The Interactivity Lab: training toward the performer as 'Architect-Clown'

A challenge for performers working in interactive and participatory performance forms is a need to navigate between the position of the 'Architect', designing and structuring an audience's experience, and that of the 'Clown', sustaining a performance state that is present and responsive to the particularities of individual interactions. While design and structure can preoccupy the development of new work, rehearsing for participatory performance proves a challenge when the pivotal ingredient – an unpredictable audience – is absent. How can training support performers to attend both to performance structure and to the immediacies of interactive exchange? How can it support them to think critically about the aesthetics, ethics and politics of both?

This article reflects on my pedagogic process working with a group of undergraduates through spring 2017, exploring training approaches to support their devising process as they created a self-directed interactive theatre piece. It offers an ethnographic glimpse into the studio work and students' responses, as we investigate approaches to developing the performer as 'Architect-Clown'. Drawing on ten years' experience as a performer-deviser in this field, I seek to tack between these two training zones, applying pedagogic methods that work to develop performance qualities of listening, presence and improvisation, alongside methods aimed at developing a critical and reflexive approach to experience-design. Are the two roles as distinct as I suggest? How might they interact, and what might be gained (or lost) from this cross-training studio approach?

Keywords: pedagogy, immersive, interactive, Lecoq, ensemble, audience

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My approach reflects my own training in the pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq and the framework of the Architect-Clown, which I propose as a performer training for interactive theatre practices, echoes Lecoq's twin pedagogic foundations of analysis and improvisation (Lecoq 2006, p. 112). However, where Lecoq's approach centred on movement analysis in order to develop a 'theatre of movement and gesture' (ibid), the adaptions presented here centre on analysis of intersubjective experience and forms of individual and collective encounter, exploring what Bourriaud (2006) has termed 'relational aesthetics' in performance. This is a pedagogic approach that combines performance improvisation with reflective analysis of audience experience: an adaptation which retains Lecoq's focus on the performer as 'actor-creator' (Lecoq 2006,

p. 94), but which shifts the frame of analysis from a language of movement to a language of interrelationship and intersubjective experience.

The Interactivity Lab

In January 2017 I embarked on a twelve-week pedagogic process with nineteen undergraduate Drama students in their first year of study at the University of Exeter. This practice-based module allowed me to explore questions of how a theatre training might approach the specific challenges of performance work within immersive, interactive and participatory fields. The broader module framework divided the year cohort into five tutor groups, with each tutor leading a curriculum of practice and research based her own particular research lens. Tutors' performance training and research curricula scaffolded the five student groups toward developing a 45-minute devised and self-directed piece, based on their group's particular focus of practice. Within a research unit titled 'The Interactivity Lab: engaging active audiences', my students explored the field of contemporary immersive, interactive and participatory performance through a weekly series of taught sessions, self-directed devising tasks, research and analysis. These provided the foundations for the students to develop their independently devised, interactive theatre piece, *The Society*.

The rising popularity of immersive, interactive and participatory theatre forms in the early decades of the twenty-first century has been, by now, well-documented (including but not limited to White 2013, Machon 2013, Harvie 2013, Alston 2016) and at times lamented (see Gardner 2014) as the terms – particularly 'immersive' – risk wearing thin through their widening usage within the arts and media. Felix Barrett, of UK pioneers Punchdrunk, encapsulated the mood of the genre when discussing the

company's work in an early interview. Describing the origins of Punchdrunk's trademark immersive approach, Barrett explains: 'what I was interested in doing was to totally empower the audience, make the audience the epicentre of the work, which is what it should be, so they can control it' (Barrett 2007, n.p.).

The notion of theatre audiences becoming the 'epicentre' of performance and 'controlling' the work (or at least controlling their own experiences within it, through the semblance of choice) undoubtedly reflected wider cultural shifts of the era, as media audiences embraced the participatory spaces of the Web 2.0. In *Convergence Culture*, published the previous year, media scholar Henry Jenkins set out his vision of the cultural shifts precipitated by the new media of a digital age:

> Audiences, empowered by these new technologies, occupying a space at the intersection between old and new media, are demanding the right to participate within the culture. […] The resulting struggles and compromises will define the public culture of the future (Jenkins 2006, p. 24).

Immersive theatre practices responded to and reflected that demand, through performance work which allowed audiences to explore, to make individual choices, and to interact with performers in ways that could shape the performance content of the production. For some theatre-makers, including Punchdrunk, the potential for audience participation to impact on the overall performance structure was often limited, and many critics have questioned the claims for audience empowerment and agency made by artists in this field, debates which I will not reprise here (see e.g. Freshwater 2009, pp. 55-75, Alston 2013, Bishop 2012, White 2016).

Instead, my focus is on the particular challenges that these theatre forms present to performers. At a 2014 practitioner workshop on 'Making Interactive Theatre' run by Coney at the University of Exeter (hosted by Burn the Curtain and Unexpected Exeter festival), Coney's artists centred on interactive theatre-making as a problem of design

and adaptation, focusing on processes for devising interactive performance structures and designing the experiential dimensions of theatre and performance for active audiences. Coney make performance experiences for playing audiences, and their emphasis in this workshop was on the process of adapting source materials such as stories, films, and literature, into game-based performance structures. Participants found the workshop useful and enjoyable, but feedback (particularly from performer-practitioners) highlighted the relative lack of an investigation of interactivity through practical performance activities. In fact, Coney's approach in this one-day introductory workshop focused on the zone of work which I refer to as that of the Architect, and feedback from those who noted the limited exploration of interactivity through live performance pointed towards an absence of the Clown as a zone of exploration in this workshop.

The work which I describe as that of the Architect within interactive theatre-making relates to processes of experience design and dramaturgy, and is particularly at the forefront of artistic processes in the developmental stages of performance-making. The Architect can thus be understood, in part, as a role which a practitioner might adopt within a devising process, wearing the 'hat' of the dramaturg or experience-designer to consider the structure and fabric of the performance piece and the intended journey of an audience through that structure. When I refer to this archetype as a 'zone' of work, I am therefore considering it as an area of focus within the wider pedagogic structure, defining the sets of questions and processes of discovery that might help train a performer-deviser to develop the skills relating to this role. The notion of the Architect as a 'zone' also extends to the artistic process, beyond pedagogy, where the zone refers to an area of work within the wider process of interactive theatre-making. Thinking of these archetypes as relating to particular zones of attention within a development

process, rather than solely as roles which a performer-deviser might adopt, allows us to acknowledge the ways that a performer can inhabit multiple roles simultaneously and over time, both within the devising process and in performance.

For performers, however, an approach to interactive theatre-making that focuses solely on the processes of design and structure relating to the zone of the Architect can overlook the raft of challenges associated with navigating the embodied proximities of an interactive audience. The performer must be able to sustain not only the dramaturgy and structure of the piece as a whole, but also to improvise, adapt and play within the micro-structures of interaction that an active audience can offer. I adopt the archetype of the Clown to refer to this zone of training which attends to the performer's work of remaining present and responsive to the particularities of individual audience interactions and to the totality of the live performance, its manifold elements and its structure as a whole. The archetype of the Clown for me is rooted in a Lecoq-based performer training, in which the notion of clown refers to a particular performance state, or 'mask', rather than to a specific theatrical genre (such as the circus clown). It describes a performance state that places the performer in close contact with their audience and with their own imagination, and which is rooted in playfulness, allowing the performer freedom to adapt and improvise, to draw the audience into their imaginative world, and to stay responsive and adaptive to the audience's responses in turn. The performance state of the Clown entails the ability to stay attuned to the embodied subjectivities of an audience whilst also sustaining the imaginative world created through performance: the theatrical fiction, or conceptual frame.

Broadly, these two zones refer to sets of skills and questions that are not solely the preserve of interactive, immersive or participatory theatre forms, and in a sense we might say that performers in a range of settings have to work across these two fields,

incorporating the work of the Clown (a state of performer presence) and the Architect (a sensitivity to the performance structure). However, in immersive and interactive theatres, these frames in particular support performer-devisers to respond to the inherent variability of the form. In more conventional settings, actors have a range of support structures in place that help to shore up the underlying unpredictability of live performance. These include the performance script, governing the unfolding events of the play; and the social script of theatre spaces, governing the details of how audiences behave, interact, and experience the performance within specific cultural contexts. The limitations placed on unpredictability in traditional theatre forms allow the actor to focus on the craft of performing character and text. Immersive and interactive theatre forms, however, alter the rules of engagement between performer and audience and bring with them an inherent variability, demanding a greater readiness to improvise on the part of the performer (and often the audience too). While actors in conventional theatre settings will also seek a state of heightened embodied presence in relation to their co-performers, the complicity between them established through rehearsals acts as another support structure. In interactive theatre forms, the performer is working with un-rehearsed audience members as 'co-performers', and must work much more quickly to establish both the rules of engagement and the dynamics of their interrelationship.

In the sections which follow, I address how each of these zones of work associated with the archetypes of the Architect and Clown were approached within the performer training developed for this module. I draw on my ethnographic observations as the course tutor and workshop facilitator, alongside responses and reflections from students gathered through a focus group discussion in the final week of the module.

The Architect

The position of the Architect relates to the practices of designing and structuring an audience's experience. However, the skills which it requires include a pre-emptive understanding of audience behaviours and an empathetic ability to imagine an experience from an audience perspective. That is to say, the work of the Architect does not entail an abstract design process but an empathetic one, built on lived experience. For most artists working in the field of interactive performance, these skills are gained through the iterative process of developing their performance ideas and testing them on audiences. Bringing test audiences into the development phase of a project becomes an essential tool for refining the artist's ideas, and is a core element of practice for companies such as Coney. Could a pedagogic process replicate some of the iterative learning that occurs in professional artistic practice? My response was to draw on the *auto-cours* element of Lecoq's pedagogy, engaging students in weekly devising and performance tasks in order to create a culture of making and testing interactive performance ideas from the very beginning of the module.

In the Lecoq pedagogy, as in my own training at LISPA, these weekly performance assignments challenge students to move between the exploratory, embodied work of the actor and the structuring, dramaturgical work of the deviser from the start of their training. Their place in the teaching at the Lecoq school in Paris was born out of the city-wide student protests of 1968, amid students' call for greater autonomy in their learning (see Murray 2003, pp. 60-61); but while Lecoq introduced the *auto-cours* in response to these demands, they have progressed to become a cornerstone of the school's pedagogy. For an hour or so per day (in the Lecoq school

and at LISPA), students work in small companies on self-directed devising assignments, creating and presenting new performance work on a weekly basis. Lecoq explains that:

> Unlike improvisation work, which deals mainly with acting, the work done in the *auto-cours* emphasises production, playwriting, and also the necessity of collaborative work in the theatre (Lecoq 2000, p. 92).

However, while the Lecoq pedagogy uses the framework of *auto-cours* to explore those territories of ensemble performance that combine to form what he describes as a 'theatre of movement and gesture' (2006), in the Interactivity Lab we used this framework to explore territories of interactivity and immersive audience experience. For example, in our first weeks of training and research we explored notions of liminality, communitas, and visceral, sensory audience experience in immersive theatres. Students responded by creating performance-experiences inspired by rites of passage and ritual. Other weeks included a set of performance-presentations that explored game structures for playing audiences; and a set of performances that responded to our investigations into the politics and ethics of audience participation. As the unit progressed towards its culmination in a 45-minute devised performance produced by the students, these weekly performance projects became centred toward the group's aims to adapt themes drawn from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1993 [1918]) to create their immersive and interactive performance, *The Society*.

While Lecoq's use of *auto-cours* therefore enables students to gain experience in the collaborative work of theatre-making, our use of regular self-directed devising for interactive theatre also enabled students to gain experience working with active audiences, and to gain an audience's perspective in the experience of new, un-tested performance events. This process of making and testing interactive performance material was embedded from the first session: in our opening workshop together, we

spent a preparatory hour introducing the ensemble training that was to form a backbone to the studio work (I return to the details of this aspect of the training below) and then moved to their first devising task. Here, I challenged the group to create a brief flash mob performance within the central public space of the University's Forum, a glass-covered atrium at the heart of the Exeter campus which links student services, shops and cafes to the University library. We conducted a site-survey of the location for the group to identify aspects of the space and architecture that were of interest, and then the students were given a short window of time to devise their performance action before the company returned to the Forum to enact their brief flash mob event.

Performing an uninvited flash mob in a public space, performers meet an audience who may or may not respond to the action, whose own activities are interrupted by the performance, and who might interrupt or disrupt it in turn. For these students the experience was nerve-wracking. 'I didn't think we'd be able to do it,' commented one student in later feedback, while another whispered to me as we studied the intended site: 'Becca, is this even like, allowed?' With no clear theatrical frame, the group had to make unanticipated decisions such as where and how the performance would begin and end, what constituted 'onstage' or 'offstage', or how and where to mark the physical and spatial boundary between 'performing' and 'not-performing'. Moreover, as members of the public responded to and interacted with the flash mob performance in a spectrum of ways, themes of enquiry emerged that were to become a constant thread throughout their process within the module.

These themes particularly centred around the blurring and questioning of the relationship between audience and performer which Alice O'Grady identifies as inherent to the field of interactive performance (O'Grady 2011, p. 171). For instance, in their later written work, several students reflected on a particular moment that emerged

between different groups of audience and public during the brief few moments of the flash mob. Their performance actions had caused an audience to gather, particularly along a set of mezzanine-level walkways that looked down on the performers below. At the same time, the relatively subtle action of the performers – who sat on the floor in individual and distant positions from one another – meant that other students and staff passing through central hallway were unaware of the event. We noticed a pair of young women who left a coffee outlet with drinks in their hands and drifted into the midst of this performance, not noticing the actors around them or the audience watching from above and at a distance. They paused 'centre stage', lifted a mobile phone, and began to snap a few 'selfies' together before moving off: unaware that the formation of an audience, forged through the performance actions of the flash mob group, had momentarily reframed their everyday action as theatre. In my students' later written work, this moment became a centre-point for their reflections on the blurring of the roles and relationships between the 'actor' and 'spectator' in immersive theatre forms[1].

Devising interactive performance tasks became a weekly foundation of the training structure, involving small companies of four to five performers who planned and executed performance-experiences for the remainder of the group. Looking back on the work, one student commented:

> Making theatre, every week: [in a] subliminal way, that was some of the most
> useful training because by the time it came to doing the final piece, it was like we
> knew how to control an audience. [We knew] what kind of things were useful. So,

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[1] This is not to imply that we read the flash mob as a form of 'immersive theatre', only that the exercise provided a tool for students to reflect on the reconfiguration of the theatrical frame in immersive and interactive performance forms.

> it was almost like this playground of ideas that we could then draw from for the
> final piece […] It was all just, without us knowing it at the time, creating this kind
> of solid grounding of 'ok, we've done pieces before, we've performed them', to one
> of the most difficult audiences – drama students (Student focus group 2017).

Samuel Beckett's words spring to mind, invoked by my own teacher Thomas Prattki and etched into my pedagogic path: 'No matter, try again, fail again, fail better' (Beckett 1983, p. 7). The weekly devising tasks were a pedagogy of 'failure'[2], a space to try and fail and try again, and they afforded students some spectacular moments of discovery in which their test audiences broke the theatrical frame, upset the rules, or hacked the intended structure and 'solved' the performance within minutes. Another student added that:

> We were playing games. But they weren't just games, they were like, little did we
> know they were helping us develop an idea of how we want to approach our final
> performance (Student focus group 2017).

One devising task which proved a particularly rich source of discoveries for engaging active audiences was set within a week where our research focussed on game-structures and playing audiences. Here, we had examined the work of companies using game-based structures, including Coney and Australian theatre company Boho Interactive, alongside pervasive gaming practices and the street games repository, Ludocity.org. The *auto-cours* assignment asked students to adapt a game from the Ludocity archive into a theatrical experience up to fifteen-minutes long, led by their company of around five performers for the remaining fifteen audience-participants.

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[2] For an overlapping perspective see Lucy Amsden, this journal, on the pedagogies of failure
and spectatorship in Philippe Gaulier's training (Amsden 2017, 2016).

To one degree or another, all of the performances presentations in this week's task entailed some degree of 'failure': necessarily, since all were first attempts at facilitating relatively complex, rule-bound and game-based performance structures. The piece which we nicknamed 'Kidnap Patrick' became a benchmark in this process of trial and error and was much discussed by students in their later written work. This piece, with echoes of 'Escape Room' experiences and the Crystal Maze, centred on the challenge of solving a puzzle to unlock the dramatic resolution of the performance narrative. The audience arrived into the studio and discovered the room empty, but for a table set with a book and an old Nokia mobile phone. A text message beeped onto the phone: 'Patrick' had been kidnapped. If we wanted to rescue him, we needed to solve the clues to find his location.

The premise was clear and the company had seemingly devised a clever sequence of clues for us to follow, but they had not anticipated the group dynamics of an audience of around fifteen people trying to solve this puzzle together. There were too many of us to all look closely at the props – the SMS messages arriving by phone and the book, a Spanish-English dictionary which was needed to translate words and solve the clues – and so the audience quickly stratified into those who took a lead in the task, working closely to solve the puzzle, and those who began to step back and look for some other way to play the game. Our energy was heightened from the performances of other groups before this one; meanwhile the stakes of the dramatic fiction as well as the need to accomplish the task within a time limit added to a sense of urgency. A playful compulsion to 'win' seemed to be growing among the audience members who felt extraneous to the task of solving the clues. Additionally, there were no performer-facilitators from the company inside the studio, who otherwise might have engaged with those that were pulling away from the given instructions: the company having chosen to

remain hidden and observe us secretly, communicating remotely through the mobile phone to add the atmosphere of mystery. Those of us who could not see the props and clues well, or did not feel useful to the action of solving the puzzle (since several people were already engaged on it), began to step back and look for other solutions to the situation we were presented with. At which point, one participant realised that the meta-objective of the performance-game was not to solve the clues, but to rescue the kidnap victim. With this realisation, he decided to forget the puzzle and start searching the building: he strode across the studio to a door linking to an adjacent room, opened it, and immediately discovered the kidnapped 'Patrick' lying motionless on the floor next-door. Game over. With other members of the audience, he carried 'Patrick' back into our studio to cheers and applause. The phone beeped: 'Put Patrick back, or there will be consequences'.

In this instance, the 'failure' of the game to work successfully was far more instructive to the students in gaining an understanding of audience behaviours than a 'successful' game might have been. The goal of the weekly *auto-cours* tasks was not to refine one particular performance idea, as in the iterative process of testing interactive performance material conducted by artists in the wider industry, but instead to repeatedly create and test new, varied ideas. In this way, students produced multiple discoveries and micro-experiences of 'failure' which helped them to develop the 'playground of ideas' articulated by the student above: an awareness of how to successfully manage audiences and guide them through an intended performance structure, garnered through lived experience.

These weekly devising tasks were an important way for students to gain experience in facilitating audiences and to develop a feel for structures and approaches that could hold

a potentially wilful, active audience. However, this group of mainly 18- to 19-year-old Drama students also had a varied level of prior experience of interactive, participatory or immersive genres. Some had attended immersive productions in the past, but for others, whose prior knowledge was rooted in naturalism and more traditional theatre models, the content of the module challenged their preconceptions of theatre practice. We needed to experience not just their own approaches to interactive performance structures, but other artists' work as well.

One session focused not on making performance work but on experiencing other works from an audience perspective. We re-enacted Kaleider's production of *The Money* (2013), which was staged as close to the original concept as possible with students primed in advance on their role as audience-performers (Players and Silent Witnesses), the rules, and the required sum of money to play[3]; and we collectively read aloud the performance script for Ontrerend Goed's production of *Internal* (2014), the infamous production which provoked accusations of unethical audience manipulations (Trueman 2009). One student described this session as:

> Really pivotal for us, being something which we all joined in, and it wasn't
> something that any of us had thought of. And, it was so new - well I think for most
> of us it was really new - that whole experience of 'this can be theatre' (Student
> focus group 2017).

Several students commented on the different learning experience afforded by re-enacting these performances through play and collective script-reading, compared to researching them through reading and discussion. An experiential approach to these works prompted them to reflect on questions which arose through their own felt

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[3] For more details see: http://kaleider.com/projects/the-money/> [accessed 4 Aug. 2017].

experience from an audience perspective. These questions particularly centred around the politics and ethics of audience participation, including audience discomfort, manipulation and its artistic merit (or limits), the forms of investment which audiences make in an artistic work, and questions of what is at stake, both within a game structure or dramatic narrative, and more broadly in artistic work. As one student put it:

> It was all well and good being able to say 'yeah and then we'll make them [do X, Y, Z], because you know, you can step back and say that. But then when it's actually just pushed on to you […] it was like - 'oh that's what it feels like' (ibid).

Much of our discussion of the politics and ethics of engaging active audiences stemmed from this shared experience, built up through both creating and re-creating performances.

These aspects of the training enabled the students to develop their skills in the field which I refer to broadly as that of the Architect: developing an ability to design and structure interactive performance, based on an imaginative empathy for the audiences' experience. This was a pedagogy of spectatorship, as much as it was of the trial-and-error process of making performance work, placing students time and again in the position of an active, participating audience. Through this process, students developed their ability to analyse and reflect on their experiences as audience members in these numerous new performance pieces, refining their ability to sense and imagine the experience of their audience in their final project, and refining their ability to structure their performance accordingly. The act of (seemingly) detaching process from product, by not overtly framing these early devising tasks as producing material for their final performance piece, was also a useful pedagogic tool that freed students to test ideas without a concern for how they might relate to the final performance. Thus they developed their experience in designing performance structures across a broad range of

styles and approaches, and refined their ability to successfully facilitate active audiences within them. The iterative process of making and testing new performance ideas through each *auto-cours* assignment rooted students' work in reflective analysis of experience. Meanwhile, this approach was cross-fertilised by an ongoing actor training that focused on performer presence, ensemble awareness, interpersonal communication and improvisation.

The Clown

'I honestly have never felt so vulnerable in a performance ever,' reflected one student on her experience of the group's final piece, staged twice to an audience of around 60 people per show. 'Because you're just there and there's nothing between you, and they can ask you anything – like anything could happen' (Student focus group 2017). Another student described his feeling of shock as one of the first groups of audience arrived into the theatrical space where he was performing: 'it was like, what are all these people doing on my stage?' The training zone which I refer to broadly as that of the Clown aimed to equip students for this state of vulnerability and unpredictability afforded by the presence of a mobile, interactive audience. This aspect of the training sought, firstly, to develop an ensemble awareness that would strengthen the actors' sense of flexibility and responsiveness to the unfolding potentiality of their performance event. At the same time, it worked to develop the improvisational, audience-centred performer presence more specifically associated with the clown state in Lecoq-based performer training.

I approached this field of work through a weaving of improvisational training techniques, beginning from a grounding in Viewpoints, blended with ensemble movement training derived in part from the 'Breathing Performer' work of Christopher Siversten (which itself draws on the ensemble training techniques of Song of the Goat Theatre, Teatr Pieśń Kozła) and in part from my former training with ZU-UK. As Anne Bogart and Tina Landau note, 'in Viewpoints training, one learns to listen with the entire body' (Bogart & Landau 2005, p. 23), and this embodied listening was a vital tool in supporting the group to develop a close-listening state of ensemble awareness in performance. Blended with these approaches were foundational clown techniques focused on audience contact, alongside physical approaches to characterisation, and improvisations that extended the audience contact work into directly engaging and facilitating audiences. Taken together, this blended training approach aimed at guiding students through multiple layers of embodied performer awareness, starting from an embodied awareness of self, then extending to an awareness of self in relation to the ensemble, extending again to encompass an awareness of the performance space and all elements in it, and finally directing that embodied awareness toward the self in direct contact with audience.

Thus, the zone of training I describe as that of the Clown encompassed preliminary layers of grounding and centring work which I refer to in class as the 'Actor's Body', along with ensemble movement work aimed at building a state of embodied listening within action, prior to the introduction of exercises more specifically associated with clowning. One student described how the ensemble movement work of running, jumping, and stopping as a group stood out for her within the training:

> I found that – like at the beginning, we were pretty rubbish. And it would be a really gradual stop, or we'd all be looking around […] but then I feel by the end, we got much, much better at it. In terms of you know, having your weight forward,

> and then, you're not even really looking at anyone because you've got that soft
> focus. But, you just sort of all feel it, and go for it. That definitely stuck with me
> (Student focus group 2017).

Observing how this work had been visible to her in their final performance, she recalled a scene referred to as the 'party room', set up as a New Years' Eve party where audience roamed and mingled with performers. She felt conscious that she was:

> watching where the energy is in the room, and just keeping the flow of what's
> going on in there. And being able to feel - you know, be as a whole group in what
> you're doing even though you're doing individual things. I feel like that stemmed
> from that work we were doing and travelled all the way through (ibid).

Another performer who was involved in this scene linked her experience back to the ensemble exercise of throwing and catching a ball, passing it between partners while the group continues moving with energy through the studio space. She described a sense of awareness within their performance that:

> everyone else in the class was supporting me and I was supporting them. In like,
> the whole energy. And we were making sure the ball is still held – like we never
> dropped it. The energy never dropped (ibid).

These ensemble-centred elements of the training helped the student company of nineteen sustain a sense of connection to one another, most noticeably within the 'party room' scene, where the 'party' framing allowed audience relative freedom to mingle and interact. Meanwhile, work drawn more specifically from clown training helped them to negotiate their sense of performer presence in direct relation to that of the audience.

The performance state associated with contemporary approaches to clowning is

grounded in an opening up to intersubjective exchange between performer and audience. It demands vulnerability from the performer who seeks to open herself to the possibilities of mutual exchange or, as Peggy Phelan writes of live performance more generally, the 'possibility of mutual transformation' (2003, p. 295), working from a state of not-knowing that can allow for emergence and discovery. The clown state operates in that place where, as the student cited above articulates, 'anything could happen', demanding that the performer abandon her reliance on script or score in order to work with the raw materials of 'self-with-others' (Britton 2013).

This quality of open presence and connectivity is one key element of clown training that can support the work of the interactive performer to stay responsive to the in-the-moment presence of their audience. Meanwhile, a second element is in the ability of the clown to absorb and transform the information offered by audiences into the logic of her own imaginative world. The clown's ability to spin gold from straw, transmuting the contributions of their audience into their own imaginative landscape, parallels the work of the interactive performer who sustains the imaginative world of the performance, while simultaneously absorbing and responding to the contributions of their audience. To clarify, where I refer to the clown within this zone of the training, I am therefore referring to those performance principles which underpin contemporary approaches to clowning and the clown state, rather than a particular theatrical genre or set of performance conventions rooted in circus. This is the Clown as pedagogical tool, as opposed to a particular performance style.

In our studio practice, we approached clowning work from the ground up, beginning with a regular practice for the students to simply meet and hold each other's gaze while standing still, in a circle, facing the rest of the group. In this exercise, the performers seek to stay present to their partners, sustaining a connection with one

person through eye contact, until they recognise that the interaction has reached an end and they take up the gaze of another person. While holding eye contact, they try to stay relaxed and open to the other, observing and acknowledging their own internal reactions without 'doing' anything more. On the page, this exercise might sound easier than it can prove to be in practice. The first time we approached this task, we felt the nervous tension in the group quickly rise, expressed through increased tensions in the body, the rapid breaking of eye contact between pairs, nervous giggles and laughter. It took many repetitions for the students to grow comfortable with meeting and holding eye contact like this, allowing for their own vulnerable visibility as performers, unconcealed by the masks of character or action.

This work led us toward an exercise which Thomas Prattki calls 'waking the clown': an intimate, focused exercise where a solo performer enters a circle of her colleagues and prepares to wear the clown nose for the first time. The group gathers close around her while she bends down to put on the red nose, the 'smallest mask in the world' (Lecoq 2006, p. 116); they then move outward a little as she rises up to meet their gaze. Standing in the centre of the group, at a relatively personal proximity from each ensemble partner, she 'wakes up' her clown by exploring the raw state of presence between clown and audience, working to stay in contact with her breath, to be present and open to her partners, while observing and allowing her emotional and imaginative responses to emerge.

Though we only touched on this work briefly, it had a profound effect for some performers in the group. 'That clowning exercise really freaked me out,' recalled one student, with voices chiming their agreement. Continuing, she described feeling 'a heightened state of being aware of what was going on around you,' and that it seemed 'like we were suddenly more conscious of the "beings" or whatever you want to call the

other people in the room.' She added: 'that ability to look everyone in the eye, that stuck with me a lot […] I'm just going to keep practising and doing it, because it's helped me so much as an actor' (Student focus group 2017).

In their final performance, this student observed that she used this 'heightened consciousness' to stay aware of the audience around her, and found it supported her in a several ways. Firstly, she discovered that 'there's so much more you can be aware of […] there's different circles of attention that you can have – even more so than what Stanislavski would have said' (ibid). Moreover, she found that this area of the training enabled her to feel more responsive and adaptable in relation to the idea of the 'character' that she was performing. She explained:

> I definitely found [this performance state] when making a character. I found it
> difficult to make a huge characterisation because I'd need to – I feel mostly I'd have
> to make a character that was me, because of the complexity of having to improvise,
> ignore and also interact, and be aware of what changes were happening, and
> everything that was going on. It was too much to make a big character (ibid).

Her words point to the way that this performer drew on the foundations of clown work as an alternative route into creating a 'character', grounding her performance in her own embodied responses within a heightened state of performer awareness, rather than in the preparation of a character's psychology and given circumstances more traditionally associated with the work of the actor.

Lastly, for her this heightened awareness of the audience also created a sensitivity toward her own in-the-moment responses, and an awareness of the relationship between her moments of interaction with individuals and the broader performance structure. She described feeling aware of the audience's presence, but also of when 'there might be someone next to you, but you need to ignore them' (ibid). Her comments indicate that in moments like these, she found herself negotiating the roles of

Architect and Clown simultaneously. She was navigating between, on the one hand, an alert awareness of her audience and a flexible, adaptive approach to her interactions with them, while, on the other, staying attuned to the wider performance structure and seeking to avoid entering interactions that could derail her from the narrative trajectory of the scene.

Much like the student cited above, other performers found they had to stay responsive and adaptive to the input of their audience in ways that challenged their notion of performing a 'character'. For instance, in our discussions, the performer playing 'Kevin' tried to untangle how the character both was and was not him. Describing his interaction with audience members he explained:

> It's like talking to me, normally, but I'm, you know - my objectives and motives are kind of Kevin, but it's still who I am […] There wasn't necessarily a character because it was just too complex with everything going on (ibid).

His scene demanded an ability to absorb the audience's improvised comments into the logic of the performance, where audience members were framed as guests at a party and he was one of their hosts. He therefore found it impossible to develop a 'character' in his understanding of a psychological, Stanislavskian approach, since any unexpected information from an audience member could conflict with his prior decisions about the character's given circumstances. Instead, he found that 'for me it was very spontaneous […] it's all just kind of [being] ready to jump in' (ibid).

To support students in this area, I introduced a Lecoq-derived approach to physical characterisation, working through a process of building a character 'from the outside in'. Here, in contrast with psychological approaches to character indicated by the students above, the performer begins by constructing their character's body, finding

their physicality, rhythm and movement qualities. The students' feedback reflected the way in which they drew on that approach in their final performance piece, in some cases experiencing their 'character' as a kind of mask, where their character gave them a structure to perform within, while at the same time allowing for flexibility and adaptation in performance.

A student who played one of the 'Scientist' characters, who had some differentiation as a group but were predominantly involved in a facilitation and audience management role within the performance, described his experience as follows:

> They walk like this, they talk like this, this is kind of how they are as a thing, and what they emanate. Ok, now - the rest of it can change as much as it likes, but that can stay very much like a solid grounding for the character (ibid).

His colleague from this group of Scientists added:

> We did focus on characters, and before we went in we had these characters in our head, but as soon as it started happening that kind of just went for me and I was less about, like I'm 'acting' as this character, and I was more being, like, yeah ok I'm a scientist but this is - this isn't just - it's not just a play and an audience, it was much more… interactive (ibid).

She had planned for her character to be stern and serious, but the audience's mood in their section of the performance took them by surprise, becoming increasingly playful and boisterous. In response, she found they had to adapt from their preconceived roles, adding, 'we kind of relaxed a bit more and got out of the stiff scientist characters. We only did that because of the way they reacted' (ibid).

Their experiences indicate how these performers drew on the zone of training which I refer to as that of the Clown in order to stay flexible in their approaches to both performance content and character. Drawing on Lecoq-derived approaches to character and clown, alongside ensemble training in embodied listening, awareness and

connectivity, this zone of training worked across layers of embodied awareness, performer presence and improvisation in order to support performers' abilities to absorb and respond to the contributions of their audience.

Toward the performer as Architect-Clown

This paper has laid out one approach – my approach, teaching on this particular module – for navigating the demands of a performer training suited to immersive and interactive theatre forms. Tacking between ensemble training and devised theatre practice, I sought to guide this group of undergraduate Drama students through a training that could develop their skills and experience across the two zones which I have designated here as the Architect and Clown. The framework of the Architect-Clown has drawn on Jacques Lecoq's twin pedagogic foundations of analysis and improvisation, and adapted them to a context of interactivity between performer and audience. Through reflections offered by the students themselves, we can glimpse some of the ways they navigated between these roles in their final project, drawing on different elements of the training for specific aspects of their performance. If this training supported them to negotiate between these two positionalities in constructing their final performance, then might it point toward the emergence of a hybrid identity: the performer as Architect-Clown?

For me, the next step in refining this pedagogy will be to find ways to continue weaving the two strands of work more closely together. I observed that the students' detailed work on the state of embodied readiness we called the Actors Body, and the performance qualities of connectivity and listening achieved within the ensemble training, were often diminished within the weekly devised performance presentations.

This tendency is not specific to undergraduate students, instead it reflects a challenge that is common to devised theatre practice more generally. That is, the difficulty of moving between the roles of dramaturg-director, engaged in thinking critically about the performance structure, and of that of performer, engaged with acting quality and embodied presence. In the crucible of collaborative performance-making, it is easy to become preoccupied with decisions, questions and reflections relating to the performance structure and the zone of the Architect, and these students reflected that they rarely brought the Clown performer presence work into their self-directed rehearsals. Are the positions of Architect and Clown as distinct as I portray them here? The challenge in future iterations of this pedagogic research is to progress from tacking between these training zones, toward inhabiting and working across both fields at once.

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