contextualizing the location of one’s field site is quite relevant to account for the research conducted, this is less so for my fieldwork. I have conducted a multi-sited ethnography by obtaining my material in two quite different countries – Norway and Colombia, as well as conducting field research in a digital space. The field site do not always coincide to one geographic location, but rather can be a social one “in and of the world

systems” (Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Kurotani 2004). During my engagement to digital clowning happening in every corner of the world where people of numerous nationalities have taken part, I have discovered some recurring issues that occur regardless of nationality, and these are the themes for my chapters (outlined below). Because my research was disrupted after a month and a half, my field site shifted to a digital one taking place in the homes of people around the world, and further, to a site in my own country with a culture quite different from Colombia. While the sites changed, I argue that the concept of clown did not. That said, I simultaneously argue that the relevance of *humor* is something both universal and culturally conditioned (see chapter five), there are certain elements to the concept of clowning that seem untouched by the shifting of geographic location as shall be illustrated. Apart from the shift in humor and language, I contend that the social relation and space created between clown and audience originates from the same elements regardless of it being a hospital in Colombia or an asylum center in Norway.

As I was not able to visit and perform for people in crisis situations as planned, my understanding of how and why humanitarian clowning matters, was formed largely through online fieldwork. This happened literally through live and public discussions between us, online, whereby they would relate personal stories and experiences from previous tours to crisis regions. They would be asked questions or to retell stories from their experiences in refugee camps or sites of natural disasters and I could collect these stories and identify the common features. (Du Boulay 1984). Often, this would take the form of a “Question & Answer” session, after which I would analyze and compare this information with information previously collected and looking for commonalities.

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND ANALYTICAL ARGUMENTS

In **this chapter** I have elaborated on my somewhat complex entry into the field and argued for its multi-sited nature. I have provided a framework for my understanding of the concept of a clown and introduced my informants and their humanitarian clown mission. Additionally, I have discussed my methodological approach both as an observer, but also as a full participant, being given the opportunity to clown myself. Thus, using myself and my experience as an analytical tool for understanding the concept of humanitarian clowning has been quite central. In **chapter two** I will introduce the clown through my informants emic understanding of it as an amplification of themselves. By using Victor Turners concept of liminality, I will illustrate how the clown also exists in a space betwixt and between identities. This space is also

experienced by my informant's target group who have ended up in limbo due to the crisis situation afflicting them. Moreover, I will argue that the clown is not simply a character, but a full being of its own existing in a liminal space of being for a performer; “not me... not, not me”. In **chapter three** I further my understanding of a clown as created in an interpersonal, liminal, and social space through play. Play theory will be added to show how this is also argued as a liminal concept. In clowning, play becomes more than simply games. Play has the potential to provide a place to easefully explore layers of vulnerability, humility and failure - all which connect us as humans. **Chapter four** explores what happens in this liminal space of “in-between” with the clowns and their audience. The clown creates and connects in both a physical and emotive space with its audience through play. In this space the audience is given room to express and explore emotions and energy which enables an expansion for disruption and action. Further, due to the nature of play being an “in-between” space, all social statuses and hierarchies within a hospital or refugee camp can be temporarily suspended providing the audience with break from their “everyday roles”. In **Chapter five**, I will highlight the language of humor as a tool used by the clown to connect to its audience. I will discuss the implications of the ability of humor to be both culturally and universally specific. This chapter also explores the various elements in humor and how the clowns convey their messages to a multi-lingual audience through the use of gibberish and body-language which can serve to break down and/or enlighten social norms and structures. I will conclude by summarizing the thesis centering on the key arguments and contributions to the anthropological discourse on humanitarian clowning.

CHAPTER TWO: I AM NOT ME... BUT NOT NOT ME

INTRODUCTION

“First and foremost, I am a human, of course... But if I were to tell you who I really am, I would say I *am* a clown. I am a clown in everything I do, all the time. It’s a part of me that I let out more easily than others do, but I do believe everyone has a clown within them. It just means that I let myself be lead differently and do things in another way than most people, because I am and know my clown.”

(Conversation with Fredrick)

The first moment I realized that the clown seemed to be more than simply a character was after the first night with my informants in Colombia. We had just finished rehearsals and Jane had offered to drive me home. Prior to this encounter, I understood that clowning was more than merely big shoes and a red nose. Yet I had not realized that behind clown performers were layers of thorough construction which was far from coincidental game playing. This realization changed my perspective and precondition to enquiry, raising new questions regarding the social levels and significance in *being* a clown. My research question quickly changed from the *effect* of clowning to the social *role* of a clown and clowning.

The chapter will first provide a brief historical context of the clown’s role in society. How and what has the clown been understood as through time? I then introduce the being of a clown as seen from my informant’s emic understanding. Who the clown is to the performer is often best understood through the way my informants talk about their clown – I argue. The performers refer to the clown as being apart, but also integral to them. I relate this to Richard Schechner’s concept of ‘Not me, but not not me’ (1985). I shall illustrate the ritual passage in the transition into a clown. This transitioning I understand through Victor Turner’s elaboration on the *Rite des passage* and specifically the space of liminality (1986). This is a space which I shall argue, where the clown is situated permanently.

“EVERY CULTURE HAS A CLOWN”

Although there has been no systematic research on clowning on a global scale, studies indicate that clowns or their equivalent other (fool, jester) can be found in almost all cultures of the world. Some scholars have documented religious and secular institutions that encourage actors whose public behaviors are bordering on transgressive and who often cause a mixture of fear and laughter among those who witness their antics. Such events are usually contained within the boundaries of time and space and obtain a ritualistic nature (Bouissac 2015, 181). There can be found traces of the first clowns as early as ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, followed by the Jesters in the Middle Ages (Davison (2013: 18; Peacock 2009: 107). The jester or fools use of play as a way of deflating the mighty or parodying their behaviour has existed for centuries both in the church and the royal courts. In this way the jester was used to help societies see the greater “truths” by conveying their perception of the world either spiritually or politically as commentators (Peacock 2009: 107). In the church as well as the royal court the jester’s role in society was a combination of entertainment and truth telling. Its purpose was to invert by “lowering the mighty in their seats and exalting the humble and meek” (Peacock 2009, 108).

In Europe, the Italians introduced *Commedia Dell’arte* to the rest of Europe after the end of the Renaissance in the eighteenth century (Bouissac 2015: 172; Davison 2013: 19). The characters represented recognizable and fixed types or figures of society in an exaggerated manner by standard names and identifiable clothing⁸ (Davison 2013). Often the characters depicted the differences between the social classes in society and once again the stage was used to make mockery of the higher class. Later, Shakespeare incorporated clown characters into his dramatic text where the clown would act as a light relief or serving the role as truth tellers like the court jester (Peacock 2009, 87). Inspired by *Commedia Dell’Arte*’s character the Harlequin came its successor Joseph Grimaldi – considered one of the greatest English clowns. His routines and use of facial makeup greatly contributed to what is considered the golden age of the circus from the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries where the iconic Auguste clown was born (2009, 88).

Before it became a generic in contemporary English, *clown* was the name of a British pantomime character of the eighteenth century. But originally, it was a common word which referred to the class of undereducated peasants (Bouissac 2015: 171). There are some clown types that are more familiar than others, the most common ones being The Auguste and The

⁸ Typical figures of *Commedia Dell’arte* can be categorized into four groups: Zanni: the witty servants by the name of Harlequin or Colombiana, Vecchi: often wealthy and greedy old men by the name of Il Dotore or Pantalone they often head of household, Innamorati: a young, upper class couple madly in love often called Flavio and Isabella. Il capitano: an independent and braggy character often military like (Davison 2013, 33-64).

Whiteface. The Auguste appeared in European circuses during the nineteenth century, drawing its name from the antiphrastic use of the noble name August in the means of ridiculing a person as clumsy and slow-witted. What the names “clown” and “auguste” have in common in the language of the circus is how they both were used as terms of abuse (2015: 171). The August clown attempts to be clothed and act like a smart gentleman but fails, which is signaled in both his attire and his act. He is paired with his contrasting other, the Whiteface, which is often all these things in his neat and tidy clothing signifying both status, wealth and control as opposed to its partner in the low-status, incompetent and incapable Auguste (Bouissac 2015: 172; Peacock 2009: 20).

The first and second world wars had an impact on clowning, however, this was remedied by Jacques Lecoq and his followers who turned it into an art-form introducing clowning into their training program at The International theatre School in Paris in the 1960s. This resulted in clowning being taught in drama schools worldwide to this day (Davison 2013: 18; Peacock 2009:31). For Lecoq, the clown, unlike other theatrical performers, has immediate contact with his audience. The clown comes to life through the people that are looking at him through play (Peacock 2009: 32).

Clown performer, teacher, director and author Jon Davison suggests in alliance with clown historian Tristan Remy that a chronology of clowns is misleading; they do not and cannot have such an isolated and self-sufficient history (2013). Remy proposes that clowns occur in different moments in different societies, being shaped by those moments and societies. Therefore, rather than focusing on the clown’s journey through various empires (Egyptians, Greeks, etc.) the interesting thing is what clowns did, how they did it in each historical moment and how what they did interrelates to those moments, giving us a much more complex understanding (Davison 2012: 19). Additionally, by illustrating the presence of the clown being both in the holy church, the royal court, on the street, in the theatre and at the circus shows, it shows how the place changes however the clown as a character conveying truths and breaking social norms remains the same. Although being a figure of the in-between in contact with both the sacred and the profane, the clown portrays the true structures and conditions of society through comic relief.

By contextualizing the role of the clown historically we can better grasp the meaning of the clown through time despite cultural or geographic location. As illustrated here, the clown acts as a connection between individual humans and society at large. By illustrating and communicating the “truths” in a comical act, the clown may ridicule the people of higher status

and also enlighten the conditions of the “peasants” without further sanctions. This historical overview suggests that the clown has through time in all its shapes and various names, obtained the ability to connect the pure with the impure, the higher with the lower, the sacred with the profane and the good with the evil. This leads to the question of how the performer transitions into their clown.

“I WANT TO GIVE HER A CHANCE TO GRIEVE AS WELL”

During one of my first nights in Colombia, Jane and I parked on the pathway outside my apartment in one of the busier suburbs in Cali. The area would be buzzing with people and traffic during the day, but dusk had fallen upon the city and the road was completely empty. We stared out onto the dark street for a moment before Jane broke the silence and sighed. She confessed that she was anxious about their first hospital visit for the year. She said: “This will be the first visit since David died and last time I was there, it was with him”. The group had tragically and unexpectedly lost David, a young group member, over Christmas, less than two months ago. This had impacted the group and their work considerably. Through all my sessions with Jane, his name would often be mentioned with both laughter and longing. Jane acknowledged that she should have taken more time to grieve, but that she also wanted to keep David’s memory alive by honouring him through their work.

Jane went quiet and seemed to retreat into her thoughts. She hesitated before continuing:

“I think Lulu needs a guardian angel. It won’t be easy for her that he’s gone, and I want to give her a chance to grieve as well. Maybe David can sit on her shoulder when we’re in the hospital and she can talk to him. Maybe some of the children can see him too. I think she feels a little angry with him that he suddenly left. She could behave a little more crazy, you know? If she talks to herself or to David and asks his opinion or, argues with him or they can discuss things they see in the hospital together. What do you think?”

As she talked, she illustrated what she meant by whispering towards her shoulder and pointing out onto the empty dark road in front of us, as if there was someone there. I was a little confused and tried to process what she had said. At first, I did not understand who she was talking about, but then I realized she had just referred to her clown (named Lulu) as someone else. Did her clown need to grieve as well? We played

with the idea for a few minutes, how she could use him in her performance and while I suggested that *you* could do this and that, Jane would propose that *she* rather than *I* could try such and such. “I think it’s a good idea. It can give Lulu some more time with David and it can give the children some hope, you know, if they can see him or not” she concluded.

*

The significance of clowning means something quite personal for my informants, as well as something highly interpersonal in relation to an audience. The aim here is not to imply some multiple person behaviour. Rather, it will be argued that the significance of a clown seems to be quite personal for every performer as it resides within them. I seek to isolate how or what triggers the behaviour or performance in the being or becoming of a clown and how it relates to the performer itself. Through this being or action of clowning, the performer connects and confronts a space within themselves. This space, as conveyed by my informants, is a space that they, and humans in general, are not normally in touch with. This view is also validated in Fredricks introductory quote. Through this, I understand clowning as a creative, expressive release of inner emotions that are channelled in the performance of a clown.

I will not dwell much on the question of self in this thesis. I only intend to shed light on how my interlocutors understand their clown in relation to their self. Nancy Scheper-Hughes proposes that the western perception of the bodily self is rather biomedical, as something physical and individual (1987). She suggests that the body can be divided into three levels of analysis; the individual, the social and the political body. She argues that the body and the self cannot be seen as purely autonomous, as is has been in western societies. We also have a social self which is both symbolically and metaphorically good to think with in terms of culture, nature and society, as well as the body being something which is governed by larger institutions such as the state (1987: 7). This means that the body is individual, but also something that co-exists in relation to its environment. The social self has also been discussed by Marilyn Strathern (2017). She argues that a person as an individual is incomplete on its own and must be seen holistically in relation to a larger category in social life as part of a whole (2017, 86). Alone you are an *individual*, but you also have a social *dividual* in relation to others, and the more accredited you are as your social dividual, the more you are yourself (2017).

In terms of the clown, the self can also be understood as a relational identity, existing only in an interpersonal and social space. Arguably, its credibility and identity will grow the

more its space and interaction is strengthened through social connection. This connection often appears, as we shall see, through play (chapter three). The clown self will be understood as a social self, but which builds on something individual from within. As the event above showed, Jane was going through a process of grief after the loss of her friend. She also felt the need to let her clown express her grief. Her way of creating a release for her clown Lulu was through the performance, by connecting to her late friend, David, and also sharing this connection with the audience in the hope that they would see him too. To better understand the being and becoming of a clown, next, I will share some insights in the understanding of one's clown as seen from an informant's perspective during an interview. What takes places when on is transforming into a clown, and how is it also connected as an integral part of oneself?

“TELL ME ABOUT YOUR CLOWN”

Laura has worked as a clown for most of her professional career and was one of my earliest informants during this project. Laura and I would often have informal chats over video conferencing to provide a general status update from our sides of the world. I had kept notes from these conversations and felt it necessary to request a more official and structured interview to provide more clarity and understanding for my fieldwork. Only a few questions which are most central and relevant to the fieldwork have been chosen. During our interview I asked Laura to tell me about her clown. She responded:

“I guess my clown in general is someone who really likes to be proper and likes things to be good. She's both kind of bossy and also kind of stuck up, she both wants to have a party, but if something goes wrong she has to shut down the party. She's a little uptight and really concerned with the rules. So, how this can manifest in a show is, for example, during a performance in a displaced persons' camp on the border to Myanmar, there were all these benches lined up for us, but in a tiny dark space. So, we decided to move the benches to a better place. Or rather I, in my clown, moved them and it became the opening act and also a way of playing with gender. See, there were these men there who said they could do it, but I was like “NONONO, I'LL do it!” and it became a funny thing because the kids would sit on the bench, but then I would make them all stand up and move the bench two feet, and sit and stand up again and again. It quickly became a way of playing because it was relatable. It was also a way for me – Laura – to set up,

take care of the audience and myself, to see if the props were in the right place. So, my clown and I were both concerned with the same things; are the audience safe, do we have everything... but if a prop was missing, my clown could just run off to the van in the middle of the act and get it, but I, Laura, couldn't. If something went terribly wrong during the act, my clown could just stand and cry... a LOT..., but I could not do that. Or she could boss people around and suddenly it becomes a fun way to play with power dynamic because sometimes the audience will scold me back, if my clown is really in charge and then a little kid tells me what to do it immediately becomes fun, and that helps my clown too because she really wants to get things right, and gets very upset when she doesn't. So, this fuels her persona.”

I continue to ask her: “how do you, as yourself, identify with these characteristics that you have as a clown?” She answered:

“I think that my clown is definitely an amplification of who I am, and a lot of the process of finding my clown was done semantically. Thinking about how I move and carry myself. So, I'm a tall person and I carry myself that way, but as a clown I carry myself even taller. So, if I, Laura, look around and see how people are engaging at work I look and think as a teacher or a leader that ‘Rebecca looks a little uncomfortable’. I might approach you and ask ‘are you okey’, but my clown will look *making big eyes, glaring* and think “‘oh-oh she’s not having fun... HAVE FUN REBECCA!’” – and it comes from the same place, it’s not just about increasing the volume of an emotion, but a shift in the whole reaction. It’s the part of me that is concerned and looking around that is amplified, and this also amplifies the question of am I allowed to have fun with this?

For example, I, Laura, am a very logical person. I research stuff and try to find the right approach and question how can we do this right? My clown also wants to be logical, but her logic is not to look at the bibliography of something to find something else. It could be to run around screaming until something happens. It’s an amplification of certain parts of myself, but also turning off other parts of myself. In intellectual discourse there is a space to be reflected, fair and balanced, but as a clown you choose something, and you just go with it. I, Laura will solve a problem by looking at it from your perspective, but my clown is not going to do that, she’s not going to quietly reflect and come back.

It's also an important thing that my clown is not my best self. Yes, it is a very *real* version of myself, but it's not like my clown is all the stuff I like about myself. Just like I can be self-conscious about myself, so can my clown. My clown loves to sing, but she does not like to speak, she doesn't like her speaking voice. And I know I, Laura, have a self-consciousness thing about my voice as well. She is a full being and not just of good things - that's not very interesting, you know? And, also, flaws are more relatable for others!"

I continue asking "It seems like your clown is more emotionally capable or accessible than you are. How do you connect to the expression of this in the space of 'my clown can do this, but I can't' and yet you are the one taking action?". Laura replied:

"I think it's about how we step into the world. I, as myself, am a person who makes eye-contact with you in the park, or someone who you can ask for directions at the airport or elsewhere, I'm a pretty open person. People in Sweden⁹ would come and ask me for directions and I'll be like "oh, yeah, let me help you with that!" It's absurd! And that's my normal self, but I am also introvert in that I spend a lot of time *not* stepping into the world just being by myself and not making eye-contact. But, as my clown I CAN'T, she has to engage, my clown is radiating energy all the time. I, Laura, can pass a kid and choose to give a cheeky little wink or not, but if a child passes my clown I have to react or leap into it. So, in terms of those feelings, all those are mine, but it's an amplification of them. One of the places I go as my clown is in the sense of unfairness. I spend most of my professional life thinking about displaced people in the job I have, and in general I have an inflated sense of justice. In clowning I get to feel that. I get to be angry with it through her. And I also get to turn that part of me, Laura, off. Whereas my clown can go and go and go, so sometimes I have to remind myself to take off my nose and stop."

Much of what Laura expresses in this interview, I also recognized in comments and discussions with my other informants as well. Most of her approaches in describing the connection to her clown is done with exemplifications and not with clear answers as it might be hard to explain these verbally. It suggests how much of being a clown is tacit knowledge. The way she illustrates her relationship to her clown shows how they are both interrelated and originate from the same core, but she also sees her as a full being of her own. Their clown is them, but also not them. Often, my informants seem to struggle how to best explain what this

⁹ Laura is not from Sweden, but from North America

clown persona is, because as it is a liminal identity, it is also lost in-between the vocabulary to describe it. Moreover, it resonates with what Schechner (1985) describes as “not me... but not not me” (1985, 112). I suggest that every performer (and arguably everyone else, as many of my informants believe) has their own relation, understanding and significance towards their own clown. This is general for all of the clowns I talked with. Simultaneously, the significance and understanding of a clown is quite distinct. This is also because, as Laura explained, it comes from characteristics within the self, but it is amplified, making the persona of a clown as unique as their own personality. I have so far suggested that the clown is an amplification of self, something which is relatable for us as individuals but also as part of a whole, as well as being a truth-teller through time. In the following section I shall introduce the space of liminality which I argue is where the clown is continuously situated.

THE RITUAL TRANSITION

Victor Turner (1982) explains Arnold Van Gennep’s term of *Rites de Passage*, which Van Gennep applies to transitions in a persons or groups shift in social status and argues that almost *all* types of rites have the processual form of a “passage”. The rite of passage has three distinct phases. The first is the *separation* where the ritual subject is detached from its previous social statuses through symbolic behavior. The next phase is the intervening face of *transition* which van Gennep calls “margin”, “limen”, or as Turner calls it the *limina/liminality* phase. “The ritual subjects pass through a period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo which has few (though sometimes these are most crucial) of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent profane social statuses or cultural states” (Turner 1982: 24). The third phase is the *reaggregation* which includes symbolic actions that represent the return of the subject in a new and well-defined position in the society. For the ritual subject, Turner describes the liminal phase as:

In liminality, profane social relations may be discontinued, former rights and obligations are suspended, the social order may seem to have been turned upside down [...]. They are dead to the social world, but alive to the asocial world. Many societies make a dichotomy, explicit or implicit, between sacred and profane, cosmos and chaos, order and disorder. Hence temporarily undefined, beyond the normative structure. [...] In other words, in liminality people “play” with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them. (1982: 27).

I find that this description fits the characteristics and actions, or rather, the *performance* of the clown. In the performances I have observed and partaken in, I will illustrate how the clown often aims to create a disruption in the surrounding environment and turn the social order upside down by inviting its audience into its space of liminality. This is where the clown “plays” *with* the rules by defamiliarizing them. I shall return to these disruptions and rule-breaking in the coming chapters. Erving Goffman (1959) defines performance as an “activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way, any of the other participants”(1959: 26). He argues that “all the world is not, of course a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn’t are not easy to specify” (1959: 78). For Goffman there are two kinds of performers: the one who conceals as comen do (framing as a performer on stage, tv etc.) and the one who does not know they are performing (ordinary people playing their “life roles” as teachers, doctors, father, sister) (Schechner and Appel 1993: 28). Is the clown possibly the liminal performance of the two combined? The clown acts like a visible comen in front of its piers, but it is playing out the social roles in society, portraying the truths of everyday life. It is performing, but portraying the traits of our inner humanity which, as my informants imply, we are often not entirely in contact with on a regular basis? I will proceed by illustrating an example of the actual transitioning into this being or performance which I understand as being in a state of Not me... Not not me.

Performance theorist, director and author of “Between Theater and Anthropology” (1985), Richard Schechner suggests that it is in this rehearsal/ritual process that one first connects to the state of being as he calls it “Not me... not not me”:

“While performing, a performer experiences his own self not directly but through the medium of experiencing the others. While performing, he no longer has a ‘me’ but has a ‘not not me,’ and this double negative relationship also shows how restored behavior is simultaneously private and social. A person performing recovers his own self only by going out of himself and meeting the others – by entering the social field. The way in which ‘me’ and ‘not me’, the performer and the thing to be performed, are transformed into ‘not me... not not me’ is through the workshop-rehearsal/ritual process. This process takes place in a liminal time/place and in the subjunctive mood.” (1985: 112)

As Schechner explains, this process is in a liminal state of in-between and depends as much on private experiences and behavior arising from the self, as it does to the social surroundings. The perception of the two in relation, the person as a performer and one’s experience of others, is

what creates this “not not me” identity, that I understand to be the clown. It can also be recognized in how my informants transformed into their clown. It can be best illustrated with an example from my first visit with the clowns at the hospital in Colombia where I experienced my informants gradual shift into another being by enhancing and amplifying their own characteristics until they were something else – their clown.

THE TRANSITION TO A CLOWN

The shift into their clown through (what I will refer to as) a ritual transition, could be seen in minor behavioral changes outside the hospital in Cali, Colombia, before changing into costumes or warming up, as we eagerly waited to enter. Nina was mimicking and slightly making fun of the guard by the door, and Marco and Miguel were bantering and singing songs to visitors queuing up to get in. This was their first hospital visit of the year after a few months break. This was one of the larger hospitals in the city and an important client for them to work with. Payasos Payasos had established a relationship with the hospital over the course of a year. It simply began with Jane asking to perform one day and has now expanded into a weekly event in collaboration with a group of child psychiatrists. The psychiatrists can attest to the benefits of these visits on both the children and staff, and also wish to study the process more closely. I met two of the psychiatrists during several of our visits, Ella and Maria, and they also participated in a clown workshop during my time in Colombia (see chapter three).

As we entered into the hospital, I noticed that their transition into character intensified. While climbing the stairs, on our way to the fourth floor, Marco and Nina, would simultaneously chat with me while making subtle comic gestures and comments to guards and passing doctors. Miguel had his Ukulele out, playing The Beatles “Let it be” - singing half the words in English and improvising the other half in Spanish. I was quite unsure as to whether I should respond to any of this; to play along with it or just let them do their thing. The character-change into a clown intensified further as we entered the psychiatrists’ lunchroom where they changed into costumes. The room itself was quite a spectacle as I observed the team navigate “stumblingly”. Although it was slightly larger than a broom cupboard, someone had somehow managed to cram two computer desks, a lunch table with a microwave and a tiny sink in addition to the four doctors expecting our arrival. The longer we were there, the smaller the room seemed to become in response to the group’s frantic behaviour. At one point, a doctor offered to get me a

chair, but as I had no idea where it could possibly fit. I kindly declined and discreetly placed myself in the far corner.

The psychiatrist, Maria, talked us through some of the more critical patients that we would meet and whom they would like the clowns to spend some extra time with. Doctors, nurses, guards and cleaning crew would enter and exit the room every 30 seconds and each time the clowns would react differently. Sometimes politely greeting them with their actual names and occupation, other times with a surprised gasp, fainting over another doctor, acting like a bowling pin getting knocked over, or shriek and cover themselves up as if they were naked. They would also repeatedly ask me more seriously if I was comfortable and understood everything “*Todo bien, Rebe?*” (Everything okey, Rebe?). One doctor entered several times and Nina acted as if he was her husband and spoke passionately to him or pretended to be jealous if he spoke to one of the other female doctors accusing him of cheating, all the while ordering him to go and make dinner for the kids.

Articles of “civil” clothing were replaced by striped socks, colourful vests and golden feathers in tufted hair. Marco tied a yellow bandana around his neck and put a black bowler hat on, Miguel fixed his hair in a messy bun and put on a white, silk dressing gown. I was handed a mirror, as Marco pulled out a beautifully blue and green painted box with the image of a red nose on top, it had a kind of sanctity to it. Inside was his nose and some white make-up that he started putting on with his finger. While they were finishing their make-up, the doctor spoke of a rather tragic case involving the sexual abuse of a young girl which brought a cloud of seriousness over the room. Nina turned to gather herself as tears ran through her white make-up and down her cheeks. She pulled out a paper bird with a string attached from her chest pocket and played with it by pulling the string so the wings flapped, took a second to wipe her tears and then clapped her hands together “*Vamos a jugar!*” (Let’s play!).



Picture 3: Marcos box for his nose and makeup © Rebecca Hill



Picture 4: Piña, Magda and Tito in a circle to gather energy while warming up at the hospital. ©Rebecca Hill

We went out into a narrow staff hallway to warm up. By this point, the three of them were already acting very comical, with exaggerated gestures and funny comments. The warm up included various exercises that were also carried out during rehearsals. These activities served to boost creativity, imagination and enhance focus, becoming more and more “clown-like”. Their voices changed as they imitated certain characters, gradually becoming animalistic in their movements. Their eye-contact focused, shifted and broke more rapidly. They finished off with a counting exercise, increasing the pace while they stomped their feet and shook their heads simultaneously. Suddenly they broke into silence, looked at each other, put on their red noses and turned towards the main corridor a few meters away. Together they leaped out as if through an invisible curtain, throwing their arms out to the side and heads back as if they were greeting a giant applause (though the corridor at the time was empty). Nina, Miguel and Marco were gone as Magdalena, Mango and Flavio¹⁰ had completely replaced them, and from that moment they treated everyone on their way as an audience member – me included.

What I observed was not simply warming up to get into character – it was a gradual shift or passage into their clown identity. One of the starkest examples of this appeared in how their demeanour towards me shifted from casual conversation, reassuring questions and attempts of translation, to having no idea who I was or pretending I was not there. I started the day as a colleague or a friend and was gradually transferred into a category of playmate/obstacle/ to play

¹⁰ See all my informants names and their clown names in the appendix p. 95

with. Another point of note was the power of their costumes and make-up as well as the nose, which slowly transformed them. These capturing colours were a visible contrast to the hospitals white walls and staff, making them quite eye-catching to the various audiences. A third was the conscious use of certain warming-up exercises that all served the purpose of bringing them into character (something that is also explained by Jane during the two-day workshop in the following chapter). These exercises are meant to enhance focus and responsiveness and is a way to connect as performance partners and to spark creativity. However, in this event, I consider them as doing something beyond this. They are not simply Nina, Miguel and Marco warming up to entertain people in the hospital with a character they portray. They are in a process of changing into someone else entirely, with an energy gathered from within and with a purpose and motive to disturb or waken something deeper inside themselves and the people they meet.

When we left the hospital that day, I was astonished by everything I had witnessed. I noticed that once they re-entered the doctor's office after the performance they were quickly back to themselves, by walking and talking normally (relatively speaking) again. They asked me how it was as they got undressed and there were no signs at all of their clown persona. They would talk about some of the children they met, but mostly about non-hospital related topics. My mind was put in turmoil all afternoon from every patient we met. It left me with a pressing question concerning how the clowns coped with these activities and the resulting emotions. They explained that it was different for a clown. When they leave the hospital, they try to leave the performance behind as well. Nonetheless, certain happenings could continue to occupy their minds for many days. Marco, for instance, explained that he had a hard time thinking about the case of a young girl who had been sexually abused because she had the same name and age as his daughter which was an image that was hard to forget. My informant, Laura, once told me that she could never simply go to a hospital as herself with no agenda, as she would feel misplaced. One time she had been offered a tour of a hospital they were to perform in the following day. She had gone there as a civilian and told me how it affected her emotionally to see all the sick children, how she felt like she had no right to be there and it had drained her completely that afternoon, "while as a clown the next day I had a purpose. I didn't see the *sick* children, I just saw opportunities in all the kids, grown-ups and doctors I could goof around with". Thus, Laura viewed the same situation differently as a clown versus as herself.

The clowns play and perform their way from one room to the next – be that in the hospital or on to another show. I have observed that once they are finished in one place, they

jump right to the next. However, as an observer, I personally experience a lot of emotions during the moments that are created between the clowns and their audience. I frequently wondered how they managed to snap out of a powerful moment and continue while not breaking down emotionally. Doctors would be wiping their tears, but the clowns would already be interacting with someone in the next room. This leads me to yet another aspect of the clown being “something else”. The clown is created and exists in a space of in-between, a free space of floating structure and emotions, but also through connection. On the one hand, they are completely perceptive and vulnerable to others’ emotions and expressions, but on the other hand, they may also have the ability to allow it to remain in this space and shut off for a period afterwards. It is what Laura referred to in the interview as turning off various parts of herself. The clown can connect to the moment, but also leave it in that moment. They exist in this place of fluidity, which also means that they can leave that part behind in that space and return to their former self. Due to it being not themselves (Marco, Miguel and Nina) who encountered a sick child, it was their clown who found a playmate. Not them but not, not them.

Additionally, speaking from my own experience as a clown, what I often hear from friends and family when I have told them that I performed as a clown, is something in the lines of “I don’t understand how you could ever do that! There’s no way I could!”. This often follows when I tell them about all the ludicrous things that happen during a performance or when there was a particularly emotional moment as a performer. After further reflection I will argue that this might also be due to this space and identity being ‘not me, but not not me’ – it was my clown who did it. I had not even thought about the fact that it might be difficult or embarrassing to do before someone made me aware of it. My clown came from something within myself, but I was simultaneously able to disconnect my subjective feelings to what I was doing. However, when I witnessed my informants perform in the hospital, I was emotionally drained throughout that day. I perceived the impressions and connections happening differently as a clown than as myself.

CLOWNS AS AN AMPLIFICATION OF THEMSELVES

This chapter has illustrated how the clown is understood and the way my informants and their clowns are connected through their emic comprehension. The clown is not simply a character to be performed, but an amplification of themselves and attributes beyond this, making the clown a whole and unique being for them as performers. They can refer to their

clown as if it were a full, autonomous, individual. I have also discussed how the clown gains its autonomy in relation to others as it is a relational self, dependent on social connection. Through my thesis, I will demonstrated the pertinence of this to the target audience for the humanitarian clown, namely people in a situation of crisis. The concept of liminality and the performance have been introduced. I argue that the clown exists in this temporary space of liminality where structures are turned upside-down. In liminality, the clown may perform and shed light on issues and people in society or enhance inner human characteristics which may be found in us all. Additionally, this has been illustrated by a brief overview of the clown's role as a truth teller through history. What follows now is to explore these certain "human capacities" or "traits" which a clown may easier amplify and connect to than people in general, and question how it connects to its audience through these. This is through the clown's realm of *play*.

CHAPTER THREE: I PLAY THEREFORE I AM

INTRODUCTION

I was extremely nervous to meet my informants in Cali, Colombia, for the first time, both in terms of their expectations of me, my own anticipations and the language barrier that could potentially become challenging. I was invited to meet them during one of their weekly rehearsals. After all the formal introductions and sharing of experiences, we gathered in a circle to do a routine "check-in" where everybody would share how they were feeling and some relevant happenings over the course of the week. We also talked about all things clown-related; how a hospital visit went, if they had any upcoming events. I was mostly concerned with simply being able to express myself and be understood in Spanish. There was a rather sober atmosphere in the room as everyone was relating their part, I noticed Marco, who was the first to share, started getting more and more restless and unfocused as we went through the circle, almost like an impatient child squirming in his seat. Miguel, the last one in the circle, was rounding up his piece and the second he was done Marco blurted anxiously "Enough of all this serious talk now, please! Let's play!" (Vamos a jugar!") and everyone shouted "Vamos a jugar!" as they leapt to their feet and started stretching and jumping around the room.

My thought was for how I was going to understand the rules of play, when I was struggling enough to have a simple conversation even with Jane translating for me. As they started discussing what game to play first with all sorts of hand gestures – not one of them could stand still for two straight seconds. Everyone was tiptoeing back and forth or running around the room and stretching their body excitedly. Gradually, I started recognizing some gestures as familiar and picking up words. They had agreed upon a game and, as they explained with gestures and sounds, I quickly realized that this was one of the games that we played in college, although it was known under another name. My nervousness was instantly washed away and replaced by eagerness as I yelled out "Sii!!!" in recognition, and was bouncing around like the rest, ready to impress and win. My confidence and competitiveness came rushing back.

The game was called "Yee, Yaa, Yoo" (Similarly, in college we called it "hee, ha, hoo") In short, the players gather in a circle and pass a fictive ball of energy across the circle in different directions, you must be ready to receive and pass on the energy and to react accordingly. If your reaction is too slow or you miss your turn, you're out! When we started, all my energy went into focusing and winning. I was focused and ready; react quick and precise if they passed the energy to me. As I looked around, I was baffled at the lack of seriousness of the others. Once the first person was out - at a point where in college we would all point and yell "OOOOUUUT!", everyone here just laughed and continued playing with no one actually being out. I stood there confused. 'Are there no winners or losers? What is this?' I thought to myself. They continued, and after a while they started taking out people as they missed the shot or messed up, so I got more excited again, thinking the first rounds were just for warm up. But then the losers were "rewarded" by getting to run around and try to confuse the remaining participants, which seemed almost more fun than playing? Again, I was confused... What is the point if you don't get the pleasure of victory or any repercussion?

After a few rounds they introduced something new called "Yee, yaa, yoo, extremo" which was the same thing, but more people were sending energy balls around simultaneously. As they explained, and, with my background of "serious rule negotiation" from college where everything had to make perfect sense, this new rule simply made no sense. Nothing added up. My suspicions were confirmed when these new rules added to more absurdity and less clarity around who actually won anything. It resulted in them all laughing at how ludicrous it looked. The others noticed my confusion, (probably written all over my face) and Enrique pointed out "You guys, Rebecca is looking so serious - why? Don't be so serious Rebe, it's just for fun!" I tried to hide my bewilderment at this nonsensical play simply by smiling at the comment, but my competitive instinct was aching. The playing continued, and I realized I knew almost every game from my theatre days, and with every game I had to contain my confusion and disappointment at how the dynamic of win-lose was almost non-existent compared to the extreme gloating in college. In the course of my fieldwork, through encounters, sessions, observations and interactions with the clowns, I slowly but surely understood why.

*

This event was the first encounter with my informants in Colombia. It was also my first encounter with a different approach to playing than I was accustomed to. During my time in acting school in Norway, playing became quite competitive. Initially, the games were meant to function as fun, warm-up exercises to sharpen our focus and reaction, but rather became a sport in itself. My fellow students and I were all highly competitive, and so the focus became about winning and ridiculing the losers.

This chapter discusses the clown's use and understanding of play. It explores the development and implications of clowning through play. The previous chapter discussed how the clown and the performer interrelate by being an amplification of themselves. What follows now is *how* the clown appears in interpersonal relations through play. As shall be illustrated, the act of playing might seem simple enough, but to the clown it is far more complex. What comes to light when engaging in play are layers of interaction, human conditioning, and contact. The introductory vignette showed that despite language barriers, I could connect to my informants through play, even on the first day. I argue that in the engagement and spirit of play with the clown, the performer creates a pathway built on vulnerability, empathy and failure towards a more "authentic" self. In this chapter, my personal path towards learning this new way of play became my main tool of analysis. I shall therefore discuss the process through the way I experienced it. It was through my tacit learning and reflexivity towards what I was taught that I understood the significance of play through the clown. The tacit knowledge I incorporated not only became my method of learning, but a model for explaining the implications of clowning. I shall begin by highlighting how play has been applied theoretically by former scholars and discuss how I shall employ play to my own empiric material.

SERIOUS PLAY

"Play is the single most vital element of clown performance and activity in our society today" concludes clown scholar Louise Peacock (2009). She states that "contemporary Western society undervalues play, assigning to it a frivolity, a time-wasting quality (or lack of quality). Children play; adults may play, but only in their free time" indicating that play for adults sits outside the seriousness of making one's way in the world (2009: 9). She attempts to bridge "seriousness" and "play" by illustrating how clowns achieve curiosity, disruption, transgression, deviance, subversion and much more through their interaction in play (2009). Play is also linked to liminality. For Victor Turner "play is a liminal mode, essentially interstitial, betwixt and

between all standard taxonomic nodes” (1986: 168). The liminal mode, as was discussed in chapter two, is quite applicable to clowning in which anything can happen as the performance occurs “when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun” (Turner 1982: 44). Peacock describes this as the perfect description of theatrical performance, occurring as it does in a dramatic time and place which is both within and outside real time (Peacock 2009: 10).

Barnaby King also furthers Turners point of liminality into the use of play and clowning. He argues that “being liminal does not imply it is disconnected from material and everyday interests. On the contrary, it's very liminality gives it a critical potency” (2017: 205). As Turner states “there is no sanctity in play; it is irreverent and protected in the world of power struggles by its apparent irrelevance and clown’s garb” (Turner 1987: 170). King continues:

Crucially, play is protected *in* the world of power struggles, not protected *from* it. [...] Play can appear innocent and disinteresting while simultaneously mocking, ridiculing, critiquing, separating and recombining familiar cultural ideas. It is grounded in a contradiction between appearance and reality, between seeming harmlessness and actual power, or as Turner pithily puts it “dangerous harmlessness” (King 2017: 205-206).

It is in this liminal realm of play that the clown exists. Although play can appear to be just for the fun of it, there is much depth and many complex elements one can connect with. Louise Peacock highlights performance theorist Richard Schechner’s argument that in the West, play is a rotten category because of society’s preoccupation with and prioritizing reality. She argues that

This societally held view that play is rotten or, more commonly, suitable for children, lies at the heart of the devaluing of the contribution that clowning can make to our society. Rather than accepting the view that play is “rotten”, what needs to be asserted is the importance of play in allowing us to connect with and interpret symbols and metaphors in a way which may allow us to connect with deeper truths about human existence (Peacock 2009: 12).

It is these “deeper truths about human existence” that shall be enlightened here. I will argue that through play, the clown reconnects its playmates (the audience) to levels of vulnerability, humility, failure and empathy. These are fundamental traits which we all share, but due to the nature of discomfort does not often voluntarily seek out.

TACIT KNOWLEDGE – LEARNING THROUGH *BECOMING*

Hanna Müller emphasizes the use of one's subjective experience as a means to obtain further knowledge upon a matter as she learnt the implications of welding through the process of *becoming* a welder (2000). She could not simply interview her informants on the subject of welding because they would use a terminology¹¹ to describe the process which was only familiar to the welder itself. She argues that through the conscious *existential dimension of experience* she could break down the barrier between her and her informants and obtain the terminology through a tacit, embodied experience (2000: 14). This process was not only the methodological approach to her research, it also became the epistemological way to create knowledge. She translated her embodied experience of becoming a welder into a vocabulary more recognizable to other “non-welders” to understand the process of welding. Sherry Ortner argues that the *conscious* methodological use of one's subjectivity is underestimated within the “human science” of anthropology and should be given more space (2005). For her it is “important to keep the interpretive method and the concern with subjectivity together” because it is through our subjective experience that we are understanding our research subjects (2005: 46). The conscious approach to my own experience became my method to obtain the terminology to both understand my informants experience of clowning, but also my way to apply its comprehension. In other words, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, I have been creating knowledge through the embodied experience of becoming a clown.

JUEGO LUEGO EXISTO – I PLAY THEREFORE I AM

The following empiric example was my experience during a two-day workshop in Colombia on an introduction to clowning. It is best illustrated in its entirety to show the readers how I experienced the developing process of constructing a clown. During this workshop I learned how to be a clown and the elements of clowning through the practical experience of it.

¹¹ They would use welding terminology such as measurements that made no sense for an unlearned for instance to count to three before you moved the welding object into water, but the length of counting to three was relative and had to be learnt through the practice of it. Either she counter too fast or too slow which ruined the metal.

Jane arranged a two-day introduction course in the basics of clowning approximately four weeks after my arrival in Colombia. This course was aimed at anyone who had an interest in clowning or simply wished to do something new and different. It required no prior knowledge or experience. The course was held in a colonial-style building, concrete walls painted light blue, dark blue covered windowsills and, in the middle, a bright yellow door. Jane was very fond of this place because, she explained, it looked ordinary and similar to the rest of the street from the outside, but it had a hidden gem inside; a wonderful backyard with a giant garden full of colorful flowers, palm trees, lush green grass and flowery bushes. She had told me about this beautiful, bright, yellow door, opening up to a little paradise where creativity and dreams had no limits. "You know Rebe, yellow is the color for creativity. That door is a sign". This garden backyard was the last thing you would expect in a concrete, colonial architecture, brick-layered, buzzing city.

The room we were in had white walls which Jane had covered in colorful balloons and posters with joyful quotes or tasks written on them. The biggest one was yellow and said "Juego Luego Existo" (I play therefore I am). She had brought a box full of hats and wigs, and as we entered you could hear circus music playing from the speakers and the smell of flowers coming in from the open door leading out to the jungle backyard. The participants consisted of some friends of Jane, a few with a background in dramatic arts or dancing, the father of Janes friend, David, who had unexpectedly passed away two months ago. David's father had also brought along his work colleague whom he referred to having a natural "funny bone" in him. Additionally, I recognized two of the child psychiatrists from the hospital we had visited earlier in the week and who were excited to see me there as well. From the moment we were gathered, there was a rather open, light and playful vibe surrounding the group.



Picture 5: "I play therefore I am" poster hanging on one of the walls. © Rebecca Hill

Jane started the first day with games to help us to get to know each other, to loosen up and to find our playfulness. I do not know why I expected the workshop to be of the traditional type where Jane educated us with a blackboard and we were seated in front of her. So, it took me a surprising amount of time to realize that this playing actually was the teaching, all the while I was anticipating her to stop the games at some point and start a presentation. Every game that I thought was "just for fun", was followed by much thought and explanation. After a game, Jane would ask the circle of participants how we felt and explained what we were doing. Two key points were central; failing and observing our own and others' reactions once one of us did fail. Jane explained how we should not be ashamed of failing. Basically, nothing we could do was "wrong" to do, because we could learn from it;

"We learn from our mistakes', is what we are taught as children, but somewhere along the way this changes and we no longer tolerate mistakes. Why is it as adults, that it's a crime to fail? How can we then continue to evolve if we have

to be perfect all the time? As humans a thing we have in common is that we make mistakes. If not, we would all be robots. Failing makes us human, and it's something everyone can relate to. Enjoy them! We must see these "defects" as opportunities and possibilities and not as limitations".

We continued with a game of "Simon says". Essentially, everyone walks around the room and waits for commands from whomever is Simon, and you must do what Simon says. As Jane shouted out various instructions, she would simultaneously try to confuse us by doing a contradictory move. For example, she would shout out "Simon says stop" while she jumped, so people imitated her by jumping, instead of stopping, and this caused a lot of laughter in the room. The exercise illustrated what she had been telling us and why we were doing what we were doing. These games that I assumed we were simply playing for the fun of it, had deeper messages behind them, and we became the living examples of these lessons by observing our own and each other's behaviors and reactions to the exercise. The more we failed (which was Jane's motive to make us do) the more we got accustomed to it. We went from embarrassment to embracing it. Jane would continuously speed up or add new challenges to a game once we started getting the hang of it, in order to confuse us again and have us make new mistakes.

We carried on with an exercise where Jane told us to line up at one end of the room and positioned herself on the other end, by a wall. She asked us one by one, to close our eyes and walk as fast as we could towards the wall and stop as close as we managed without crashing into it. She would stand on the other end making sure we would not, by stopping us right before, reassuring us that we would be safe the whole time. While I was waiting for my turn I tried to prepare as well as I could by estimating how many steps I could take to get closest possible. However, once I was up, my judgement was quickly clouded by nervousness and fear, filling my whole body as I closed my eyes and started walking. After only three steps I felt like the wall was right in front of me even though I had counted at least ten steps with good margin. I felt my body hesitate and my arms slowly raising in defense. Although I knew Jane would catch me at the other end the discomfort clouded my judgement. I stopped about 2-3 meters from the wall, unable to take the uncomfortable feeling of not knowing when the wall would hit any longer. Afterward we joined in a circle again and Jane started by asking "how many of you tried to count or prepare for how far you could get, before walking?" several people (including myself) smirked with a guilty look on our faces. She laughed and continued:

"I'm not going to call you cheaters, because it is natural to try and prepare even for the unknown, or things we can't control, but that is the point of this exercise. To leap into the unknown. That's what we do as clowns, we never know what reactions we are going to get. We never know what people suddenly might find funny. We can't control it, we just have to go with it. This comes with a lot of joy and thrill, but also fear, vulnerability and discomfort. It goes for clowning, but also in life. We cannot control everything no matter how hard we try, some things are just out of our hands and downright uncomfortable. We just have to learn how to stand in it. It's part of the show! And the show...? ...must go on!"

We continued with various games, Jane constantly reminding us to think about our reactions towards failing, how it felt, and how did we react when others failed. After each lesson she explained bit by bit how clowns were driven by failure. She said "they are basically grown-up children with less boundaries regarding right and wrong, and how the world works, and that's a good thing!". The more I learnt about clowning, the more I understood it as and connected it to the thrill of being a child. It was as if we were being reborn again piece by piece with reminders of childhood and reenacting these as a new character - a clown. Jane concurred "clowns are simple, spontaneous and have no common sense. They act first and think later". This was what we were taught to do as well, removing calculations and practicality from the agenda, letting go of predictions and inhibitions. I found it much harder than expected, since this felt like contradicting my own instincts.

Another layer to this was the removal of "losers" which had occupied my previous understanding of playing, as mentioned, in college. There was no focus on losers during the workshop. Jane made it clear that as clowns, they wish to remove this understanding that if you fail you are punished by being a loser or taken out of the game. In clowning play is for the experience, participation and connection. Jane elaborated on the subject of losers in our break. She explained that rather than punishing the people that failed, she wished to praise them, to see that there is nothing wrong in making mistakes. If you did something wrong here, you might be taken out of the game, but you would also get the prize of deciding who goes next for instance. She also added something called "mofongo" to all the games. A "mofongo" were the people who "lost" but they got a new job to try and distract or confuse the remaining players, so they still got to be involved. Being a mofongo was almost more fun than being in the actual game.

During lunch Jane told me a story of a village they had visited on their humanitarian clowning tour years ago where she had an eye-opener on the subject of losers. She explained that when one engages in play, there is often the typical understanding that if you lose, you “die” in a game. During this visit to an extremely remote village in the highlands they had introduced a game called "Assassinator". Basically, everyone walks around in a space and there are one or two people with the role of an assassin who must "kill" by winking at someone passing by without someone who is set to be a "spy" uncovers them. If you were winked at, you had to "die" dramatically to the ground, and the game continues until there were no victims left, or the spies managed to uncover the assassin. Usually, this is a very popular game. I recognized the game from acting class, and I had also seen it being played with children in school at home. Children usually seem quite enthusiastic to the concept of a spy-game.

In this village, Jane explained, people responded quite reserved and reluctant to play. Some of the children seemed to be frightened by the instructions and asked to not participate. This was something the clowns did not understand at first. The local organizers had heard rumors of this incident from the villagers, and the next day when the clown group returned, they explained to the clowns that the people of this village had experienced a lot of military violence, war and death through the years resulting in an almost halving of its population in a short period of time. Jane continued saying they were mortified by this.

"I mean, Rebe, of course people didn't want to play a killing game! So, from that day we changed the name of the game to “Don Juan”, where instead of being killed you fainted dramatically of love when Don Juan winked at you and the spies were replaced by jealous wives trying to uncover Don Juan. It was such an easy thing to do and it caused a lot of laughter instead of pain. So, especially from that visit, I do my best to take away the focus on punishment and "dying" or losing when we play." Jane concluded.

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The following day we continued much the same as the day before, but gradually we were adding the observations and reactions noted from yesterday and slowly drawing characteristics to create the outline of a clown figure for each of us. During one such exercise, Jane divided us into groups of three and asked all but one from each group to

walk around the room, while the others sat down. She told the rest to pay attention to their walking, looking for details. To note the pace, the rhythm, how the arms were moving, their facial expressions, everything. After a few minutes she asked another from each group to get up and follow behind the first one and mimic the way they were walking, but to add a layer of intensity to it and expand the movements a few levels. The last member of each group sitting must now observe the difference in the two and see what movements got more distinct in the second, after a few minutes the last one got up and they were now supposed to mimic the second, but overly exaggerate the various movements one was mimicking.

I was observing this exercise from the sideline and this development looked like a sort of "evolution" of walking, watching the groups, three in a row, walking around, from the first walking casually to the last almost looking like an animal of some kind. After a minute Jane asked the first person to sit down as the others continued walking, taking in the hilarious moment, people were laughing so hard. "Do I really walk like that?!", "Why do you think I'm limping?" "It looks like I have two left feet" people commented as they were observing the other two. Then the second person sat down and only the last ones remaining looked rather absurd. This exercise, Jane explained, is to make you aware of your own natural characteristics and show that you can find humor in the simplest of things by magnifying them to the absurd.

We continued with a task where Jane had set up a screen wall and she brought the box with hats and wigs for us all to choose one. Before we started, Jane explained that you do not need much to become another character. Normally the nose is so recognizable that this is often enough (notably we had not yet received or used a nose during the workshop), adding, "but we are not ready for the nose yet. A hat or wig works just fine". She spoke while she was trying on different hats, illustrating

"Wearing something creates a different identity than your own. A hat or something on your head helps you put a lid on your energy, so you keep it inside and it doesn't come flying out from the top of your head. It also gives more focus to your face. Now, what we will do is we are tearing down the theatre's fourth wall, because we can't be clowns without an audience".

Once everyone had found a hat - and there were all sorts of hats: a fancy black top hat, a floral printed one, a sparkling, black one, a cap, a red beret, a purple feathery one, a

glittering baby bonnet - we started. Jane gathered us up against the wall at the end of the room and made us pretend there was a heavy wall in front of us to push together using all our body strength. We shoved the wall to the other side and "off a cliff" and everyone applauded. Now that everything was ready, Jane asked us to one by one go behind the screen door she had placed on the middle of the floor and pick out a new hat, enter from one end of the wall and look at all of us who were sitting and watching from the floor. We should then walk up to the centered space between us, breathe, look at each and every one with clear eye-contact, see what reactions we got, maybe subtly react back (but not act), stand there for a short minute making eye-contact before turning and going back to the screen door from the other side, turn and look at us one last time and then go behind it. Jane was very strict about us not acting, but simply taking in the reactions, acknowledging the audience, feeling the sensations of standing there and becoming aware of your reactions to it.

Once it was my turn, I felt a rush of adrenaline, realizing this was my first time "back on stage" since college, but never without the fourth wall. Nervousness crept through my body, but once I put on a hat it was like this lid as Jane explained, that contained all my energy, and I gathered it to become something else. As I entered and stared out at everyone, shyly, the eyes looking back were full of anticipation, but also welcoming. I walked out and stood there, absolute silence filled the room and I was fighting the urge to try and do something funny. Don't act, she said. "But what should I do? These people are expecting something funny to happen. I have to do something funny! Everyone is looking at me!" I thought, feeling extremely uncomfortable and vulnerable. So, I searched for something safe in this awkward situation and made eye-contact with one of the psychiatrists. She winked flirtingly at me, so I shrugged a little, before I smiled and winked back, feeling rather stupid "this is so not funny" I thought to myself. To my surprise, this followed with reaffirming giggles, so I continued searching and saw David's father looking at me with big angry, almost frightening eyes. He tried to provoke me, so I got a little scared, tried to challenge him by looking angrily back, but gave up and looked down. They all laughed some more. I breathed, continued gazing around and played a little with their stares. I tried to connect a little with everyone, which slowly started feeling easier, before I returned towards the screen door, spun around and looked at them once more and exited. They applauded. After this Jane went through the point of the exercise:

"We shouldn't always try to actively be funny, we never know what people will react to, and we can only react to their reaction to it. You need to play off- and with them. And you must give yourself time to *see* them. Something might be funny with one kid, but bring total silence to someone else, you can't plan everything or depend on it. Clowning is like playing chess with the audience; You play your move, and see what the other does after that, that is when you know what will be your next move. Should I continue in this direction, do something else, or pick up something I did earlier? Maybe some moves are safer than others, maybe you are somewhat prepared, but you can't plan the whole game. Everything depends on their reaction, and that can be a little uncomfortable not knowing."

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I wish to highlight some points from this vignette by returning to the idea of tacit knowledge. Hanna Müller (2000) emphasizes how tacit knowledge is played out subjectively through the individual experience. As anthropologist we can use this *means* of knowledge to give meaning to the language which we use to further explain it. Müller became aware of this after she learnt that she could not simply learn welding through a literary and verbal discourse. Initially when she arrived at her fieldsite she expected to be *told* how to do welding, but she later realized that it could not merely be told, it had to be done. The oral explanations were not sufficient for her to comprehend the practical task (2000: 22). Similarly, to my initial thoughts during the workshop. I was expecting Jane to tell us how to be a clown. But, it was through the *doing* of clowning by playing I grasped the actual elements in it, which I further connected to a vocabulary to understand and explain.

Many of the key elements in the practice of clowning are based on the fundamentals of standing in uncomfortable feelings and experiences. Failure, for instance, is a key ingredient of clown performance. Clowns demonstrate their inability to complete whatever task they have begun. "In doing so, they speak to the inner vulnerability of the audience whose members are often bound by societal conventions which value success over failure" (Peacock 2009: 24). One would expect that clowns are just running around and having fun, but they are exposing their own vulnerability and humility in exchange for laughter. Jane taught us the principal of failure in clowning through experience of it and not simply saying that "clowns fail a lot". Through the disguise of humor, she pushed us to face our fears and the unknown and dwell in that space and sensation of being seen. This taught us the aspect of vulnerability in clowning. Through these experiences we as her students were taught something more as well: empathy. Clowning

is a lot about empathy, because it is how we find out where the audience are (Peacock 2009: 156) As we were experiencing these uncomfortable sensations of humility, we could further this to empathize with our audience on another level. This empathy may be the reason why clowns are considered truth-tellers, they are not simply conveying the reality, they are doing it candidly and empathically. By breaking down the wall between us and our spectators and looking them directly in the eye completely stripped down. We are inviting, acknowledging, and connecting to our observers. We are being a quite exposed and real version of ourselves. I shall now continue with the experience in the workshop where we were given our red nose as an initiation to becoming a clown.

THE BIRTH OF THE CLOWN

After some exercises where we entered and did certain things on the stage. Jane asked us all to lie down on the floor and close our eyes. She turned on some rather calming instrumental music. She gave us various instructions to become aware of our body, filling and transferring energy to each part of it, limb by limb. She asked us to remember the smell of fresh grass and picture fields of green, smell the ocean and create waves in our minds. It was quite a mindful exercise. We were told to become more and more curious about our body, without opening our eyes, we were asked to touch our fingers and feel our legs and ask ourselves what it felt like, how everything functioned if you pulled on a finger or pinched your thigh. After a while she told us to lie on our side and open our hand out. A minute passed by and I suddenly sensed something small and rubbery placed in the palm of my hand. I felt it. I caressed it with my fingers and pulled it tight to my chest. It was my red nose. It felt so emotional to hold it. It felt warm inside my hand. We were told to explore it and feel its energy and gradually place it on, open our eyes and act as if we are seeing the world for the first time. Jane changed the music at this. This music could not be placed into a certain genre, it was unlike anything I had heard before. It was an instrumental, calm, and soothing melody, but it had a cheery, peculiar, playful tone to it. It was almost as if someone had tried so make the soundtrack of a whimsical day in a child's life full of exploration and serenity. I allowed the energy of this music to fill me up. Everyone was exploring themselves, feeling their arms, testing out their fingers and feet as if they grabbed and walked for the first time. Connecting.

We went on exploring the thing around us, walking on all fours, rolling, spinning. Someone was pulling on their shoelaces and placing their shoes on their hand, another stomping and listening to the sound of the floor, a third pulling their hair. I was touching my teeth with my tongue and tugging my ears. Jane asked us to start noticing each other and exploring or mirroring our movements, maybe follow someone's lead or start a silent game together. The whole experience step by step was very emotional. Every part of it was so detailed and full of body conscious revelations. It was a journey of rebirth, and suddenly I felt like I had connected to something within me, another being. I better understood how a clown was someone else, but also amplified from me. We were together and two separate things. This is what Jane and several other interlocutors had been referring to but struggled to explain. We gathered after the session and everyone there could relate to the same sensation, some said they cried as they received their noses, others felt the urge to laugh. Most of us agreed that we had all connected to something deeper within us, almost like entering a new world. David's father got really emotional and said this was the first time he felt he understood why clowning was so important to David, and he had a hard time processing the fact that he could not share this moment with him, all the while he also felt like this connected him to David and brought them closer than they had been the last years of his life.

The rest of the day followed with various exercises together and singularly, where we developed and explored our clown persona in different settings. We played with dynamic and depth through status-roles in duos. We were paired up where one was supposed to have low and submissive energy, and the other rather high, dominating energy¹². We had a scenario where we got a subject and had to create a "show" or scene around it, in a very short amount of time so nothing could be perfected for instance the word could be "ritual" and we had 10 minutes to prepare something to show the rest. As we were getting more and more explorational tasks I could slowly make out different characteristic features in peoples clowns, and I could sense some in my own as well. I realized that even though we tested different scenes and energies, my clown returned to an energy as a rather proud being, that loved showing off and feeding off of the audiences' confirmations, it felt like a childish and curious energy, and it seemed like it was willing to go rather far to please the audience, no matter the cost of humiliation. It

¹² Similar to the historic clown duo the Auguste and the Whiteface. Pairing in duos with one high and low status clown it a typical dynamic created withing clowning.

seemed like my clown felt like it was its job to entertain the audience or make them feel taken care of yet humored. I am sure that you could ask me anything, from what my clown had for dinner last night to its family's medical history and I would have an answer. We had become that connected and acquainted over the course of a simple weekend.

Through this experience I could come to understand how Jane could refer to her clown as its own separate being with a full-on personality, and how she knows her every thought and reaction towards things. I also understood why those reactions might be slightly different to her own and also why she and her clown might have different needs of expressing it. When I pictured my clown, imagine an 8-9 year-old child wearing mum's kitchen cloth as a cloak and a mask drawn on from a crayon or mum's eyeliner. The child is mischievous yet innocent and charming, standing in a confident superhero pose, regarding everything as a mission or an opportunity to seize the day. It seemed like my clown could be both of high or low status, as long as it could be cheeky and playful about it. All it wanted was the attention or a moment in the spotlight even if that came at the price of humiliation. It did not matter if what it did was in the wrong or right way so long as others could also engage in it. This was something I could relate to personally too in the way that I, personally, do not mind taking the lead on things or to humiliate myself to engage others in a task. I will often make a fool out of myself in bigger groups, so others feel comfortable to join in 'under my wing' of humiliation. There were relatable elements to my clown that came from within me but expressed in another way, just as Laura explained in our interview in chapter two.

The other participants had a much clearer high or low status figure. David's father had a dominant, commanding and almost military like clown who would lecture or command and always be of higher status in our exercises. One of the psychiatrists, Ella, had a clown that seemed to be in a dreamy state, like they were in love and didn't really care what was happening around them and moved at quite a slow pace. One of Janes friends had a clown that was bossier and more perfectionistic, always running after the others and organizing or tidying up at the same time as she was rather clumsy, therefore everything she attempted to perfect would turn out worse than it initially was. I sat there observing the others and wondered where these traits came from them personally, and if the other participants too reflected on this amplification of self.

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Picture 6: Me proudly wearing my nose in the break after the initiation into a clown. ©Rebecca Hill

Through the course of this workshop, without me fully realizing it, Jane had presented me with tools to connect to something which was already a part of me. Barnaby King describes from his own clowning practice that it was often the moments of greatest failure that led to the moments of greatest learning. Foolishness and failure are second nature to the clown, and it is perhaps because of its affinity with vulnerability that this practical learning was the most effective ethnographic research method (King 2017: 11; Peacock 2009: 154). By playing, I practically learnt the sensations of failure, humility and vulnerability. I was also taught to embrace rather than to shy away from such uncomfortable sensations by connecting to something within me. When I connected to my clown after I was given my nose, I applied these tools of knowledge and formed them into a being which I could further depict with words for others to comprehend. I could explain what a clown was for me to someone who has not had the same experience by describing this 8–9-year-old child as defined above. Although writing about a very different theme, Hanna Müller had a similar experience. When she attempted to understand how the fluid in the melting pot should look when it was ready, she associated it

with the look of milk right before it boils in a pan in the kitchen, and the shape of a metal rod should be the same shape as a nail. The actions she did were translated into a familiar vocabulary which can be better understood by her and others who have not been through the same process. (2000: 27). Similar to my own experience, the practice of *doing* has left me with the vocabulary to create a model of explanation for others to better comprehend the implications behind it in more detail.

Furthermore, my understanding of play was also altered through this process. Initially, play for me was about competition and prestige between my college friends and myself. During this workshop I was taught how play was a means to bond and relate to others. Moreover, the process of playing taught me why play is an imperative tool for the clown.

BECOMING BY PLAYING

In the introduction to this thesis, I gave an empirical example of my first time performing as a clown. Before the show, I was having a slight panic attack in the form of an existential “clown-crisis”. I was questioning who I was while Bart was handing me various hats to try out. Although I had been in touch with my clown during the workshop mentioned above in Colombia, I struggled to reconnect to it a year later sitting in that van. However, during the shows I got to perform, I slowly recognized the same traits coming back to me as we started to play. I tried to remember the lessons from Jane about vulnerability and failure, and simply to stand in my own humility. I was channeling this as my clown character. In the van, Bart told me that I would know if the hat felt right, which I thought sounded odd at the time. However, after our second show, I slowly realized how I fitted into my hat, as it became a part of my clown. I also tried to recall what Laura had said about the clown being an amplification of herself. She explained that her clown was not a perfect version of her but just a different way of expressing parts of her. During my show with Bart, I could suddenly relate to this in how I sometimes liked various parts of myself during an act, and for another act I might struggle with the same thing. For example, the trousers that Bart gave me. They were three sizes too big and only held up by the braces and a shawl I tied around my waist. For one act I would play with the braces and for the next I would almost curse them for falling down all the time.

Moreover, the manner in how I incorporated these sensations was through the tacit knowledge and sensations I had learnt through experiences with my informants. Hanna Müller

stated that by being formed by the work she did, she was experiencing her *self* (2000: 7). It was in her *doing* of welding, which took her through a process of *becoming*, and by becoming she understood the *being* of a welder (2000: 14). I could reconnect to the feeling of being a clown by remembering the sensations which lead me to the development of my clown in Colombia. This happened through the practice of playing in my shows with Bart, and by remembering the feelings I had connected to during the workshop in Cali.

This chapter has illustrated an important aspect of clowning by the retelling of the experience rather than through a theoretical approach. Just as my informants explain their clown through acts of clowning, I do the same as it was through the practical experience of it that best illustrated the essence of it. By reciting the event, it is the closest one can get to understanding it without being there oneself. I have explored the implications of clowning through the clown's use of play. Play is not about competition as I initially thought, but about a deeper human connection by creating a space where one is permitted to fail without sanctions. When the clown plays, it does so openly and inviting for others to participate. It presents its vulnerability and humility by connecting directly to its audience and asking them to join in. Furthermore, I have introduced the concept of play as a liminal mode. Just like the clown, play is also liminal. By existing in a temporary space which inhabits another set of rules for the time being. The following chapter will explore what happens within this space when the clown engages in play together with its audience. Play is the clowns pathway to interact and bond with their audience. Through play, the clown is able to connect and acknowledge its spectators on a deeper and more human level.

CHAPTER FOUR: SEND IN THE CLOWNS

INTRODUCTION

We went down the halls of the ICU (Intensive Care Unit) in Cali, visiting every room, and as we were standing outside the next one, I saw a tiny baby rolled into a blanket lying inside a miniature hospital bed attached to monitors and tubes. The sight of it made my heart ache so bad I had to look away. The chart on the window said he was only five weeks old. We were all expecting to enter as the psychiatrist, Ella, motioned us to the next room instead. She explained that they did not believe it necessary to visit the baby. The clowns looked confused expecting an explanation, so she continued saying that he had been abandoned at the hospital less than a week ago by very young parents unable to take care of him. I could not make out the diagnosis they had set, but they said he had been quite unresponsive to their tests so far, so they feared he might be deaf among other things. At this the clowns looked at each other for a brief second with an agreeing expression on their faces and asked if they could go in anyway. Carefully they opened the door and circled around his tiny little bed as Mango started playing a soothing kind of melody on his guitar. Flavio took out a curious, little box instrument which had small metal sticks that he tugged with his thumb, and a metallic harp sound came out. Magdalena started humming to the improvised melody and Flavio and Mango joined in as well, swaying calmly from side to side. The melody sounded like a lullaby, the three of them half in unison, but also a little off tune which made it sound more “clown-like” in its perfect, imperfect state.

More doctors and staff gathered in the door-opening and peered through the window. The whole ICU was assembled around the baby’s room, mesmerized by the almost hypnotic sound. Several had taken their phones out and started filming. After a minute the baby started moving his head slightly. Flavio walked closer and was almost right by his head, tugging his thumbs on the little box in his hands. Suddenly we saw the baby’s arms and legs make tiny movements from inside the blanket, his head shifting a little from side to side. Ella gasped quietly at my side, a tear rolling down her cheek, as we saw the baby’s eyes faintly open and a tiny grin appeared. She whispered to me

that he had never opened his eyes before. The baby gazed around and locked eyes with Flavio for a moment as they both smiled to each other. Several staff members were crying, watching the clowns working their magic in awe. They continued playing the song for a few more minutes while the baby was moving a little. Slowly it seemed like he was falling asleep by the melody and the clowns started backing out while playing and sliding the door shut behind them. This incident left both me and the medical staff quite emotional. The doctors were still wiping their cheeks, completely speechless. The clowns were already making their way to the next room, now playing an upbeat melody.

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Picture 7: Magdalena and Flavio humming a melody to a five-week-old baby. Mango playing guitar in the corner. ©Rebecca Hill

This chapter will examine what happens in the social relation *between* the audience and the clowns. What takes place in the interaction with an audience? What happens once the clown enters a patient room or stands in front of the crowd? As stated in the introductory chapter, the humanitarian clowns aim to create a *moment of relief* for its audience who are experiencing a situation of crisis. It is this moment and the aspect of relief which shall play a central role in this chapter, as I will argue that the creation of this moment carries with it not merely the sensation of relief but rather also of *release* and of *disruption*. In this moment, I aim to show, be it for just a few minutes inside a patient's room or for the duration of an hour-long show, there appears to emerge a space where several things can be explored; a release of energy, a sense of relief and elevation to explore emotions, and a possibility for action and disruption.

DISRUPTIONS AND CREATIONS

In its very nature of persisting in liminality, the clown seeks to turn things upside down, to turn structure into anti-structure, order into disorder. As researchers have argued:

In their incongruity they combine features which normally do not appear at the same time: they may have human characteristics but also show exaggerated features such as big shoes and colorful make-up, and seem to exceed physical, political and social borders like taboos and norms. They may be clumsy yet skilful (musically talented or acrobatic), sad and happy. They unify the script of magic with the scripts of reality by overcoming gravity through juggling numerous balls (real/unreal). No tripping hazard can harm them (Jürgens, Hietalahti, Straßburger & Ylönen 2019: 6).

Being in a state of disorder, the clown in its performance reveals the actual system of order (Babcock 1984: 107). Thinking with Turner, however, the fact that something is no longer in order or structured, brings with it a new form of order: “structure may just as legitimately be viewed as “anti”-structure or at least have a new set of limitations” (Turner 1975: 50). I will argue that the clown in its liminal force, seeks to disrupt in order to create. This may be to illuminate the structures present, or to unravel these structures and relations and create new structures – which might be broken apart again once the clown leaves.

The opening vignette illustrated such disruption. The clown is told that they do not need to visit the baby, as the doctors regard it as “unnecessary”, which is exactly why the clowns aim straight to that room. The incident with the baby was a powerful moment which stuck with me throughout the week, and I brought up the matter with Jane again after our next rehearsal. She explained:

We see examples where the doctors say we don’t need to visit this or that patient, and often these are the ones who need it the most, so we know that if they say this, that is exactly where we have to go. And often that is where you really see the magic happen. Many places haven’t seen what clowns can do, and don’t understand why it matters before they see it for themselves.

Moreover, the event left the medical staff and me quite emotional, whereas the clowns were already making their way into the next room down the hall. Within a five-minute window, they intervened with the natural structure in the hospital by disregarding the doctor’s assessment of

the baby not being necessary a visit. Furthermore, in this short timespan they were able to disrupt the work-environment, gathering both medical and cleaning staff together to share a moment so powerful it left almost no eyes dry, and the “magic” energy was almost palpable, followed by a new break where they continue their playing down the hall, leaving everyone speechless.

I will clarify my use of the term “magic”, as it will appear in various forms through the ethnographic material. Magic is something which has been studied as a concept of itself within anthropology on previous occasions (Greenwood 2009). In this thesis, magic shall be understood in two ways:

- 1) Atmosphere – it’s in the air
- 2) Through the playing and performance with the clown

They often appear simultaneously as one creates the other: magic atmosphere through a magic show. Magic is also in the liminal mode together with the clown and play. It is of the imaginative or illusory type. It is often the use of giving objects an extraordinary ability or creating invisible objects out of thin air.

Countless times I have seen interactions between the clowns and the patients using magic through performance. They have played volleyball or ping pong through the patients’ window or made the child’s finger disappear and reappear from their hand to the clowns. Why the shows often are described as magic by various spectators (parents, doctors, organizers of events) is because the use of magic brings with it an empowering force in the manner that for a moment someone in the audience is given an extraordinary ability or create something grand, and everyone believes it. As Jane stated in chapter two, while she was talking about giving her passed friend David a place in her act, she also added that the children might be able to see him when she talks to him. I view this use of magic as quite important for the relation created with the audience in question. In crisis, children exist in conditions which might make them feel quite powerless. Playing with the clown can give a child magic-powers or extraordinary abilities for a moment and make them feel strong. More importantly, by involving the children in a magical act, the clown will center the child as the protagonist. The child is the one who becomes the star of the show and the genius magician.

Further, there is an aspect of community that is created between the audience and the clowns which I will explore here. In the connection between the audience and the clown’s performance, through the liminal mode people can be subverted from their social duties and

roles, and into a space of *communitas* (Turner 1982: 45). *Communitas* is what occurs between the group of people experiencing a ritual process when they are in the liminal phase in-between two categories. Its participants experience society as an “unstructured” or “anti-structure” in that liminality is neither before nor after. Therefore, the norms of everyday life do not apply to people in *communitas* (Turner 1975: 49). The bonds created in *communitas* are also anti-structural in the sense that they are undifferentiated, egalitarian, direct and nonrational (1975: 53). Turner claims that people have been conditioned to play specific social roles, statuses, classes, ethnic affiliations, cultural sexes etc., in different types of social situations. Human beings *play* their roles in human ways. Much like how Erving Goffman discusses the presentation of self in everyday life (1959). However, the *full* human capacities are locked out of these somewhat narrow, stuffy rooms. Thus, liminality provides a propitious setting for the development of these direct, immediate and total confrontations of human identities (Turner 1982: 46).

In other words, Turner argues that people are playing a role in everyday life but are not expressing their full human capacities. These confrontations exist in the space of liminality, in *communitas* where the people are gathered in an anti-structural and undifferentiated space where “the more spontaneously “equal” people become, the more distinctively “themselves” they become” (Turner 1982: 47). Thus, when they are in a moment of breach from their daily lives, they can show their true forms, much like the clowns does. These human conditions I believe may take form in a space through, what was illustrated in chapter three: vulnerability, humility, failure and empathy. By exposing their own vulnerability and humility in exchange for laughter, the clown also invites the audience to join.

In the following, I will argue that the clown invites to a voluntary moment of play, into *communitas*, where they create a space to explore these capacities. The clown creates a moment of relief, release and disruption. I shall now argue for the moment of *relief* through the elevation and expansion of space in the *communitas* providing the audience with an outlet to confront and acknowledge their inner emotions.

“IF THINGS GO WRONG MY CLOWN CAN STOP AND CRY... A LOT”

Minutes before I was about to perform my first show together with Bart, he explained to me about energy and expressions. He told me that there should be no doubt what feeling the clown is experiencing on stage. No matter how sudden, irrational or even the

language spoken by him or his spectators. He said that whatever feeling I was having while on stage, or whatever reaction that occurred, I had to make sure that it was big. If I was angry, then stomp my feet hard and pout my lip. If I felt sad then sob so loudly that the next town could hear it.

The organisations I have followed target a specific group of audience; people in a situation of crisis. This particular group experiences a range of difficult emotions throughout their day. This includes being stuck in a hospital bed and poked by needles every day, a parent watching their child in pain, or the everlasting wait in a refugee camp with no control over their situation day after day. These scenarios would stir up emotions in most people. The clowns' performance does something to these emotions. I wish to question or identify this liminal space where one can explore or reconnect to one's emotions in the presence of the clown that is so overly in contact with their own emotions. I argue that the clown's exaggerated expression of emotions can act as an outlet for the audience to utilize. This can be enlightened with the following example which happened during a hospital visit in Colombia:

In the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), as we were making our way down the hallway, the clowns stopped abruptly by the door leading into a patient room where a girl was lying in bed. Her head was wrapped in bandages and she seemed quite drowsy. The psychiatrist, Maria, said she had just had a rough brain surgery the day before, and she had been a patient over a long period. Her father was sitting by her side looking exhausted and her mother was picking up her phone to film as the clowns entered. Flavio started bantering with the girl asking her name, but she seemed quite weak and tired, so her father answered. Apparently, he had quite an accent that Flavio picked up, as well as the girl's name, so he quickly asked with an accent himself if he was Mexican and casually throwing out some Mexican slang words. Her father nodded and confirmed that her name was the same as a character from a famous telenovela from Mexico. Flavio and Magdalena quickly jumped into a recreation of a typical dramatic scene from this show. Mango was accompanying them on guitar. During the scene they had gone from being overly infatuated by each other for one moment, to heartbroken and crying the next. The girl and her father laughed as they continued and started including them in the scene. Magdalena was now acting out a love scene with the father. The girl giggled away, looking much more awake. Flavio started acting like a director, but proposed silly things like farting noises to happen, and the girl stopped him and said "nooo that would never happen, they have to dance!". She was co-directing them with Flavio. I observed

as they played with the girl and her parents and after a few minutes I saw the father getting quite emotional as he watched his girl doing magic tricks with Flavio and excused himself while they continued. The show ended in Magdalena singing the Mexican song “La cucaracha” accompanied by Flavio on his Kazoo and Mango on guitar as they paraded out the door.

We finished our visit to the ICU and came out into the hospital corridor some minutes later to find the Mexican father with his back turned. He was covering his face in his hands sobbing, attempting for a moment as he saw us to contain himself. The clowns were interrupted mid-joke and spotted him. They immediately went over and all three of them embraced him in a big hug. They stood there silently while he sobbed even louder as they held him for one or two minutes until he looked up and said “thank you”. Magdalena wiped his and her own face with a yellow pocket tissue and gave him a reassuring look. Once he left, she clapped her hands and yelled to Mango and Flavio “why are you just standing there, move it! Let’s go!” while waving her tissue after them. For me, the moment was so powerful to watch. It only took a few minutes, but they seemed so important for him, acknowledging his pain and allowing him to break for a moment. My initial reaction, feeling quite emotional from simply observing them was to give Nina a supportive and reassuring stroke on the back. I imagined how hard it must have been for them. Meanwhile, she reacted as Magdalena and jumped up as if I scared her and looked at me like I was some crazy stranger. It felt like Nina was not even there and I had just comforted someone randomly, forgetting that she actually was not Nina at the time, but Magdalena.

*

The event lasted no more than a few minutes, but it seemed clear to everyone present, both me and the psychiatrists watching as well as the clowns and the father; the liberation of emotions, compassion, pain and relief in that moment was necessary. The clowns functioned as an outlet for the father to break for a short instant. In the manner that the clown symbolises something liminal and in-between, and simultaneously carries with them a space for anyone to experience this fluidity, the father was given a moment to release these emotions.

I believe that by increasing the scale of emotional range out of its typical proportion, the clown elevated the space for others to connect to their feelings. Thus, if you feel mad, it’s okey, because the clown has already thrown the biggest tantrum in front of everybody. You feel sad? No matter, the clown just cried so hard, they filled two imaginative buckets of tears. The clown

does not hesitate to laugh, to cry, to show us fear, and his display of feelings provokes a public sharing of emotion, most often through laughter (Peacock 2009: 17). Furthermore,

The self-contradictory nature of the clown has a distancing effect: it makes identification difficult, but also makes it easier to laugh *at the clown*. [...] The clown is *close* to a human being, but eventually, unfamiliar, even mysterious – possibly a *non-human other*. The nature of the clowns allows for human beings to treat them inhumanely (Jürgens, Hietalahti, Straßburger and Ylönen 2019: 3).

During a show it might be easier to release certain emotions or reactions onto the clown than otherwise. Moreover, I argue that the identity the clowns is performing as not them... but also not *not* them allows them to better channel these emotions that others spring on them. In the light of their ambiguities, clowns take on the role as symbolic scapegoats and may function as lightning rods for societal hatred and anger (Jürgens, Hietalahti, Straßburger and Ylönen 2019: 4), or in this case, sadness and despair. When I observed the moment in the hallway, I was almost brought to tears, but Nina could snap out of it (though she told me after the show that it was hard for her) and continued the show because she was Magdalena at the time. It illustrates that the clown is highly capable of empathy and sentiment, but in its fluid state is also able to put these feelings aside.

Like all forms of reflexivity, clowning is paradoxical in that it involves a simultaneous subversion and transcendence of itself (Babcock 1984: 116). Nina could see a father in pain, but being her clown, Magdalena, she could also approach him, hug and comfort him and not demand anything in return before continuing. From my observations, the father could allow himself some relief because he too is in that moment or space with the clown in a temporary space. He is allowed a moment of vulnerability. We (the parents, the psychiatrists and me) just watched the clown go from crazy in love, to tragically mourn, to raging angry within a five-minute time span. In other words, in that patient's room we watched the clowns push and pull on the boundaries of emotions, expanding them for others to release their own feelings without these being viewed as too grand. The clown exposed and broadcasted its own feelings of vulnerability and humility which might elevate the space within the *communitas* which was created so the audience – in this case the family- may do the same. Another aspect of this expression is in the manner of exaggeration. As I have argued, the clown is not a little upset, but is completely heartbroken without a doubt to its spectators. This is conveyed through the use of energy. I will now argue for the clowns' ability to create a moment of release by the use of energy.

“MY CLOWN CAN GO AND GO AND GO FOREVER...”

Something that has become apparent during my field research was the high level of energy in every expression posed. As a clown, every action and reaction one has can never be too big.

While we were unloading the van, Bart was giving me clear instructions before our first show and my debut as a clown: “Energy, Rebecca, energy is key. You must have a minimum of ten times more energy than your audience so that you’re always able to lift them up, and still have energy to spare for yourself”. He illustrated by asking me to scare him on the spot, so I gave him a nudge and said “boo!”. He jumped ridiculously high, shrieking with his hands in the air and a terrified expression on his face. His reaction almost scared me in return. It also triggered an intriguing sensation as to how I managed to stir him like that, so instantaneously that it practically rubbed off on me in just that brief second. The reaction he gave was not only in the sense of showing how scared he got, but the energy within and through his movements, were so concentrated, almost electric, that it triggered something in me as well.

As a clown, the level of energy that one brings engages the audience more actively to participate in the show. In the previous chapter, I showed how Jane as a clown cannot plan the whole act because it is a dynamic, interdependent and interactive process with the audience. The performance depends on the level of energy and engagement from the audience, as it is dialogically developed between the two in the way the clown constantly relates to the surrounding public (Bouissac 2015: 108). The audience are not simply asked to watch and be entertained but they are invited into a space of *communitas* where they are expected and encouraged to participate and thus determine the course of the show. What seems to be coincidental play and inspirational acts, is often based on a carefully thought-out process of the clowns responding to his/her audience from the moment they enter a room. Bart explained that what they do is not free play, but is highly conscious, based on how they read the audience. Barnaby King (2017) noted the same from his hospital visits in Colombia. He observed that what seemed like lack of technique and free play by working with energies of dissolution and chaos, was rather the clowns “redefined understanding and awareness of at least two sets of rules and conventions: those of the hospital and those of clown technique”. The clowns incorporated and subjected the “world of the patient” and the “rules of the hospital” into the logic of the clown (King 2017: 210-211).

Returning to my performance with Bart, I was left quite baffled after our first show, unable to understand how Bart always knew what to do or how to respond so quick, regardless of what the audience would say or do. He explained after our show:

“It is a constant conversation between us where I see how they respond and that again determines my next move. I need to see how I can best spark their creativity, how they can feel empowered. I want everyone to feel seen, connected and interacted with when I’m with them, whether if it is by connecting through eye-contact, an interaction, or a magic trick. When I come in with my level of energy, it is also a way to test and see where the audience are on that scale.”

For my first show as a clown, Bart and I were invited to perform for about 30 children and their families at an asylum centre placed outside of a smaller city on the coast of Norway. We set up our stage on a playground surrounded by red barracks that housed the families. If I had not known that people lived here, I would have assumed this place was the site of an abandoned building project. The red paint was peeling off the walls and several windows were broken and functioning as a place to hang up washed clothing. The place was completely silent and deserted as we arrived, besides a woman from the administration who came to greet us accompanied by a little boy aged about two. Bongo¹³, who was in character the moment he jumped out of the van, had put on loud circus music from a speaker as he started unloading all of his suitcases. He handed over a smaller case to the little boy and asked him to help carry it to the playground. The boy happily obliged.

As Bongo entered the playground centred in the middle of the barracks, the whole atmosphere changed around him. He was wearing a beautiful red coat, black top hat, blue and white striped shirt and he had swirled his long moustache into circles on either side. I watched him stride across the space accompanied by the little boy by his side and circus music echoing of the barrack walls. As we got ready, more and more children appeared looking curiously at all the commotion happening. Bongo was interacting with several of those inquiring about his suitcases, telling them about the magic props for when he set world records, and more questions emerged. He noticed a shy boy hiding behind his mom’s legs, making eye-contact and tried to sneak closer to him in an overly exaggerated manner, tiptoeing arms out and said “hello mister”. The

¹³ I will call him by his clown name for the description of the show, for he is now in his clown character.

boy quickly hid behind his mothers' legs. At this Bongo jumped backwards scared, mirroring the boy's reaction. The boy peaked out to look as Bongo tried again from a little farther distance to sneak closer to the boy and said "hello?". The boy shrugged once more but calmer, which again made Bongo jump. More children were now observing and laughing. The process was repeated once or twice, the little boy had now discovered that he controlled Bongo's reactions. At this Bongo seemed to consider the boy to be no longer scared, but rather engaged, and said "ai, ai, ai, mama mia!" before he proceeded to unpacking his suitcases.

When we started, both Bongo and I saw that a group of the children were overly energized and keenly testing Bongo's patients by tugging his clothes and pulling his suitcases after he kindly asked them not to. Bongo asked them to sit down and once he turned a different way they got back up and started running around on stage which complicated our performance since we were now spending more time ordering them around and risk losing character. I could sense momentarily that it was slowly becoming Bart and I who were charging around and less Bongo and Baqckua. I stood there wondering how we would ever calm them down enough to get started as Bongo was spinning in circles trying to acknowledge every child running around. Bongo suddenly snapped quite into character again and attempted to make a game out of this apparent disobedience. He yelled in a cartoon voice "why do you do the opposite of what I tell you, are we in backwards-land?... Sit!" he looked expectantly at them and the children got up "Stand!" and the children sat back down while squirming in their seats and giggling away. All his manoeuvres were done in an overly exaggerated manner. I copied the children getting up and sitting down, repeatedly. After increasing speed to such a level that we were all jumping up and down and completely out of breath, Bongo continued by announcing that we were going to attempt to break a world record and the winner would win one million.

One child, the same little boy who helped carry Bongo's suitcase earlier, was kindly sitting down and watching all this commotion, but suddenly stood up and screamed a high-pitched shriek while shaking, completely unable to contain himself. It seemed like the thrill of all this game playing made him almost electric with excitement. The playground paused for a moment, everyone stared at him in silence as he started laughing and Bongo gasped "woooooow! That's it!". Bongo continued explaining the rules of a game based on going "bonkers" while he played his saxophone and then

pausing like a statue once he stopped. He made me illustrate, so I brought all the energy I could master and danced as wildly as I could, stopping comically when he paused. Bongo invited everyone to join, parents and organizers included. The first round was interrupted as Bongo thought they did not dance nearly good enough “My grandmother can dance better, and she’s turning 112 next week!” and illustrating with small, shy movements and a hand on his crouched back. We continued with a few more rounds, when Bongo paused his saxophone, he pointed out people’s statue-poses and said “Don’t move your hair! I saw you move your teeth! Don’t move your gallbladder, or liver! Oh gosh! there is a snake in front of you! Ruuun!” causing some laughter, but nobody moved. After another few rounds we declared the winner as one of the boys who had been testing Bongo’s patience in the beginning and said he had won one million grains of sand that would be delivered in a large bucket the next day. Bongo followed by declaring himself as the world’s greatest magician and was now going to show some magic tricks, motioning everyone to sit down, which they now did without further objection.

By presenting obedience in the form of a game, Bongo slowly regained his power of “leading” the group. Without being pushed into it the children had chosen to abide when it was proposed in a playful way and without challenging their autonomy. From the moment we arrived and within the first few minutes, Bongo had turned the energy of the place around by encouraging this energy to be used in play instead. This was apparent in his actions but also in the visible breach of the everyday as he entered playground. He was wearing colourful contrasting clothes and stirring up the still environment with loud music causing commotion and turning the atmosphere upside-down. Furthermore, with a game of sitting and getting up on commando followed by shaking your whole body, Bongo had successfully regained the “power” to continue the act, applying new structure into the chaos. Rather than demanding control, he negotiated it piece by piece until they gave it to him, allowing him to proceed. He invited the children who had a lot of energy to channelize it in a different way than what they seemingly set out to. It went from uncontrolled chaos to energized play within moments. Or rather, antistructure into structure. In that way he could also read the participants and see what needs had to be met. By turning their attempts of defiance against him into a game, what started as efforts to disobey his boundaries to start a show, transformed into a way to settle them all in and getting to know them better. Furthermore, it was a way for them to release some of the extra energy built up to focus during the following acts. Bart explained to me later that day that

during performances in refugee camps they often see that the kids have a lot of worked up energy and emotions when they arrive to watch their shows. Sometimes a child can suddenly scream or even become violent without an apparent cause towards them. He continued:

“We try to create a place and means to address this energy and these feelings in a better way through games and laughter rather than what could result in violence. Humour and foolishness are just the language and tools we use, what its actually about is this expression, accomplishment, empowerment and connection that is created between us and the group and how we can best channelize that”.

What is apparent from the example above is not simply that Bongo invited the children to release their energy in a controlled way, but also in the manner of *how* he did it. On the one hand he used an exaggerated amount of energy and emotions to mirror and help them channelize their energy correctly, on the other hand he *invited* them to do so, instead of demanding it. I have been told by both Laura and Bart that when they perform for children in crisis situation, some audience members will often resist the “rules” of the games being offered at first. People in crisis situations often experience the feeling being controlled or told what to do, that they will not always simply “obey” if they can choose not to. Therefore, it has been important for the clowns to invite, and let the audience choose to partake. The basis of invitation to play is central here, as the audience in question are confined in a situation of which they have little or no control over. Thus, when the clown invites them to play, they will then *choose* to participate. As I have mentioned, clowning is a dialogical process. The clown is dependent and performs on the acknowledgment and connection to its audience. It is a relational self. On the premise of invitation and choice created between the clown and its audience, there is created what I shall argue as a moment of action through *disruption*.

SEÑOR, CAN YOU GIVE ME MY HAT?”

Clown performer and teacher Ash Perrin (2019) has performed for children in various situations of crisis worldwide. He has summarized his experiences from working in crisis areas and elaborates in his book to what he refers to as “Call and Response” technique (2019: 39). While one can order the children to stand in a circle, it is far more appropriate if they were triggered by a vocal prompt that ignites the genuine desire to take part (2019: 39). *Willing agreement* is highly important when you are dealing with an audience which experiences daily loss of

autonomy in their situation of crisis (2019). As the example with Bongo showed, he presented his wished instructions (to sit down) as a game, where the children in the end chose to oblige and be seated. Perrin argues that:

Children should feel that they have a choice, that they have opted to take part as well as the right to not wish to partake. When kids have the choice, particularly if the choice is presented as a game, it really changes the quality of the work (2019: 39).

We shall now see another example of this which occurred during one of the visits to the hospital in Colombia:

We were just about done visiting the Intensive Care unit (ICU) as Flavio and Piña spotted a boy in the room at the end of the corridor. The boy had observed the clowns from his room visiting other patients in the ward. He appeared relaxed, watching TV while a nurse was examining him. Flavio entered the room pretending to present Piña as some sort of big attraction, holding his hands to his mouth while shouting Piña's name, as Piña himself leapt into the room. This startled the boy into a fright, and he looked utterly terrified by the entrance. The nurse comforted him, while the clowns, taken aback, tried to respond to his reaction by acting panicky and crashing into each other as they hurriedly tried to leave the room. The boy, still with fear in his eyes froze while they backed away, so the clowns tried to come a little closer by showing him a paper bird, which immediately set him off crying again.

“Afuera!” (Out!) he cried, and the clowns turned to go out and crashed into each other again, this time so that Flavio “flew” outside and into the corridor and quickly shutting the door behind him so that Piña was stuck on the inside with the boy and the nurse. The boy stopped mid-cry, watching as Piña now struggled to open the door. He was pulling and tugging away from every angle, but the door was stuck. Piña asked the nurse if she would be so kind and blow on the door so it would open. As she did so, Flavio budged the door lightly without the boy noticing, but not enough for Piña to get through. He turned to the boy carefully, “I think I need stronger lungs than that. Excuse me, Señor, would you please help the nurse blow so I can be on my way?”. Hesitantly, the boy blew together with the nurse and the door opened wide. The boy stared in amazement at this, Piña gestured the boy to continue blowing while he himself

pretended to be caught in a big wind and “flew” out the door, dropping his hat in the room, and flew across the corridor and onto the nurse’s station on the other end of the room. The boy sat up to watch him with a proud grin on his face. Piña called into him “Señor, I seem to have dropped my hat, but I’m stuck, would you mind clapping your hands for me?” The boy looked at the nurse and started clapping with her, all the while Piña was spinning around and around, rewinding himself back into the room again and picked up his hat. He complimented the boy for his enormous lungs and asked him to blow again. By this time, the boy was engaged in what had turned into a game controlled by him. They continued for a few turns, the boy blew Piña out, but in the wrong directions or losing something on the way, and then clapped him back again. Finally, the boy blew Piña out the door, closing it behind him and crashing into Flavio again. The boy laughed and continued blowing and watching them through the window as the clowns stood on the other side holding their hats, stumbling around and out of the ICU.

By the end, the boy had fully accepted his participation in the interaction, as the clowns had given him control rather than pressuring him into a play session. The whole interaction was turned into a positive experience in less than five minutes. Enrique explained after our hospital visit, that it was difficult to predict the children sometimes, especially the ones who had been there a while. This is because a lot of frustration can build up over time in a hospital. For some visits they would be jumping with joy for the clowns to come to their room, and other times react angry, aggressively or sad often due to some other reasons than their visit. However, Enrique pointed out, they always try to leave a room with a positive energy so that the children will not be left with bad associations of the clown for another time. This is something I have been explained by several informants. For example, Fredric who has worked as a medical clown for more than 20 years, summed it up during a conversation:

The children have such little control over their physical, mental and medical situation, so with every visit I strive to give them a possibility to decide for themselves when it comes to the clowns. They are often so angry and frustrated. They are angry at the doctors, angry at the parents, at their illness, but they can't do anything about it. So, I say, be mad at *me*. They can't say no to another pill or shot, but they can say no to me. They can be frustrated with *me*. Give them one decision to make for themselves, in their otherwise impossible situation.

These incidents contribute to a feeling of empowerment for the children. When the clown enters their room and causes disruption from the daily routine, the children are provided with a *moment of action* when engaged in play with the clown. Not only do the clowns create an opportunity of choice for their audience, but they recognize the power in the audiences' decision and validate the importance of willing agreement. Moreover, they provide the patient with options, as clowning is a constant interaction and not just one simple invitation. As discussed earlier, the clowns will start reading the energy in the room from the moment they enter and evaluate how they can meet this patient's need. In some cases, a patient does not want to participate actively, but still wants to watch what the clowns will do next, and possibly later they have an urge to join in. The freedom to express "no" can be valued as a sign of success for clowns as performers. Rejection does not mean that they are doing something wrong. On the contrary it can be a huge, empowering, step forward, because the audience get to choose their participation, or next action. "Accepting, listening and acknowledging that 'no' to play, to come up on stage, to join in is part of honoring their freedom of expression" as my interlocuter Laura stated during a conversation once.

This invitation is something I will argue is an important aspect in terms of *humanitarian* clowning. The organizations I have followed, work on the principal that they only visit the places where they are invited. Barnaby King states that the claim of "helping others" is often used to justify humanitarian action, but can sometimes serve to deepen inequalities they purport to alleviate, for example by reinforcing cultural barriers and economic dependencies, which may not be in the interest of those who are supposedly helped (2017: 164) However, he argues that through clowning, there seem to be ways to "reconfigure what is meant by humanitarianism and to elude some of its troubling implications". Through his research in Colombia, the clown organizations

have a restless sense of movement across borders, between geographical zones, social sectors performance spaces and audience demographics. This restlessness becomes a source of strength, allowing for a fluid and light-footed approach to diverse conditions and promoting a kind of dialogical flexibility that makes them hard to pin down. [...] they have found ways which are socially progressive and economically sustaining (2017: 164).

In other words, the humanitarian clown is a border crosser both geographically to reach its audience in question, but also in the manner of how it works by crossing social boundaries and causing disruption in the environment. It is this fluidity between and across boundaries and

structures that becomes the clowns strength in the work it does. The clown disrupts the environment in order to create a new temporary one by inviting its audience into *communitas* where rules and structures are turned upside down and the audience is given a momentary break from their day. What follows is looking at how the clown translates the element humor into all these various settings of disruption.

DISRUPTING MOMENTS

This chapter seeks to shed light on what happens in the social relation between the clown and its audience. I argue that a community is established within the liminal space created when the clown invites its audience to play. *Communitas* appears from the moment the clown engages and connects to its spectators. In this liminal time, relations are formed based on an egalitarian and interactional basis as clowning is a dialogical process with its audience. I argue that by entering its space, be it in a hospital or a playground, the clown disrupts the daily life and turns order into chaos for a temporary moment. It is in the chaos that it again provides a space to explore elevated human capacities as the rules are different in the liminal mode. By seeking laughter in exchange for its own levels of humility, vulnerability, failure and empathy, the clown additionally invites the audience to seek out these capacities within themselves. By being in-between human conditions, or possibly in a constant state of one's 'true' human capacities the clown may offer the best way to wake up people in crisis who may find themselves in a sleeping state of in-between. The social relation created between the clown and this audience in question might be the meeting point between a rather de-humanized audience in limbo, and an overly humanized clown. Thus, the *communitas* created might be the perfect encounter for the audience who find themselves in a situation of crisis to become "re-humanized" again, if only for a moment. The clown enters with an exaggerated force of energy and expression and disrupts the environment it enters. I argue that, by this high level of expression, the clown raises the bar and creates an outlet for the audience to experience a moment of release for their worked-up energy, a moment of relief from their troubled emotions and a moment of action to decide their own participation in the game.

CHAPTER FIVE: WE ALL LAUGH IN THE SAME LANGUAGE

INTRODUCTION

In contrast to the pale, white walls and sterile nature of the ICU, the open children's ward was painted bright yellow with beds and cabinets in a beautiful blue color. Most of the walls were also covered in paintings, drawings and various characters created by the children. The hall was quite long with a large open room containing about eight beds, four on each side of the hallway. It led into a corridor with computer desks and medical equipment, a washing cupboard, some smaller patient rooms, before it opened up again to a large room with another ten beds. Flavio and Magdalena were singing, doing magic tricks or interacting with children and adults. After every little skit, the children, who were well enough to walk around, followed the clowns down the corridor to the next patient bed or room/section of the ward. This resulted in about 20 children and parents trailing along to the very last open room at the end of the hallway. Here were three patient beds each with a child and their parents by their side. I stood in a corner between the larger open room where Magdalena and Flavio were performing a comic newspaper act at a bus stop¹⁴. I saw Mango seize upon the little room where two women sat by the bedside of a little girl. He bound into the room with his guitar hanging down and spread his hands out to the side encouraging a reaction from them - but only one of the women looked up and smiled. Mango shrugged and put his hands down disappointed "Why is it that every time I come into a room somewhere it is like I don't exist?" he said gloomily. All three looked up and the first woman explained that the mother and girl were blind so they could not see him, still smiling. The mother added "but don't let that scare you!" smirking, Mango looked momentarily nervous, but

¹⁴ The newspaper act is a well-known one (within clown and theatre) which is often taught in introduction to clowning. There are some set elements but is normally converted across social and cultural borders (Bouissac 2015: 173).

smiled as well “ah, well, that’s okey then” and continued with a song or two before he came out to join Magdalena and Flavio who were now engaging the children in a jumping game. This required the kids to jump and when they did Flavio would strike a pose, and then change poses when they jumped again.



Figure 8: Flavio and Magdalena doing a newspaper act in the open children’s ward. © Rebecca Hill

Mango - who had musically accompanied whatever skit Magdalena and Flavio were doing with his guitar -paused briefly to see what cue Flavio would give him as Flavio raised his kazoo and started speaking from it like a microphone. He was pretending to be a news anchor. Immediately Mango raised the guitar onto his shoulder pointing the neck of the guitar towards Flavio like it was a video camera. “We are reporting live from this open ward, where we have just received news that boogers have become the new delicacy, especially amongst parents. They are producing and consuming boogers at record speed. Excuse me sir, what can you tell us about this new delicacy?” Flavio pointed his kazoo toward a father sitting by his sons’ bed, who was caught off-guard. I recognized him from earlier visits and remembered that he always seemed to excuse himself when the clowns entered the ward, very preoccupied. This time, however, he could not escape because of all the children that had joined in and were blocking his exit. Blushing and turning away, he tried disregarding the humorous attempt at inclusion saying that he had not eaten any boogers and focused even more attention on his son. The son who was initially lying with his back to the clowns,

seemingly not in the mood for jokes, turned quickly and said “yes you have! I’ve seen it!” Everyone laughed and the clowns continued asking him out “What does it taste like, how is the consistency?” The father initially froze and tried to avoid the attention. Suddenly a mother giggled from another bed “it tastes like strawberries!”. There was a roar of laughter and suddenly everyone had an input on the flavor, substance and how often they ate it. Flavio would not give up on the father, coaxing him to participate. He finally admitted to having tried it for lunch while laughing and his son wearing the biggest grin and pointing his finger at his dad in awe as he rolled over in his bed giggling. Even the head doctor who dropped in to see what all the commotion was about, hesitated before saying that he had it for dinner yesterday and it tasted like chicken. It was all wrapped up by the clowns improvising a song about boogers and had the doctors dance with them as they sang a verse with a familiar tune.

*

This is one of numerous examples where humor is used to bring together various groups of people in the name of laughter. Marco told me later that day that he had waited for an opportunity to play with that particular father. Implying that he was in greater need of it. This father had been visiting his son for weeks, but barely showed any emotions while he was there. Marco explained that those parents who are the hardest to “crack” are often most in need of a good laugh. Additionally, it helps the children too to recognize humility in their parents “It’s like they are sleeping, and we wake them up again. It reconnects them” Marco said.

The example above illustrates how the clowns in the language of humor and the absurd, attempt to disrupt the underlying structures inside (and outside of) the hospital. Flavio was intent upon pursuing this particular father due to his lack of involvement in previous shows and his seeming distance from his son when he visited. Thus, in the connection and interaction with the clown “waking him up” the father becomes present again, and his son went from his back turned to completely being focused on his father. The example illustrates that the clowns use humor to disrupt hierarchies, by inviting into the space of *communitas* the clown is intervening and rearranging the social order by dancing around with both the doctors and the cleaning personnel as well as the parents. Additionally, the clown is also breaking rules and norms by discussing absurd topics such as boogers.

Several informants have stated that humor is not the goal, but the tool they use to convey something else. This chapter shall look at what transpires through humor, why and how humor

matters. “We all laugh in the same language” is a statement I’ve heard from several of my informants, implying that, on a certain level, laughter and humor may be universal. This might be true to the extent which will become evident, but I also discuss how humor is something quite culturally specific and individual. This chapter will illustrate how connection is created through humor. Arguably, the language of humor is not only a way to cause laughter, but in its innocent disguise can simultaneously serve to disrupt hierarchies and uncover conventional rules and norms of society in that, the clown often chooses to play *with* the rules, rather than play *by* them. This chapter will shed light upon certain matters that created laughter which appeared across cultural and linguistic borders and how the clown uses humor to connect to the audience. By looking closely at humor, what may transpire is that both the particular as well as the universal, in terms of structures in society, can possibly go hand in hand (Viegas 2009). Despite some cultural transgression, I suggest that the clown may proceed without repercussions due to the space it occupies in liminality. The clown may command the closest anyone could have to real “diplomatic immunity”.

TRANSLATING HUMOR

The capacity to joke and perceive something as humorous is universal. However, what is held to be funny is relative. Although one of the founding fathers of anthropology Bronislaw Malinowski defined this discipline as the science of humor (1937: vii), it has remained a spin-off to other research (Driessen 2015: 416). Yet, it appears there is a growing awareness among anthropologists that humor provides clues as to what really matters in societies. Some of the topics of humour can be found worldwide: dealing with the boundaries between nature and culture, specifically food, sex, health, death, the body and with social boundaries (2015: 416-417). However, *how* one deals with these types of boundaries humorously is what might be considered a culturally specific matter. Henk Driessen (2016) argues that anthropology shares with humor the basis of estrangement where common sense is disrupted and the audience is made aware of their own cultural assumptions. He claims that the work of ethnographers is similar to that of tricksters or clowns. As a fieldworker, one encounters limits of interpretations involving humorous situations. They must distinguish between the particular (humor as culturally specific) and the universal (humor as part of the human condition) (2016: 142-143).
has

In terms of humanitarian clowning and laughing matters, there have been some discussion on the subject of cultural transgression among scholars (Bouissac 2015, King 2016, Peacock 2009). Clown performance will inadvertently transgress cultural boundaries, possibly drawing clowns into undesired conflict with the very people they are seeking to help (Peacock 2009: 149).

Probing clowning beyond the cultural borders of European clowns has shown that, on the one hand, “exotic” performances require exegesis because linguistic and cultural barriers are not permeable to humor. On the other hand, this excursus has demonstrated that the syntax of clowning is probably grounded in a universal human ability to question the tacit constitutive rules of the socioeconomic systems that define cultures (Bouissac 2015: 196).

Due to the pandemic, my planned trip to observe the clowns *in* refugee camps, was cancelled. Thus, the performances I witnessed in Colombia were for audiences with similar cultural references as the clowns (relatively speaking). Therefore, I did not see shows where potential incidents regarding cultural transgression appeared in Colombia. That being so, I could still use my own lack of cultural context to uncover these transgressions. During various performances sometimes I would not understand a joke punchline due to my lack of cultural knowledge or socialization.

One example of this was during the visit to the ICU (Intensive Care Unit) when the clowns bonded with a Mexican girl and her parents (illustrated in chapter four). Much of the humor involved the clowns using typical Mexican slang, references to Mexican songs and of a TV telenovela that I was unfamiliar with. Therefore, for me this encounter was more an observation of their interaction within the framework of something *they* could relate to, but I was not able to understand. Another example was the one in the introductory vignette of this chapter. I observed the three clowns including a whole children’s ward of patients, visitors, medical and cleaning staff in what grew into a longer performance. However, I did not understand the word they were using “moco” and felt quite excluded from the vacuum of laughter happening. Only after the performance, was I able to understand as I had a moment to research the word and it turned out to be – boogers. In the early stages of my fieldwork in Colombia, body-language was imperative as my grasp of the Spanish language had not evolved enough to comprehend everything. However, as language progressed, so did my comprehension of the humor being conveyed. Meanwhile, when observing the clown's expression, conversation and language through their body and made-up language (gibberish) it became a whole new

subject of observation in itself. It helped me to understand how clowning can work effectively across borders for people in situations of crisis as their performances were apparently not impeded by language barriers.

Though I was never able to accompany the clowns to a foreign refugee camp, I joined my interlocutors from the Norwegian organization *Latterlig Lett!* (LL) on sections of their national clown tour. When the world shut down and LL was unable to travel abroad to their intended audiences, they focused their work to reach people within their borders. Their primary focus was still to reach people in a state of emergency, and their objective was to spread laughter and joy. As social distancing had been quite strict for the previous 12 months, they had to find another way to function effectively within Covid restrictions. Therefore, they converted an old bus into a touring vehicle with a built-in stage, so that they could safely travel and perform at the various locations. For one of their tours right before Christmas we traveled together to smaller towns in mid-Norway where LL performed for relocated refugees and people pending asylum.

We arrived at the first location and the giant bus was parked outside a row of white houses outside of a smaller town. The organizer for this event, Greta, was a social worker for the municipality in charge of activities for refugees as an initiative for their integration process as they had either just been located or were waiting for their letter of asylum. For one of the shows LL performed for three families from three different countries. Bongo was in the middle of an act where all his magic wands were broken, and he blamed audience members for breaking them. This followed a request for someone to help him perform the magic trick where he pulled a rabbit out of his hat to cover up the fact that he had no functioning wand. However, the rabbit turned out to be a chicken. There were roars of laughter and numerous expressions and explanations shouted to the clown in his act. Despite there being at least five different languages (Spanish, Arabic, Turkish, Norwegian and English) present, there seemed to be no barrier in comprehending the objective of the act or in the communication between them. Bongo would communicate with exaggerated body language, gibberish and by copying some of the words shouted to him. “Tavuk!”, “Pollo!”, “Chicken! No rabbit” would all be yelled when Bongo held up a rubber chicken, stroking it and asked if it was a cute rabbit. The families were laughing at each other, shaking their heads and at him now gesturing and imitating Bongo’s gibberish in the same “dialect” as he was. Greta told

me during the show that it was quite extraordinary the connection that Bongo had created between all involved in such a short space of time, as normally these families never spoke to each other due to language barriers.



Picture 9: Olympia and Bongo performing for refugees living in temporary housing while pending asylum © Rebecca Hill

In addition to the gibberish and body-language, Bongo would incorporate words that he heard the audience mention, into his gibberish. As he learnt that chicken for example was “pollo” in Spanish, he would talk in his made-up language and slip in ‘pollo’ now and again, and suddenly the Spanish speaking audience members would relate even more. Bongo told me that during his longer tours to refugee camps in Greece, a large amount of the audience spoke Arabic, for instance, so when he learnt a word or two, he incorporated them into the show. Some examples of this were “Yalla (Hurry/Let’s go)” and “Habibi (Love/darling)”. This created a greater connection between him and his spectators and also showed respect and effort on his part. Additionally, I observed approving nods or grins between the parents when he mentioned words in their language.

In contrast to the scapegoat, the trickster belongs to the comic modality or marginality (liminality) where violation is generally a precondition for laughter and communitas and there tends to be an incorporation of the outside, a levelling of hierarchy, a reversal of statuses (Babcock 1975: 153). The clown has been argued to be a figure which crosses boundaries and

dissolve's structure. I shall now discuss how the clown uses humor when disrupting and playing with boundaries within social structures and norms.

PLAYING *WITH* THE RULES

During the interview I had with my informant Laura which was also discussed in chapter two on the being of the clown, we talked about the topic of "permission"; how and why does the clown have permission to act and do things that are otherwise considered not acceptable. She explained that the clowns have permission because they *ask* for permission:

"I acknowledge that I am asking for that permission, and I think that's rare for some of our audiences to see. In some ways I'm breaking the rules, but I'm also saying 'Hey! I'm breaking the rules', and that's how I am allowed to continue doing so. The clown is about having and giving permission to others as well, and also about going into a space wanting to know 'what are the norms here and how can I change them for a while?'"

Jane told me that wearing the red clown nose was like having a protection badge to get away with things. For example, Piña, during one of their visits to the hospital, had jumped across the desk at a nurses' station, grabbed the microphone which he had seen a nurse address the whole ward earlier, and started singing. He even initiated a duet with one of the nurses. At this, one of the chief doctors stormed out angrily from his office to see what the commotion was about. He saw Piña, smiled, and allowed him to continue. "This would never happen if we weren't clowns!" Jane laughed. By openly displaying that they are breaking the rules, it seems like the clown is permitted to continue in doing so. Even if they do transgress certain boundaries, it may be that the clown is the closest one would get to obtaining diplomatic immunity. Possibly by being in the liminal state as something "non-human" and simultaneously inviting spectators into its liminal space through a continuous playful dialogue, it can continue its ridicule without further sanctions? It is in its oscillation that the clown has the capacity to be reflexive, and due to this reflexive capacity that the clown can act as a solvent, a dissolver of boundaries (Handelman 1981: 365) The introducing vignette also illustrated the breaking of norms and taboos by the clowns playing with the concept of boogers, implying it as a delicacy and also accusing both the cleaning crew, the parents and the head doctor of eating it. I shall now show another example where Bart and I toyed with social taboos and norms during one of our performances.

We were set to perform for an audience consisting of around 10-15 families (about 30-40 participants) of recently settled refugees in a smaller municipality on the west coast of Norway. Our performance was to take place in one of the rooms at the local culture center. The room contained an atrium for the audience, leading down to a little stage for the two of us. Most of the audience (especially the adults, we were told beforehand) spoke little to no Norwegian, except for some of the children who spoke almost fluent with the local dialect. Therefore, a lot of the content was done through body-language and the use of “gibberish”. Bart told me before the show that he wanted to include me in an act where he was going to perform a magic trick. He needed me to present him with a wand, but before giving him the actual wand, I had to give him other objects. This is how the act transpired:

“And now, ladies and gentlemen, I will perform some of the greatest magic you have ever witnessed. With the help of my wonderful assistant Backqua¹⁵. But in order to do so I need a.... uhm... what is it again?” *gesturing with his hand in front of him, forming a long object* “I need something to do magic, what is it called?” after some miming, someone in the audience yelled ‘a wand!’ “Ah, yes! I need a wand, what does a wand look like again?” Bongo and I looked confused together at the audience gesturing with our hands in front of us to make out something long. A girl in the audience said, “its long, and black and white!” while she giggled. “Ah, yes! Backqua! Fetch me a wand, it’s long and black and white, and it’s in my suitcase!”. I ran obligingly over to one of the suitcases and opened it so find several black and white objects. I picked one while Bongo was once again announcing that he was going to do some grand magic. His arm was reaching out for the wand. I placed a long, black, and white striped sock in his hand and smiled proudly. Bongo grabbed it and waved it over his head “Ladies and gentlemen...!”. The audience laughed and yelled “noooo!” as they pointed at the sock. Bongo paused at their reaction, looked at the sock in his hand and shrieked. “Is this a wand?” children and adults were laughing “no, no, nooo!”. Bongo stared at the sock “Is this a...a sock?” *pointing at his foot*. Some of the children said “yeeees”. Bongo looked at one of the laughing boys “Mister, is this yours?” and pointed towards the boys foot. The little boy shook his head smiling. Bongo walked over to one of the parents “Papa, is this yours? Wait.. have you used this sock??”. Bongo paused in his track held the sock out between two fingers and took a big smell of it before he gagged “urhg!!! Mama mia!! Smell this!!” he held the sock out to the audience and people ducked, before

¹⁵ My given clown name at the time, ‘pronounced in Latin like the sound a chicken makes’ as Bongo put it.

he ran with it towards me and waved it in my face” Backqua! Smell this! This is not a wand. A wand is not soft like this. What is a wand? It has to be ...?” he gestured as he tied the sock into a knot and handed it over to me. A boy yelled out “Its hard like a stick!”. Bongo pointed at the suitcase again “Hand me a wand! The long, black, white and hard thing in there!” I ran over to the suitcase again, my hat falling sideways, rummaging through the suitcase again and found an object as he described.

Once again Bongo was announcing that he was going to do some of the greatest magic ever seen as he held his hand out for me to place the wand. I handed over a long black stick with a white handle and a big, white brush on the end; a toilet brush. The audience roared with laughter as they saw me pull it out of the suitcase and confidently present it to him. He grabbed it and spun it over his head “Abracadabra!”, the audience were yelling “nononooooo!!!”, and he froze in his place, staring at the toilet brush in front of him. “Wait. What is this? Is this a wand?” adults and kids were laughing, looking at the brush with both laughter and disgust “No!!”. Bongo seized the brush with his other hand “Wait. Is this...?” as he started singing into the brush like a microphone. “No, bathroom, bathroom!!!” yelled the audience. He paused “Bathroom? ah! I know! Is it...?” and he mimicked going into a shower, turning on the tap and used the toilet brush to wash himself with, combing his hair and brushing his armpits. I observed two fathers cramping up with laughter in their seats. I had observed them earlier appearing to have a hard time understanding all the dialogue, but this act seemed to be clear. Bongo stopped again looking confused “aha, I see. Is it for your...?” he pretended to turn on another tap in front of him, gestured to putting toothpaste on the toilet brush and started brushing his teeth with big movements. The audience whined in disgust again “no, stop! Toilet! Toilet!”.

At this Bongo paused again with a terrified look “wait... what? Do you mean this is for... when you...?” He motioned as he drew the lines of a toilet, sat down mid-air and got up and looked questioningly at the audience. They were all nodding and grinning at him. “Do you mean after you...?” he sat down in the invisible toilet and made farting noises. The children giggled away. Bongo jumped backwards in terror “do you mean that this thing that I used here and here...” *pointing at his hair and his armpits* “...has been here?” mimicking the movements of washing a toilet. The laughter was unstoppable. Bongo gave a loud shriek, dropping the brush in front of him, looking at it and then stared at the audience “Wait... do you mean that this brush that I put in my

mouth... has been in the toilet?" pointing at the brush and then gesturing towards his mouth. He brawled and started gagging, sticking his tongue out in revulsion. He looked over at me in frustration. I tried to look disgusted, but innocent and confused at the same time. "Backqua, why did you give me a toilet brush??" He yelled, and he looked out over the audience "Everybody say EW!" the audience responded, "Everybody say URGH!" and all the parents and children yelled as a huge chorus back at Bongo. "I tell you, if I want something done, I have to do it myself" he stomped over to the suitcase shooing me away with his hands, as I tip toed over to the other side of the stage, giggling between my hands.

*

Various aspects can be made by looking at what is happening in this act in terms of humor, connection and the breaking of boundaries. Firstly, there is the use of other familiar articles as a wand: the sock and the toilet brush. Both are objects commonly known, across all cultural and language barriers, and most people are able to identify them and their purpose. The purpose of these props is for the breakdown of norms as Bongo uses them in a manner in which they were not intended. By the breaking of rules and the violating of taboos the clown is polluting in Mary Douglas's sense of the term (Babcock 1975, Douglas 1966). Douglas defines "dirt" as matter out of place, but dirt is never an isolated event. Where there is dirt, there is a system, it is a matter of classification (Douglas 1966: 36). By uncovering what is regarded as dirty, one can uncover what is not, and therefore there exists an order. Not only is the clown himself polluting as he is not within a category or system, but by his pollution of acts in taking objects out of their system, or out of place. The same can be seen in the introducing vignette when the clowns implied that people have eaten boogers, something which would go in the category of dirty and out of place as food.

Secondly, Bongo and I are humiliating each other and exposing our own vulnerability in exchange for laughs. By using the toilet brush as a toothbrush or by handing him the wrong objects implying stupidity, we are actively taking the roles as the scapegoats in the room. This may lead to others in the room sensing a liberation or release to do the same as they will not be alone. We are showing the audience that it is okay to be imperfect and continuing the show despite all the failures and mix-ups. The same thing happened in the introduction vignette, once one person admitted tasting boogers, the rest of the audience followed. Through performance, the clown connects with the audience, and in that connection comes the opportunity for recognizing that the role that the clown plays in society allow us to see ourselves more clearly

(Peacock 2009: 156). Connection and interaction are the third point visible here. Bongo is interacting broadly through excessively exaggerated body-language and gibberish to connect to a larger part of the audience. Additionally, he asks the audience to repeat words back to them to lift their energy once the act is finishing and before he starts a new act, so that everybody is “shaken” and alert for what is to come. Bongo is also continuously including them in the show by asking them what the object is or who’s it is. Finally, this inclusion of everybody present is also a way of breaking boundaries as he implies that the dirty sock belongs to the father and illustrates how smelly it is. Bongo is taking the dirty object, the polluting category and connecting it to a father who is there with his children and humiliating him in front of them. Thereby Bongo is disrupting or shaking up in hierarchic boundaries as well. This connection and playing with the rules of roles and hierarchy is what shall be discussed next.



Picture 10: Bongo and I during a street performance, teaching to some children how to break a world record in juggling (and failing). © Terje Nilsen

“HUMOR IS JUST OUR WAY OF COMMUNICATING”

Clowning is a constant interaction and connection with the audience. How a joke turns out relies on the response it gets. Thus, two gags are seldom the same, although they might start out that way. Bongo stated in chapter four, these acts are anything but unplanned or coincidental. He explained:

“Humor is our language, but we’re not just trying to be funny, that’s just the tool we use and the way we communicate. What we are trying to convey through it is a sense of achievement, empowerment, unifying groups of people in a neutral space, giving them a break from daily struggles.”

He gave me an example of when they are in a refugee camp with people from different cultures, speaking several languages and believing in various religions, and often these views can be cause for conflict in a camp. Residents could argue with each other over who had to wait the longest in a queue or received more diapers or food than the other and base this on what country or religion they had. This again could be observed in the children who acted aggressively or angry towards each other for speaking another language or simply a change in dialect. Bongo continued:

“However, when they all gathered to play with *us*, they were all just children playing and they were able to momentarily put these conflicts aside. Even if it was only for the one hour that day! Hopefully they might remember this when we leave and think ‘oh hey there is that funny kid who I played that game with’, rather than ‘oh that’s the boy my parents don’t like me talking to.’”

In the language of humor and connection through play, the clowns create a space where the participants are temporarily disarmed or stripped from status or various beliefs and cultures. This seems to be a conscious move from the clown’s perspective, as I have observed during my visits to the hospital with the clowns in Colombia as well. They interact with everyone on their way which results in, on the one hand, that doctor, guard, or cleaning person not having that status or “role” for a moment, and on the other hand, for those who observe this (the children for example) to see another side of the people towards who they might have certain stereotypical presumptions. It breaks up the natural order for a moment. I will further illustrate this with a scenario I observed in Colombia during one of our visits to the hospital together with Flavio, Mango and Magdalena.

The clowns took several detours on our way to the ICU (Intensive Care Unit). They stopped by a kind reception lady; they did a short act for an open waiting room filled with visitors and patients; they lingered by the tiny kiosk cart on wheels where a man was selling sweets, and by an invoice-counter where three people were stamping various documents. Finally, the psychiatrists Maria and Ella guided us through a door labelled “ICU”. It had a washing room before you entered containing a long sink and automatic

taps to wash. On the wall behind were several instruction fliers on how to wash your hands and arms properly, what not to touch and appropriate clothing. In orderly manner the clowns washed their hands one by one, commenting to each other on how to do it like the posters, in an overly exaggerated manner, rubbing intensely everywhere to the point where their bodies were shaking. They also commented if other doctors were washing there simultaneously saying they missed a spot or trying to mimic them. It became a spectacle for everyone around to watch as they were criticising each other and medical staff on their washing. They continued, lifting their hands in front of themselves, palms in without touching anything, like on medical TV shows before entering an operating room. They were waiting for everyone to finish, still commenting on each other and walked in a row of three, hands up, into the ICU. The psychiatrists were guiding them along, giggling the whole way.

The contrast of the colourful and musical clowns in this rather sterile and almost completely silent environment was quite stirring. As they entered it was as though they applied a filter of warmth and joy that spread out like a wave. The rooms had white walls and lots of machines, IV fluids, wires and tubes connected to the patients. There was a chart attached to the entrance to each room with information about the patient. After sharing some jokes at the expense of the doctors sitting by the counter in the middle of the room, the clowns started working their way from patient to patient; Flavio and Magdalena bantering and Mango accompanying them on a guitar. They had not yet started to interact with patients, but already they had connected with probably thirty people or more along the way, who all had their purpose of being there as well.

In one of the first rooms we entered, it was apparent that the clowns recognised the father from previous visits. A girl aged around ten was attached to numerous machines and in a semi-conscious state as her father was washing her face and arms with a cloth and gently tucking her in under her blankets. Flavio and Magdalena were playing invisible volleyball in the hallway as they spotted the father grinning at us. He was wearing a football shirt and seemed rather intrigued by the volleyball game, smiling as he watched them. Flavio spotted his interest and passed the imaginative ball into the room. The father caught the invisible ball and passed it back to him. Flavio asked him if he saw the football game last night and the two got into an intense discussion about football, while passing the volleyball back and forth. Flavio's passes were looking more dramatic, leaping across the room to catch the ball in time, implying that the father was

“leading” the game even though his passes were quite gentle with his legs planted next to his daughter’s bed. Magdalena and Mango went over to the girl and started playing a funny song about tomatoes. I was standing in the corridor observing them together with the psychiatrists and one of them, Ella, explained to me that this father had been here almost every day visiting his daughter for months. He tried to be with her as much as he could around his work schedule even though it seemed to exhaust him.

After our hospital-visit Nina explained to me that it was as important for them to take the time to work with and see parents, doctors and even the cleaning crew because they are the ones who need to continue the work when the clowns leave. They are the ones who interact the most with the patients for the rest of the time. Therefore, the clowns try to create a more playful and positive atmosphere around them to transmit onto the children when they are together. This is also suggested in what Nina said: “If we dance with the doctors in the hallways the children might see this and not just think of the scary person who sticks them with needles next time they come to examine them.” I observed various encounters, where the clowns would grasp an opportunity to include parents and staff in their gags in front of the patients. For instance, during a visit with Flavio and Piña, on several occasions throughout the visit, they would start a game of invisible ping-pong through a patient’s glass window. One of them would be on either side of the window and having a doctor serve them a fake ball, as they each had a physical racket to smash with. They would also hand over the rackets to doctors and nurses while they would be commentators on the game. Another example was during an act inside a patients’ room between Magdalena and Piña, where Magdalena would sit down in a red, plastic children’s chair that was way too small for her and it got stuck (see picture 11). After unsuccessfully getting Piña to try and take it off, it ended with several people both visitors, doctors and cleaning crew queuing up in a long line out of the room all trying to pull the chair off with everyone laughing hysterically.



Picture 11: Magdalena stuck on a chair, Piña engaging by-passers to help pull it off ©Rebecca Hill



Picture 12: Mango, Flavio & Magdalena performing. Magda taking a nap in the middle of the act using a fathers (from the introductory vignette) hand to rest on. ©Rebecca Hill

Jane told me during one of our first meetings that the hospital we visited, and its hospital staff was very different now than from when they first started. Back then, the doctors had not seen how a clown worked before. They were very distant and dismissive towards the clowns when they tried to include them in their games, rather watching from the side-lines. Now they would approach the clowns through their own initiative during acts or in the hallways. They would even invite the clown to dance with them. Jane continued “But I have no idea what happens when we leave, I hope they still dance...”. The line of interaction in the work of clowning, suggest an egalitarian from of play. For a clown everyone is a potential playmate. In their view this comes before other social statuses, current occupation or living situation. They seemingly disrupt or blur the lines of who is guard and who is being guarded by creating an egalitarian space in which they exist together in *communitas*.

I have argued earlier that a “*communitas*” appears between the participants that the clowns engage with. *Communitas* produces a sense of unity in which social boundaries and hierarchies are lifted temporarily. The difficult with *communitas* though is keeping it going.

The tendency for anti-structure to revert to normative structure stems from the fact that “the experience of *communitas* becomes the memory of *communitas*, with the result that *communitas* itself in striving to replicate itself historically develops a social structure” (King 2017: 216; Turner 1982: 47). Thus, the atmosphere which the clowns attempt to create may only cause momentary relief and possibly does not have any long-term effect. Barnaby King (2017), suggests play to be transient and quickly moves from experience to memory when work and routine are initiated again. Yet, he argues that the interventions might temporarily disrupt institutionalized inequalities and transform the atmosphere of the hospital for the better by bringing this momentary release (King 2017: 216).

What is the point of disrupting and turning order into chaos if it is only momentarily beneficial? The clowns cannot know, but merely hope that once they leave the hospitals the “doctors continue to dance” as Jane implied. Maurice Bloch made an elaborate description of a ritual among the Merina people of Madagascar which he calls the “The royal bath” (1987). There is a section during the most sacred part of the ritual, the night after the bath of the king where there appears a break. It is said to be a night without sanctions, where everyone can have sexual relations with anyone with no consequence. He believes that this is quite important to the ritual as the freedom for one night help reinstate and maintain the rule of the royal king over his subjects to continue (1987). The anti-structure for Bloch is applied to strengthen the actual structures once order is reinstated. In Don Handelman elaboration on the ritual clown, he also stresses a moment of the rituals where the ritual clown may ridicule or praise various people who are important in the ritual before the ritual-subject can continue their journey of becoming, it is meant to enhance their coming persona (1981). What may be visible from the examples illustrated is possibly not a “strengthening” of existing hierarchies once order is restored as was the case of Bloch, but rather a more “nuanced” frame around it? In the *communitas* the clowns disrupt the structures and illustrate their own and the audience's humility, possibly showing that the doctor is not “just” a doctor, but also something else. In the space of *communitas* created the participants can be stripped down of their daily “roles” as father, refugee, guard etc. and reveal other human capacities.

Momentary relief, release and disruption appear to be the achievement of the clowns. A place for a temporary break from ones’ daily life. However, considering Turner arguments that we play human roles in our daily lives and in liminality we truly connect to our full human capacities, possibly this temporary break is more of a reconnection to our self than what is being realized? As illustrated in the introduction vignette, and Marcos’ explanation that he wanted to

seek out that father due to the seeming distance from his son and being able to be there, to “wake him up” and reconnect them again. It is often the case as has been illustrated that the clowns seek to “shake” the natural structures especially in front of the children. By using humor and play, the clown is disguising its actual aim for its audience. By breaking boundaries, the clown is forcing connection, but also inviting to it. It is not about what is funny or not, or what boundaries to break or not. It is about human connection and about uncovering the structures to see what lies beyond and how we all relate to them together.

LAUGHTER OUT OF PLACE?

The chapter illustrates humor as a tool used by the clowns to create a connection to and between the audience members. The clown's ability to disrupt and ridicule without repercussion can be called “diplomatic immunity”. The clowns appear to be truth-tellers throughout history and may continue this position, despite their simultaneous “overstepping” of cultural and social borders. There might be some universalistic aspects in terms of humor when looking at the humanitarian clown and their acts towards an international audience. The performance by Bart and I was one of these examples. Prior to the show, Bart gave me clear instructions because he knew that this act had been successful with other audiences before. Playing with matters out of place, for instance by using a toilet brush as a microphone or a toothbrush could be perceived as breaking a social taboo across cultural or linguistic barriers. What happened simultaneously though, was that while he was humiliating himself by using the toilet brush in the wrong way, connections took place between him, his spectators and among the spectators themselves. He used humor as a tool to create connections in the space of *communitas*. Simultaneously, there may be instances where linguistic and cultural barriers are too strong for laughter to occur. An example of this was when my own lack of cultural understanding prevented me from being part of that humorous moment at the hospital between Magda, Flavio and Mango. The humor was too “culturally specific” for me to fully share with the others.

Additionally, I have experienced instances where humor has been too “brutal” to be funny. During a show with Bongo and Olympia in *Latterlig Lett!* (LL) for newly settled refugees, there was a girl who told a joke about a father killing his family, which silenced the whole audience and the clowns on the spot, yet the girl giggled hysterically. Donna Goldstein (2003) discusses how her informants in the favelas in shantytowns in Brazil use humor as a coping mechanism and a vehicle for expressing discontent and sentiments that are too difficult

to communicate publicly (2003: 5). Once again it may be that the clowns function as an outlet for relief and release of emotions and sentiments that might be otherwise undermanaged or difficult to manage as discussed in chapter four, possibly through the act of laughing. The laughter may be for comical purposes, for the purpose of relief, or a form of commentary toward their social and political situation. Whatever the cause of laughter, this chapter has illustrated how humor is utilized by the clown as a means of connection and relation towards its audience. The clown is asking for permission to break the rules of norms and social taboos, and openly announcing it while it does, the clown may be allowed to proceed. By using humor the clown disrupts the social structures and hierarchy to reveal other human capacities which may be shared among the audience.

CONCLUSION: A JOURNEY FROM AMATEUR TO FOOL

The past year and a half have been a personal journey from amateur to fool. In the field of anthropology, it has been stated that you are your own main tool of analysis (Briggs 1970: 6). The use of one's own subject to choose some data above something else proves that the work and analysis of an anthropologist is quite hermeneutic (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 23). It is clear that my presence has left traces on the data I have collected. Simultaneously, through thick ethnographic description of my participation and understanding, I hope to have provided the readers with a deeper appreciation of the way ethnographic "facts" are established in the course of everyday engagement (1992: 25).

In this thesis I have drawn on my personal experience in gaining an understanding of the implications of clowns and the role of the clown for people in situations of crisis. Initially, my entry to the field was the identity and self-perception of a researcher by positioning myself outside of the 'frame' of analysis to observe the clown in action which provided insight, but not a full comprehension. I was told from my first day that I must clown to understand. Through participatory observation I obtained a more substantial understanding and learned through the process of *becoming* a clown (Müller 2000: 18). Obtaining embodied and tacit knowledge became my method to approach the field, but also a way of developing my understanding and a vocabulary for further explanation.

By exploring the implications of clowning through observing, communicating and participating as a clown, the thesis has sought to illustrate how the clown is an internal amplification of the self in the eyes of the performer. My informants have argued that the clown is a different part of themselves that they have access to and can release easier than others. The clown is both an amplification of their self, and a unique being of its own, suggested through the expression of being "not them...but not not them". Additionally, it has been argued that the clown is a relational self, existing in a social and dialogical interaction with its audience through play. The clown exists betwixt and between identities in a temporary space of liminality, where it invites its audience to join. It is an ambivalent figure of enticement and danger, hilarity and gravity, fun and solemnity. But the context of its presence is often that of sacredness, truth and

the authenticity of experience (Handelman 1990, 236). By functioning as a truth-teller in society, turning social structures into anti-structures, the clown reveals the existing order in society. It breaks boundaries in order to create new ones. In the liminal space of *communitas*, this occurs when the audience engages in play with the clown; a space is created where the audience can acknowledge and explore several things, such as a temporary release of energy, a moment of elevation to relieve various emotions, and a moment to make autonomous decisions in dialogic actions with the clown. In this space, disruption is triggered – where the everyday existing hierarchy (between father and son, doctor and patient, etc) is contested as the audience is invited to become more of a participant than a spectator. .

In the early stages of processing my research material, I realized that I had opened a Pandora's box with matters that deserved further exploration. Each of the topics of focus here; the clown as a being, the role of play, the social relation between the clown and the audience, and humor – could have been themes of their own analysis and development, far more so than that which has been included in this thesis. There are also other aspects which have not been mentioned due to the scope of this thesis. Examples of this are the aesthetic aspect of their costumes, the nose, their props and how the clowns use their performance space physically outside the traditional circus ring. Another aspect is the social and political expression that a clown could hold in its power. I met performers who used clowning as activism ie; a way of drawing attention to the humanitarian crisis and conditions in refugee camps. I understand that there are even some activists who can reenact the sea crossing many refugees must take to enter into Europe - performed in a respectful manner. However, during the spring of 2020 I discovered a group of clown performers in Norway who demonstrated asylum-seeker issues through a performance which involved sailing into Oslo Harbour wearing life-vests and carrying huge placards calling for political action¹⁶. It is my opinion that it would be highly worthwhile to explore these aspects in exploring a clown's role as a truth-teller in society and within humanitarian discourse.

In terms of the audience in question, namely, people in situations of crisis, I argue that the humanitarian clown provides momentary relief from their situation through creating the liminal space of *communitas*. The clown itself comes into being within a liminal space and seeks to disrupt the social environment it enters effectively turning order into chaos. The clown's audience are in a crisis and often, also, a state of limbo due to endless waiting,

¹⁶ Many of the performers brought their kids with them, who also wore the life-vest, which was a pretty powerful scene.

uncertainty and lack of control over their situation. The clown stems from a liminal place as well, but unlike the audience, the clown can actively control its space and cause disruptions and new orders, with help from the audience. The clown invites the audience to join it in its liminal space providing the audience with the ability to maneuver within this new paradigm together. In the clowns' liminality there is no typical rationality, but rather curiosity and exploration of rules and boundaries. In contrast to its audience the clown is not "stuck" in a confined space of limbo but rather exists and regards its space of liminality as limitless. This is quite the contrast from the fixed and authoritarian limbo of the audience. Additionally, the clown offers its audience a more authentic and truth telling reality of society, acknowledging and relating to their situation through empathy. By the use of humor and the absurd, the clown exposes its own vulnerability and humility in exchange for laughter, play and connection. Furthermore, the clown invites the audience to explore their own vulnerability and humility together with it.

With regard to people in a situation of crisis, one may question the benefits a humanitarian clown may provide. Would not economic support be preferable? I will argue that, although they must first be provided basic human needs such as food and shelter, people in a situation of crisis often endure longer periods where they are partially stripped of their humanity. The clown, in contrast, is a figure which is overly in contact with itself and encourages connections and relations as well as amplifying every emotion and expression it can muster. Thus, the clown may be the ultimate figure to *re-humanize* such an audience and re-connect them to themselves, if only for a brief period. The connection is not only achieved through interacting with the clown, but also with oneself and with ones surrounding, potentially "waking up" the audience. Humor is the clowns' *way* of communicating and this goes beyond laughing matters. They create connections and interactions with their audience, but also further this connection between the spectators themselves. By turning both the doctor, the guard, the parents and the children into playmates, the clown disrupts everyday roles and social hierarchies to create new connections. The clown expresses the humanity that exists despite people's social role. It is by the crossing of boundaries as well as international borders that the clown can break the rules and invite the audience to participate, which is why the clown may proceed with its ridicule and performance without further sanction. By connecting and acknowledging their audience and conveying humor from a space of vulnerability and fault, the humanitarian clown has the ability to interact across cultural and linguistic borders, creating a space to connect to oneself. This is why the humanitarian clown can be a powerful figure in improving the lives of people in crisis.

APPENDIX

NAMECHART OF PERSON AND CLOWN

Person	Clown
Jane	Lulu
Nina	Magdalena (abbreviated to Magda)
Marco	Flavio
Enrique	Piña Chocolada (abbreviated to Piña)
Miguel	Mango
Carlos	Tito
Bart	Bongo
Laura	Luna
Camilla	Olympia
Fredrick	Patty

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