UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

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SPECIAL ISSUE

A/r/tography and the Literary and Performing Arts

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ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

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Special Issue:
A/r/tography and the Arts

Guest Editors
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THEME

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create relational and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work are often rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess, which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others (see http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/).

This special issue of Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts invites original creative and scholarly inquiry that engages in critical debates and issues regarding a/r/tographical methodologies; are exemplars of critical approaches to a/r/tographical research; and/or extend the boundaries of inquiry-based research. Contributions are welcome from disciplines across the arts, humanities and social sciences and in a wide range of formats including articles, essays, and artistic interludes, which explore diverse forms of the arts from drama, dance, poetry, narrative, music, visual arts, digital media and more.

The C/a/r/tography of Critical Clowning: Neo-Bouffon Performance in the Academy

Julia H. Lane
Simon Fraser University
& University of British Columbia

ABSTRACT

Clowning as data draws on my experiences of theatrical clown training and performance as a performer, rather than as an outside observer. While there exists a number of biographies and a few autobiographies about/from famous circus and screen clowns, very little (if anything) has been written exploring the possibilities of clowning as a critical practice infiltrating the academy. Like the slashed identities embraced through the term (and the practice of) a/r/tography (artist, research, teacher), I am seeking ways of bringing together my identity as a clown and a researcher. My search has led me to the notion of subverting the term c/a/r/tography to signify clown, artist, researcher, teacher. The accepted definition of "cartography" is "the science or practice of drawing maps" (Oxford American Dictionary). A subversion of cartography is particularly fitting for this paper, which indeed represents an interpretive mapping of critical clown practices as they relate to academic conventions.

KEYWORDS

Clown, Neo-Bouffon, Trickster, mapping, subversion, affliction

Julia H. Lane
Faculty of Education
Simon Fraser University
8888 University Drive, B
urnaby, BC V5A 1S6.
E-mail: jhlane@sfu.ca

The clown is passionately opinionated about the human condition and, via parody and burlesque, breaks the frames of proper behavior to instruct, criticize and transform.

   (Mitchell, 1992, p. viii)

We are your lunatics. We surrender our lives to make your nonbelief possible. You are sure that you are right but you don't want everyone to think as you do. There is no truth without fools. We are your fools, your madwomen, rising at dawn to pray, lighting candles, asking statues for good health, long life.

   (DeLillio, 1986, p. 319)

In the Preface to the book *Clowning as Critical Practice*, William Mitchell recounts his attendance at a 'curing festival' in the 'Wape society' where he was engaged in anthropological field research between 1967 and 1982 (1992, p. vii). He explains, 'I witnessed performances I could only call clowning' (Mitchell, 1992, p. vii). He further describes how he became convinced that other Oceania ethnographers likely also had what he terms 'clowning data' (1992, p. vii) that they had stumbled upon in the field but generally did not talk about because 'field-workers seldom consider humor a "central subject of study"' (Mitchell, 1992, p. 6). I share Mitchell's framework here in order to articulate a divergence: this paper does *not* consider 'clowning data,' but rather considers clowning *as* data. On the surface this may seem like a pedantic distinction; however, I feel that the difference is significant enough to warrant careful consideration. The clowning data discussed in *Clowning as Critical Practice*, and other academic texts like it, represent information collected by researchers in the field who encounter, often unexpectedly, cultural figures who they label 'clown' (even when the Indigenous culture has no particular word to represent the idea 'clown' – or at least no word shared with the researchers). [i] Clowning *as* data draws on my experiences of theatrical clown training and performance [ii] as a performer, rather than as an outside observer. While there exists a number of biographies and a few autobiographies about/from famous circus and screen clowns, very little (if anything) has been written exploring the possibilities of clowning as a critical practice within the academy. To be very clear, some anthropological and critical texts *about* clowns have been produced within academia, however; to my knowledge, my current work represents the first attempt to question how clowns might infiltrate the academy – bringing with them their entire arsenal of critical practices. Like the

hyphenated identities embraced through the term (and the practice of) a/r/tography (artist, research, teacher) (cf. Irwin & De Cosson, 2004; Springgay, et al, 2008), I am seeking ways of bringing together my identity as a clown and a researcher. My search has led me to the term c/a/r/tography to signify clown, artist, researcher, teacher. While I appreciate that the term a/r/tography is actually spacious enough, in itself, to embrace the kind of critical clown practice that I wish to discuss, the term c/a/r/tography supplies a mapping metaphor that I find generative of meaning for my work.

The accepted definition of cartography is 'the science or practice of drawing maps' (Oxford American Dictionary). A subversion of cartography is particularly fitting for this paper, which indeed represents an interpretive mapping of critical clown – specifically bouffon – practices as they relate to academic conventions, which in itself involves a (re)mapping or (re)considering of these academic conventions. Cartography is also a fitting term for clown figures because, as Lewis Hyde observes, 'trickster is a boundary-crosser […] [but] there are also cases in which trickster creates a boundary, or brings to the surface a distinction previously hidden from sight' (2008, p. 7). [iii] Like early explorers who risked sailing off the edge of the world, clowns venture where others fear to tread and in so doing, they map by simultaneously crossing and creating boundary lines. [iv] This article is far from representing a complete or finished product capable of mapping all of the possibilities of critical clowning in the academy. Rather, the present article represents an initial survey of the landscape – an introduction to the contours of the terrain. This process of surveying allows me to get my bearings before attempting to discuss the fullness of the territory. What's more, it invites other voices into the discussion. This publicizing of work-in-progress resonates with the ways that I have begun to bring critical clowning into my own academic experiences – ways that recognize the shifting quality of the ground on which we stand and as such make space for the scholar to be imperfect, inexpert, and in-progress.

The clowning *as* data in this paper is derived from two experiences I had bringing my clowning practices into the academic arena, both of which occurred during a graduate course in a/r/tography held at the University of British Columbia during the fall of 2011. I am interested here in closely considering those performances – both my own internal experience of the performances and the reception they received from my peers and instructors. In unpacking these performances, I will use criteria derived from more conventional academic clown research (where 'clown data' is the standard), a/r/tographic and arts-based scholarship, and clown/bouffon performance practices/techniques/criteria learned outside of the academy. Given the limited scope of the present articulation of critical clowning and its possible roles in the academy, and in arts-based research more specifically, I have chosen to focus on the interconnections between "neo-bouffon" as developed by Karen Hines and the understandings of arts-based research posited by Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner. The work of these pre-eminent theorists/practitioners will allow me to gesture towards a more encompassing intersection between various clowning practices and the multiple fields of arts-based educational research and inquiry.

Before discussing my performances, a contextualization of the ways in which I am using the terms 'clown' and 'bouffon' is in order. The English lexicon for clowns is extensive, even without considering terms from other languages or cultural ways of knowing. Some clown scholars employ terms interchangeably, while others insist on

v
This is the type of clown that Louise Peacock refers to as a 'simple clown' (2009, p. 35–36) and John Towsen refers to as an 'Auguste' (1976, p. 214–216). Towsen describes the Auguste as the 'traditional comic butt, a simpleton [….] the inevitable comic victim – "he who gets slapped"' (1976, p. 214–216).

vi
http://www.ecole-jacqueslecoq.com/en

vii
http://www.ecolephilippegaulier.com/

viii
This version of the legend is my own re-telling and is adapted from another paper: Lane, J. (2010). The aesthetics and ethics of (a) clown: A paper inspired by the filmmaking of Federico Fellini. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Education, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada.

firm distinctions between terms and the 'clownesque' figures that they represent. Mitchell offers the following list to demonstrate the breadth of the vocabulary: 'buffoon, trickster, clown, humorist, prankster, harlequin, droll, comedian, comic, joker, mime, and mummer' (1992, p. 18). However, even this list is partial and incomplete. Indeed, it leaves out the very form of clowning that most concerns me in this paper: bouffon. Mitchell's list does include the term *buffoon*, which, though orthographically similar, generally represents a very different kind of clowning practice from bouffon. I have most commonly seen the term buffoon used to describe the kind of hapless circus clown who falls into a pail of paint or steps on a rake only to be hit in the face. [v] Even the dictionary definition of the term belies such a meaning: 'a ridiculous but amusing person; a clown' (Oxford American Dictionary). This unfortunate creature is very different indeed from the bouffon.

While it finds close cousins across cultures and eras, the bouffon tradition with which I am most familiar has its origins in *L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques LeCoq* in Paris. [vi] Before founding his own school, [vii] Philippe Gaulier worked at *L'École* and, alongside LeCoq, developed what is now referred to as bouffon. Together they also created what is known as 'the legend of the bouffon,' based in the conditions and the folklore of medieval Europe. This legend comes to me through John Turner and Karen Hines. What follows is a version of that story.

They say there is a village where beautiful people live. All ugly or otherwise afflicted people are banished to the swamp. The swamp people are the bouffon and they live together in their abjection. Once a year the beautiful people drag the bouffon out of the swamp and into the village to entertain them. The bouffon juggle, tell jokes, do imitations, parody religious ceremonies…and they do these things to the very best of their ability, despite their various afflictions.

The bouffon have a secret. They want to take over the village and leave nothing for the beautiful people. But they have to be very careful. Beautiful people are not tolerant or forgiving. They sit and watch with rocks in their hands. All it takes is for one beautiful person to feel offended and the bouffon will be stoned into a bloody mass of dead flesh. They will never leave the stage.

The bouffon dream that one day they will perform so well, be so full of delightfully forbidden charm, that the scathing impact of their performance will come upon the beautiful people silently, suddenly. On that night the beautiful people will go to sleep feeling intoxicated by their own self-satisfaction. In the middle of the night they will sit straight up in their beds. The veneer of the bouffon's performance will fade away and only the hateful, spiteful anger of their words and gestures will remain. The beautiful people will look at themselves in the mirror and see only distorted, hideous faces staring back at them. They will feel their own internal darkness squeezing the life from their vital organs. Each one of them, in their own time and their own way, will take their own life. For how could they live now that they have seen the ugliness inside of themselves? The next morning, the bouffon will slowly emerge from the swamp. The village will belong to them. [viii]

Hines has articulated what she terms 'Neo-Bouffon' - a performance style that maintains the founding principles of bouffon but envisions them in ways that Hines feels are more appropriate for the contemporary Canadian context. Hines retains what she refers to as 'the unholy trinity' of bouffon - namely, charm, parody/imitation,

and affliction - as these are the qualities that have always allowed the bouffon to 'get away' with their performances (Karen Hines, personal communication, 16 August 2011). However, Hines recognizes that 'getting away with it' is very different in the contemporary performance situation where actors are seldom, if ever, physically compelled to perform and where audience members do not bring stones with them to the theatre. Hines (2004) feels that it is not only false, but also incredibly ungracious for performers to 'play hatred against [not to mention wish suicide on] anyone who would be good enough to come and see [their] show' (p. 13). Furthermore, Hines is unsettled by the notion of 'apparently able-bodied performers' *using* physical affliction on stage, even though she has seen the way that affliction made ideas, especially parody, 'cut just a little deeper' (2004, p. 12, 13). She therefore combined her Gaulier training with a form of clowning that she encountered under the tutelage of Canadian clown innovator Richard Pochinko (Hines, 2004, p. 13). On the surface, these performance traditions (although both frequently described as 'clown') seem to be completely at odds with one another: the bouffon reportedly want their audience to commit suicide, while Pochinko insists that clowns love their audience (Hines, 2004, p. 13). In combining these (seemingly) disparate traditions, Hines discovered the 'personal bouffon,' paralleling Pochinko's conception of the 'personal clown' (2004, p. 12). While still deeply critical and ambivalent figures, these 'Neo-Bouffon' are more complex and more human than previous iterations of bouffon. There are still plenty of things that these bouffon hate, but there are also things that they love. [ix] These bouffon are still afflicted; however, the performers do not use a 'random choice of physical deformity, but rather one inspired from within, based on aspects of oneself that one is repelled by' (Hines, 2004, p. 13). It is this 'Neo-Bouffon' performance tradition that I have begun experimenting with in the academic context. These bouffon are only one species (or genre) among many 'critical clowns' that I believe might have an important role to play as fools and jesters in the courts of the ivory tower.

Susan Parman states that 'we need dreams during the night and play during the day to prevent epilepsy, internal time-locking, madness, or other maladaptive aspects of synchrony' (1979, p. 330), a diagnosis which Rotuman clown scholar Vilsoni Hereniko has already linked to the critical role of clowning in many societies. In contrast (or in extension), the bouffon play in order to demonstrate the ways in which we have already succumbed to such maladaptation. Hines explains Gaulier's description of the bouffon as,

> the hunchbacks, lepers, syphilitics – everything society rejects and is disgusted by. But they come to tell us – God's beautiful children – that all aspects of humanity belong to everyone. In the grotesqueness of the Bouffon is a truth about humanity. (personal communication, 14 August 2011)

Of course, in 'telling us that all aspects of humanity belong to everyone,' the bouffon do not only claim beauty for themselves, but also force a recognition of the grotesque in 'us.' Both of the bouffon performances that I did in my a/r/tography course were intended to simultaneously encourage humour and play in what are often serious and work/task-oriented spaces, and illuminate some of the ways in which, as academics, we are already maladapted and even grotesque.

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One of the major contradictions in the bouffon work is that, though they clearly have an antagonistic relationship to their audience, the bouffon are described as being fearless because they exist 'beyond hope, beyond joy, beyond love and beyond hate' (Karen Hines, personal communication, 14 August 2011). In order for the bouffon to dream about their audience committing suicide, they need to be able to experience both hate and hope. However, Hines believes that the description of their fearlessness refers to the fact that while performing the bouffon move beyond feelings and desires so that these do not consume them and thereby reveal the true purpose behind their antics (personal communication, 14 August 2011).

x
The 'point of attack' is a central aspect of bouffon (and neo-bouffon) training and performance. The point of attack is the 'object of the desire to kill' (Karen Hines, personal communication, 15 August 2011). It is essential to note that the bouffon aim to 'tear down [only] that which is not for the greater good' (Karen Hines, personal communication, 15 August 2011). The bouffon do not attack merely for the sake of attacking. It is also important to note that the moment a point of attack becomes obvious, the audience is either able to reject it as not being 'about them,' or they are able to 'kill the bouffon,' who have not achieved the ultimate goal of 'getting away with it' (Karen Hines, personal communication, 15 August 2011). In the contemporary performance scenario, the audience 'kills the bouffon' by leaving the theatre, writing bad reviews, telling their friends not to attend, etc.

I find the us/them dichotomy in Gaulier's description of the bouffon striking: 'we' are the beautiful people and 'they' (the bouffon) express a truth about humanity that we are not privy to, presumably *because* of our beauty. This dichotomizing tendency is an important aspect of what is addressed through Hine's concept of the 'personal bouffon.' In describing her 'neo-bouffon' character, Pochsy, Hines emphasizes that mercury poisoning is both Pochy's affliction *and* her crime. Hines states 'Pochsy [is] spared the indignity of unmitigated victimhood. Indeed, her complicity in toxifying herself and her world [is] as important as her narcissism' (2004, p. 13-14). Unlike the bouffon in Gaulier and LeCoq's legend, this neo-bouffon character is not an unrelentingly subjugated figure. Her complicity is precisely what helps to blur any clearly identifiable 'us/them' dichotomy and, indeed, is a large part of what allows her to 'get away' with her 'simultaneous condemn[ation] and celebrat[ion] of humankind' (Hines, 2004, p. 14).

The audience is not put on the defensive by a 'them' who comes to attack 'us' (and can therefore easily be dismissed as wrong and be destroyed with impunity), but is rather put at ease by 'one of us' who entertains in a way that we can 'laugh at [and] hum along with' (Hines 2004, p. 15). Only sometimes, this person who we identify with so closely, says or does something that makes us feel that the floor has dropped out from underneath our feet…but, we needn't worry because it will only be a moment before we are on to the next charming thing that allows us to laugh and hum once more. The notion of attack in Hines' work is complex; x rather than ungraciously attack an audience who has demonstrated their support by coming to the theatre, Hines identifies with the audience in order to attack the things in which we are all complicit and which require closer examination if we are going to survive as a species. Bringing this form of critical clowning into the academy therefore asks scholars and educators to not only connect with their audiences (students, "the public," etc.) but also to accept their fundamental complicity in that which they identify as worthy of tearing down. While critical clowning can operate this way from within the academy, I also believe that there are aspects of the academy itself that require the attention of the critical clown.

My experience of creating a neo-bouffon performance that took the institution of academia – in which I am deeply embroiled, personally and professionally – as its point of attack was challenging. I have been a student continuously since I was first enrolled in kindergarten. I am currently a doctoral student who has been awarded Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funding to study clowning, cross-cultural dialogue, and ethics. I am reliant on the academic institution for my livelihood and also, to a large extent, for my identity and my sense of self-worth. This reliance made the idea of 'attacking' the academy – even for the greater good – feel risky. It also made the academy seem like the perfect focus to uncover my personal afflictions – my personal bouffon. What's more, a classroom presentation seemed to offer an ideal opportunity for the kind of simultaneous frame presented in the bouffon legend: like the audience who has come to be entertained but is (blissfully) unaware of the bouffon's ulterior motives, my peers and instructors arrived at my presentation expecting to hear about and potentially see the theoretical and artistic framing of my research, but were not prepared for my work to involve a point of attack in which we were all directly implicated. The classroom frame relied less on the 'collective lie' than other theatrical performances. Rather than 'playing' a student presenting in front of a classroom, in my performance I *really was* a student

giving a presentation that *really* was being graded by my instructors. Simultaneously, and without offering prior warning, I was also doing a neo-bouffon performance.

This dual framing was an important aspect of much of the feedback that I received. The first time that I did the performance, the audience was made up of five of my peers and the teaching assistant for the course. After seeing my piece, they suggested that I look into the work of Andrea Fraser and Andy Kaufman, performance artists who also play with mixed framing. [xi] Furthermore, this audience told me that they felt that the 'attack' elements of the performance were too subtle and might have been missed by an audience who was not paying close attention. At first I was very resistant to the latter piece of feedback. I believed that being more overt would result in me revealing too much about my point of attack and, while I was fairly certain that my audience would not stone me to death for my offenses, I was suspicious of their desire for clarity. As Barone and Eisner (2012) articulate, 'there is a deep desire for categorization that offers a precision and clarity to relieve us of an anxiety born of ambiguity' (p. 102). This desire is deeply felt within the walls of the academy and nurturing the 'anxiety born of ambiguity' was a central purpose of my performance. It is worth considering that, in their requests for a more tangible critique, my audience was actually displaying, without necessarily recognizing, their affliction.

On the surface, both of my performances were delivered as 'standard' academic presentations such as those given at conferences and in lecture halls the world over. The spoken text described clown research in much the same way as the introduction to this paper. The crucial factor was that my first iteration included brief 'asides' that commented on what I perceived to be my dysfunctional relationship with academia. When rehearsing this piece, I performed these asides as moments of 'direct address' to my audience; however, feedback from my friends and my partner (who were my 'test audiences' before I brought the piece to the 'pilot audience' in my class) indicated that this made the point of attack too obvious. When the pilot audience told me that they had almost missed my asides completely, I made the crucial realization that feedback from a 'knowing audience' is very different from that of an 'unsuspecting audience.' In other words, my friends and my partner knew about the intentions behind my performance. What felt like 'overkill' to such a prepared audience, may have felt 'just right' to an audience who was hearing about and simultaneously experiencing critical clowning for the first time.

Because I was unable to assemble *another* unprepared audience before the performance of my second iteration, I did the only other thing I could think of to help me fine-tune my work: I turned to the expert, Karen Hines. Karen listened to my concerns, and then proposed that I increase both my subtlety *and* my clarity. She suggested that my commentary on my relationship with academia (the asides in the former performance) could be made subtler, while the *feeling* of being afflicted in this relationship could be clarified and heightened. Eureka! Not only did this insight help me to revise my second performance, but it also helped me to draw a connection between the practices of neo-bouffon and what Elliot Eisner (2005) refers to as 'productive ambiguity,' or material that 'is more evocative than denotative, and in its evocation […] generates insight and invites attention to complexity' (p. 180). It is my sense that such productive ambiguity is precisely what is needed if arts-based research is indeed going to accomplish the goal of 'calling into question that which has become the all-too-familiar' (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 23). Both the concept

of productive ambiguity and this imperative to call into question are related to the notion of attack in neo-bouffon performance. For the bouffon performer, ambiguity can contribute to "getting away" with their attack. This ambiguity is productive of the specific kind of calling into question that the bouffon wish to foster in themselves and their audiences through their point of attack – a calling into question of that which is not for the greater good. In identifying closely with their audience, the bouffon avoid preaching or informing their audience of their failures from on high, both approaches which would threaten the bouffon's chances of survival.

The concept of productive ambiguity also connects to the framing of this paper as the *cartography* of critical clowning. Mapping, as a general practice, appears to have as a central goal the reduction of ambiguity – the exploration and clear demarcation of the world into set and definable boundaries. However, as Hyde (2008) remarks,

> boundary creation and boundary crossing are related to one another, and the best way to describe the trickster is to say simply that the boundary is where he [sic] will be found – sometimes drawing the line, sometimes crossing it, sometimes erasing or moving it, but always there, the god of the threshold in all its forms. (p. 7-8)

Both tricksters and clowns could be called natural cartographers, but they are the kind of cartographers who would drive rational Enlightenment mapmakers mad. Rather than establishing defined parameters by which all might be categorized and delineated, critical tricksters and clowns are more interested in maintaining the in-between places of productive ambiguity, where boundary creation and boundary destruction meet and can indeed be experienced as one and the same. This is the role of the clown as critical c/a/r/tographer. It is also the role of educational arts-based researchers and practitioners who seek to move beyond the all-too-familiar in order to open up new spaces of consideration and possibility.

The challenge of dwelling in in-between spaces was evoked for me during my first performance when I completed my 'script' and suddenly realized that I had no idea how to handle the inevitable question and answer period. From the moment when the first question ('So, was that on purpose?') was raised, to the moment I responded, I felt stuck 'in-between' – between the neo-bouffon character who had performed the script and my 'regular' identity in the classroom. In this first iteration of the performance I was keenly interested to hear about the experience my audience had had during the piece (although I quickly found myself feeling defensive and 'on guard' – perhaps a reaction stemming from my afflicted desire to be perceived as 'knowledgeable' and even 'right'). Due to my interest in the feedback and my lack of preparation for the Q&A, I simply 'broke character,' and spoke with my peers, addressing their questions and concerns as I would in any other academic setting. In reflection, as I prepared for my second performance, I realized that this breaking of character for the question period had potentially undermined the entire purpose of my performance. My participation in the question and answer period may have afforded my audience the kind of cathartic experience that I have argued elsewhere is directly resisted in bouffon performance (Lane, 2011). By responding to the questions of my peers, I allowed them to sort through and therefore dissipate any lingering discomfort, anxiety, or sense of their affliction established through the performance.
xii

There has been much discussion in the clowning literature as to whether clowns are actually able to subvert cultural norms or whether they are more accurately 'abettor[s] of cultural reproduction' who 'strengthen the status quo [even] as it appears to be subverted' (Mitchell, 1992, p. 24). Commenting on this debate, Hereniko (1992) states that 'although it is true that clowning and comedy "remind us of the existence of the rule," they also remind us that such rules do not exist without popular support' (p. 175). This observation aligns with the relief or safety valve theories of humour. Mitchell cites Freud's estimation that laughter was 'the release of excess energy that is normally used to suppress forbidden feelings and thoughts' (1992, p. 14). Much has been made of these theories in relation to the tolerated deviance expressed in times of carnival – times when forbidden feelings and thoughts need not be repressed. However, as Hyde recognizes in the slave narrative penned by Frederick Douglass, such bacchanalian celebrations are often only tolerated so far as they support the normal 'order of things.' As Douglass wrote,

> *These holidays served as conductors, or safety-valves, to carry off the rebellious spirit of enslaved humanity [....] [The] object seems to be, to disgust...slaves with freedom, by plunging them into the lowest depth of dissipation [....] So, when the holiday ended, we staggered up from the filth of our wallowing, took a long breath, and marched to the field. (quoted in Hyde, 2008, p. 234-235)*

During carnival, fools may be allowed to play kings, but the following day, desire for deviance satisfied, they are again expected to submit to the 'real' king. In breaking out of my neo-bouffon performance frame and firmly re-entering the scholarly classroom frame, I demonstrated my support for 'the conventional academic rules' and may have strengthened the status quo even as I attempted to subvert it. However, it is my belief that critical clowning is capable of transgressing acceptable conventions in a way that draw attention to their complex and problematic implications, and, furthermore, to our complicity in perpetuating these systemic problems.

In seeking to further explore the critical impact of my clowning in the academic context, I resolved to extend the simultaneous framing of my performance throughout the question period in my second showing. The second performance took place during a special full-day gathering specifically designed for everyone to present their research and their art-work. Only the six people who saw my original iteration had any preparation for the simultaneous frames of my performance. In this remount, silent stares – which grew in length and became increasingly revelatory of my internal panic – replaced the original asides. I also employed a visual presentation tool to heighten my parody of a conventional conference presentation. Once again, I felt that the question and answer period became the most interesting aspect of the performance. This time I maintained my character throughout and refused to offer any of the insights or clarifications that my audience sought. Instead, I responded by asking *them* to clarify aspects of their questions, using the excuse that unless I understood exactly what they were asking, I would be unable to answer them adequately. It was my hope that this strategy would highlight some of the absurdity of academic conventions where we 'use words to talk about other words' (Peter Cole, personal communication, 29 November 2011) and can become obsessed with clarity in ways that seek to dispel all ambiguity with categorization and definition (which is, of course, a fundamentally impossible task). It was also my hope that this would sustain or increase the dis-ease experienced by the audience who believed themselves to be in familiar terrain, only to realize that the rules had changed.

The immediate feedback that I received from my audience was incredibly informative. After the first few questions were attempted, a palpably awkward silence fell over the room. Eventually, I broke this silence by reiterating, 'I am happy to respond to any questions that you might have.' The audience laughed and someone exclaimed, 'We are afraid to ask questions' and the professor added, 'We are too afflicted to ask any questions.' The written feedback [xiii] that I received further confirmed that the audience identified with 'the performance within the performance' and that 'the questions created the type of awkwardness/affliction' that I sought.

What was particularly interesting is that the written feedback also informed me that several audience members had become 'taken [in] by the performative element and neglected to listen to the content' of my presentation. I found this fascinating for two key reasons. First, I believed that the content gave the audience significant 'clues' as to how to 'read' the dual framing of my performance. I was concerned that without some such 'hints,' the nature of my performance might be lost on the audience. Barone and Eisner (2012) cite Gordimer's insight that,

> [A text] will be understood only by readers who share terms of reference formed in us by our education – not merely academic but in the broadest sense of life experience: political, economic, social, and emotional concepts, and our values derived from these: our cultural background. (p. 71)

Many people have no point of reference for the concept of clowning as a critical practice and likely even less sense of how to understand or connect with such practices themselves. I therefore felt that it was part of my responsibility, in the 'scholarly frame' of my work, to provide some of the 'shared terms of reference' that I believed the audience would need to understand the performance. For example, the content of my scholarly presentation informed the audience about the 'unholy trinity' of bouffon (charm, parody/imitation, and affliction) and about the necessity of an unidentifiable point of attack, even while I enacted a charming parody of a scholarly presentation that covertly attacked the anxiety-inducing strictures of standard academic conventions. The feedback that the audience members 'stopped listening,' seems to indicate that I may have been overly concerned about providing shared terms of reference. Perhaps by increasing the emotional stakes of my performance, the piece became like an opera – understandable on the level of *feeling*, even by those who do not 'speak the language.'

The second reason I found the feedback about the audience 'not listening' fascinating is because of what it might say about academic presentations more broadly. In rehearsals, my partner told me that the moments of silence (my stares to the audience) 'called him to attention.' He observed that when I was speaking, he sat with his head down, not looking at me, but rather paying attention to the notes that he was scrawling. This is a familiar experience in many academic presentation situations; ideally, a presentation will trigger thoughts and ideas in the audience members who may, therefore, become rather involved in following their own threads of consideration and may lose track of the presentation itself. When I stopped speaking and stared out into the audience, particularly as the silences began to last an abnormally long time, eyes snapped away from notepads and iPhones to meet my stares. My partner told me that when he looked up and saw the panic in my eyes, he wondered, 'What did I miss?' Instilling this question aligns nicely with the purpose of bouffon and

arts-based research more broadly. As explained by Barone and Eisner (2012), 'the purpose is not to add to a "knowledge base" or to proffer truth claims regarding social phenomena [rather it is] designed to enable people to see aspects of the world they might have overlooked otherwise' (p. 166). When we are called to attention by something that we did not anticipate, we are collectively inspired to ask, 'What are we missing?' This calling to attention, or calling into question, is not only a self-conscious goal of educational research (and arts-based research specifically), it is also the purpose of the "point of attack" in neo-bouffon performance. It is by "attacking" complicity in our complex circumstances that critical clowns have an important role to play in revealing that which might otherwise become habitual, taken for granted, or overlooked.

The critiques of the academy presented in this paper are not necessarily new. Indeed, in his book *Coyote and Raven Go Canoeing*, Peter Cole engages with trickster figures to heighten the impact of his criticism:

> *RAVEN: so now you have to write a book   do you have editorial control*
>
> *COYOTE: no   she has   but I have control   of her*
>
> *[....]*
>
> *RAVEN: What's your angle*
>
> *COYOTE: obtuse   isosceles   scalene acute equilateral   coyotec   I call them on their stuff*
>
> *RAVEN: who   m?*
>
> *COYOTE: the publisher   and editor-in-thief*
>
> *RAVEN: meaning*
>
> *COYOTE: meaning she steals my name and attaches it to my ideas after they've been sifted through her vocabulary   writing style and business agenda. (2006, p. 59, spacing original)*

What I believe the practices of critical clowning broadly, and neo-bouffon more specifically, have to offer to such 'artful posing of questions regarding important social and cultural issues' (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 122) are playful, sometimes humorous, tactics from which *no one is safe*…not even the 'question posers' or the institutions that support them. Barone and Eisner (2012) are clear that there is a 'danger that high-minded arts based researchers will, in their passion for challenging familiar, comfortable, dominant metanarratives, proffer an arrogant, totalizing metanarrative of their own' (p. 128). By embracing the notion of affliction and by seeking to explore problems and challenges through the embodiment of the personal bouffon, the clown-artist-researcher must recognize her complicity in the very things that she challenges. In this way, the bouffon's attack is double pronged – seeking awareness and responsiveness from the audience *and* the performer, the student *and* the educator. This, I believe, is one of the defining elements that distinguishes neo-bouffon from bouffon. It is also the central strength this tradition can offer towards the 'tearing down of that which is not for the greater good' in the academy.

In discussing ethnodrama, Barone and Eisner (2012) establish that arts-based work provides an opening into a new psychological landscape, into a possible, as if world. Entering into such a landscape, the viewer may be rendered at least momentarily disoriented before slowly acquiring a degree of empathetic understanding of the inhabitants of that world who are slowly transformed from aliens – "others," with whom it may be difficult to feel a sense of solidarity – into people who live inside of what Rorty (1989) referred to as "the range of us." (p. 22-23, emphasis original)

xiv
'Crazy wisdom' is a term used by Wes Nisker (1990) to describe the wisdom shared by clowns, tricksters and much eastern philosophy.

Engaging in productively ambiguous c/a/r/tography, critical clowns treat *all* worlds, including the world generally accepted as 'reality,' as *as if* worlds. Each boundary and border zone is a space not of delineated knowing, but of possibility. Through their attacks, bouffon bring awareness to accepted but problematic conventions and also to positive but overlooked possibilities. It is this awareness of possibility that provides clowns with their capacity to play – to creatively destroy and destructively create. While it may be particularly difficult to accept the bouffon – these afflicted ones who make us look at what we find most repulsive in ourselves – empathetically into 'the range of us,' this is precisely what they desire. The bouffon arrive to tell us that 'all aspects of humanity belong to everyone' and in the bouffon and the fool there are truths about humanity. Difficult as it may be, accepting these critical clowns may provide us with powerful new tools. As Hyde describes, tricksters (and clowns) hold passports unavailable to others. These passports will come in handy because 'Sometimes it happens that the road between heaven and earth is not open, whereupon trickster travels not as a messenger but as a thief, the one who steals from the gods the good things the humans need if they are to survive in this world' (Hyde, 1998, p. 6). Rigid boundaries have been established within and around the academic enterprise, and the roads leading there are often closed. As messenger, thief and critical c/a/r/tographer, the clown can travel into these restricted zones and (re)draw, cross, erase, and (re)move boundary lines and roadblocks. Michel de Certeau wrote, 'what the map cuts up, the story cuts across' (1984, p. 129). The maps produced by critical clowns are never-ending stories, where 'getting away' with the performance means keeping the audience on unstable ground. While it would be unwise to believe that we can convince these critical clowns to be 'on our side,' if we accept them for who they are we will be better positioned to accept their stolen gifts and their crazy wisdom, [xiv] even as they pick our pockets and rezone our homes.

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