PHILIPPE GAULIER'S CONTRIBUTION TO CLOWN THEATRE;

TRACES AND MANIFESTATIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines traces of the teaching of Philippe Gaulier in the genre of clown theatre. I investigate the ways two contemporary productions, NIE's *My Life With The Dogs*, and Spymonkey's *Moby Dick*, respond to aspects of Gaulier's teaching. Using Gaulier's writing and my own experience as a Gaulier student, I identify his main theatre principles and explore the ways these principles are taught, and how this pedagogy might influence clown theatre. I investigate the intermedial nature of clown theatre, which uses the spaces between differing layers of presence, and different theatre conventions, to find conflicts that can be exploited for comedy. I relate this to the multi-generic course structure of Ecole Philippe Gaulier, and the performative teaching methods employed there. I propose that Gaulier teaches in a role similar to a whiteface clown, forming a performative partnership with the student, which facilitates an embodied understanding of clowning. I argue that clown theatre interprets this partnership by framing storytelling as a kind of whiteface clown, which works in partnership with the objective to create comedy.

For my parents, Tim and Sarah

and for Guy.

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INTRODUCTION

Philippe Gaulier is an internationally renowned theatre teacher, having been a clown performer and a teacher at Ecole Jacques Lecoq before opening his own school in 1980. Gaulier is a relatively little known practitioner and pedagogue, closely associated with his own influential teacher. While not underestimating Lecoq's influence on Gaulier, this thesis aims to establish the influence of Gaulier's courses on clowning, particularly on a style of performance I identify as clown theatre. I investigate two theatrical case studies to explore the common themes, devices and approaches to creating performance that link clown theatre to Ecole Philippe Gaulier. This investigation aims to posit clown theatre in relation to Gaulier and to suggest that contemporary productions of clown theatre demonstrate visible traces of Gaulier's training. I believe that the theatre principles manifest in clown theatre can, in return, facilitate an understanding of Gaulier's school. This methodology has proved useful in the study of Jacques Lecoq's work, as Simon Murray explains

> …any attempt to describe the actual consequences of his pedagogy has to be conducted at the remove of unravelling his influence through the process and product of those theatre practitioners who trained with him
> (Murray in Chamberlain and Yarrow, 2002, p.17-18).

Similarly, I use clown theatre as a way of investigating certain areas of Gaulier's teaching as they are manifested in a theatrical context. I am not claiming that the school sets out to teach a fixed genre of clown theatre, or that all Gaulier graduates make clown theatre, but I argue that in clown theatre there are visible traces of Gaulier's teaching and that an examination of these traces can contribute to an understanding of the school.

In Chapter One, I briefly explore definitions and expectations of the role of a clown, before examining clown theatre through the two case studies that I have chosen as examples of the genre, New International Encounter (NIE)'s *My Life With the Dogs* and Spymonkey's *Moby Dick*.

In Chapter Two, I explore Gaulier's presence in academic discourse, contextualise and describe the school according to the traditions into which it fits, using information from Gaulier's own publications, my experience of the school and other published material. I examine Gaulier's relationship to his theatrical lineage and his apparent approach to this relationship. In this section, I begin to explore a common duality in Gaulier's speech and writing, between fantasy and imagination on one hand and the corporeal or grotesque on the other.

In Chapter Three, I examine Gaulier's theatre principles, through an analysis of the short course *Le Jeu* and an examination of Gaulier's use of via negativa as a pedagogical tool. I explore how insults are used to create performative partnerships that contribute to heuristic learning. I examine this pedagogy to see how Gaulier's teaching style contributes to and demonstrates his own principles and go on to identify aspects of this teaching visible in the case studies.

In Chapter Four I propose that the comedy found in clown theatre is reliant on intermediality of theatre, and examine how this intermedial comedy is connected to Gaulier's teaching. Using examples from the case studies and my own experience at Ecole Philippe Gaulier, I suggest the ways in which students could have drawn on

Gaulier's teaching when creating clown theatre. While it is interesting to note a connection to contemporary trends in post-modern theatre, I remain focussed on the particular contemporary strand of clown theatre and its comic intermediality.

In Chapter Five I investigate comedy partnerships in clown theatre. Having noted Gaulier's partnerships in the classroom, I examine the relationship of clown theatre to the story it tells, and of the performers to the audience.

CHAPTER ONE
CLOWNS AND CLOWN THEATRE

Gaulier describes the birth of clowning with a poetic anecdote, set in the nineteenth century circus, in which two stagehands accidentally make the audience laugh with ridiculous costume, physical antics and stupid behaviour (2007, p. 275-277).   The 'big top' environment is one that is familiar to a contemporary reader, so the allegory is accessible, but the anecdote demands some imaginative engagement from the reader, as the setting is not the present day. Costume, physicality and unusual behaviour, the ingredients of this allegorical 'first' clown routine, can be recognised in clowning across history, as can the need for some imaginative engagement on the part of the audience or reader of clown history.

Art theorist, Wolfgang Zucker (1954) describes the popular image of the clown as a person who does not belong in society but is given license to be 'other'. The clown, through the use of comedy, is permitted to have "an appearance and behaviour that elsewhere in society are repudiated, abhorred and despised" (1954, p. 310). Zucker links the clown's unusual appearance and behaviour, as though the former gives licence to the latter. For clown historian Swortzell (1978, p. 3), an unusual appearance can provide the audience with "readily identifiable" symbols of the clown's status as somebody who is 'other' to the audience and society. Eli Simon's, *The Art of Clowning,* a guide to practical exercises for clown students, claims that "you don't need to dress up in whacky costumes to prove you are goofy enough to be a clown" (2009, p. 4), but acknowledges that many clowns do choose to add costume as they develop their routines. Even Simon's rejection of costume as an essential element of clowning demonstrates that there is a widely held understanding that unusual

appearance as an important part of clowning. Part of the clown's identity as an outsider is the unconventional, comic use of the body. For humour theorist Henri Bergson (1915, p. 9-20), an example of the comic is a person who is inflexible to adaptation, so that their body and character becomes automated and inappropriate to its surroundings. For Bergson (1915, p. 134), when a person laughs at another tripping over, it is partly to reprove the faller, reminding them to pay more attention. He applies similar reasoning to laughter at a person with an unusual and comic physicality and appearance. Jos Houben, director of Spmonkey's *Moby Dick*, describes a similar function of the corporeal in his lecture, *The Art of Laughter* (13/11/2009). Houben claims that physical comedy based on malfunctions of the body, such as falling over, can generate laughter from audiences around the world because the body is the one universal human trait, thus everybody can understand the malfunctions as deviations from a recognisable norm. Circus theorist Stoddart (2000, p. 99-100) suggests that circuses included clowns to emphasise the work of the acrobats, providing a stubborn, heavy and unpredictable body to counterpoint the flexible, controlled bodies of the aerialists. Another suggested reason for the clown's physicality is the tradition of travelling performers, such as the popular sixteenth century commedia dell'arte, where Italian performers entertained audiences across Europe and thus developed physical routines not dependant on language. It seems widely recognised that unusual and clumsy physicality is associated with clowning, and that the clown's costume and body within it is a significant part of the popular definition of 'clown'.

Medieval clowning also relied on the body of the performer, according to the Carnival theory of Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and his World* (originally published Moscow

1936). Bakhtin explores medieval carnival traditions and carnival humour in the literature of Rabelais, where clowns entertained by disrupting formal events and rituals. At times of carnival, clowns behaved in a manner that contradicted formal environments and roles, subverting the conventions of traditional rituals. The medieval clowns made use of the universality of the corporeal (1936, p. 19), transferring the behaviours of high ceremony to the body, rendering the ceremonies more accessible to the audience. He indicates that bringing ritual behaviour to the material, or bodily, level had the ambivalent powers of the grotesque. The grotesque is a way of using images in a way that creates an ambivalent reaction in the audience, at once horrible and strangely funny (Thomson 1972). Particularly in its medieval context, this ambivalence is based on functions of the body: sex and childbirth, eating and defecating. According to Bakhtin, this presents a "contradictory and double-faced fullness of life. Negation and destruction…are included as an essential phase for the birth of something new and better" (Bahktin 1936, p. 62). According to carnival humour theory, watching a performer causing physical destruction of the surroundings, breaking the rules of society, being physically other in appearance, falling over and being rude gives a renewing laughter to the medieval society who watches it. Swortzell suggests that ambivalence is a feature of clowning to the present day – commedia dell'arte, Elizabethan fools and circus clowns all had an inherent conflict or balance between two seemingly incompatible aspects. In circus clowning, this ambivalence was personified by two partners - the whiteface and auguste, whose relationship of balance is explored in Chapter Three. Jon Davison, clown performer and teacher, understands clown logic as existing "to contradict the environment in which the clown appears" (2003, p.17). Davison uses this central theme of

contradiction to attempt a discussion of clown in its own terms, identifying contradictions in examples of clown performance and teaching, and exploring the relationship of mutual contradiction between the whiteface and auguste. Leslie Danzig, in her practice-as-research PhD analysis of her Chicago-based company, 500 Clown, also isolates disruption as an essential aspect of clowning, as she identifies the root of comedy in novelty and absurdity to be found when expectations are challenged. In a list of actions that define clowning, Danzig includes 'to play with conventions' (2007, p.85) and suggests that in doing so, clowns find humour in the disruption of expectation. John Towsen emphasises in his book, *Clowns* (1976, p.xi), that the art of clowning is variegated, so a precise definition of clowning may be hard to achieve. However, there are traits which allow writers such as Towsen to group performers together as 'clowns'. Clowns can be identified, for the majority of theorists studied above, from behaviour that is comic due to being unusual in society, corporeal and disruptive of its context.

Since the start of the twentieth century, theatre teachers and practitioners have explored the usefulness of clown as a tool for actor training. Jacques Copeau began this exploration in the 1920s, but it is Lecoq who, since the early 1960s, is credited with "the renaissance of interest in…clown as a theatrical type not confined to the circus" (Leabhart 1989, p. 99). Lecoq saw this teaching as responding to a demand from the students of his school

> Many young people want to be clowns. It is…a taking up of a position with regard to society, to be this character that is outside and recognised by everyone…to explore those points where he is the weakest…he accepts himself and shows himself as he is (Lecoq 2006 p. 115 trans. Bradby).

This vocabulary suggests a therapeutic process of self-acceptance, and it has been interpreted as such by several clown teachers, including Peacock and Simon, who agree that the clown originates from the 'self', and as a result "The clown clowns not simply to amuse his audience but because he has observations about the world, about life, to communicate to them…" (Peacock 2009, p.14). Simon goes even further, claiming that "Clowns do not have to make people laugh…The point is to be *truthful*" (Simon 2009, p.31). This seems to contradict the historical definition of clown, and almost to be describing a different performance style altogether. Lecoq notes the significance of the individual and the outsider role, but emphasises the central function of a clown is for the audience, as he discovered in exploratory workshops, "clowns make you laugh" (2006, p.114). This deceptively simple and gnomic definition is concurred by Gaulier, "The work of a clown is to make the audience burst out laughing" (2007, p. 289). Lecoq and Gaulier's approach still contains the ambivalence, corporeality and contradictory behaviour that has historically been understood as part of clowning, as they encourage students to find a strategy for making people laugh, not ruling out the use of outsider status, disruption of convention, the corporeal, costume, or friendly mocking.

For John Wright, clown director, teacher and theorist, the late twentieth century renaissance in clown has transformed it into a new genre

> "Copeau, Lecoq and Gaulier opened up the notion of the theatre clown…to confront us with a radical level of play that's capable of subverting everything we hold dear in established theatre practice" (2006, p. 183).

By bringing clown into theatre spaces and theatre conventions, Wright sees these practitioners as changing the role of the clown to something that stands as 'other' to

the theatre, instead of to society, ceremonies or acrobatic bodies. Wright calls this role the 'theatre clown', but it may be useful to separate the clown taught by Lecoq and Gaulier from scripted clown characters written by playwrights. Samuel Beckett, (1986) who emerged at the same time as Lecoq, has been seen as a modern clown author, writing plays including the grotesque, ambivalence and comedy that subverts theatre conventions. The socio-historical significance of this interest in clowns is ripe for investigation, but for reasons of space I have decided to limit my research to the performance of devised or improvised clown performance, that can be compared more directly to Gaulier's teaching, which does not include the performance of scripted clown material.

In order to explore the manifestations of Gaulier's clown teaching in actual theatre settings, I have chosen two pieces by Gaulier-trained companies that share techniques to generate comedy; *Moby Dick* by Spymonkey and *My Life With The Dogs* by NIE. Both shows feature a group of performers who are ostensibly trying to perform a story to the audience, while comedy is created by the interruptions and difficulties presented by the storytelling process. *Moby Dick* is based on the Herman Melville novel (2007, originally published 1851), in which a group of sailors hunt a whale, driven by their captain's vengeful obsession; and *My Life With The Dogs* is devised around the story of a young boy who became feral, living with stray dogs in the underground and streets of Moscow. I saw both productions in 2009, and refer to them first-hand as an audience member.

Danzig's *500 Clown Macbeth* and *500 Clown Frankenstein* have structural similarities to my two case studies. Danzig wrestles with the term 'clown', which she says holds popular connotations such as the iconography of fast food chain, McDonalds (2007, p.65). Instead, she strives to define 500 Clown's shows as belonging to a genre she calls clown theatre. For Danzig, clown theatre is a hybrid form that plays with liveness and disruption, distinct from clowning because it

> "…moves beyond the predicament of the individual clown to a narrative discourse shaped by the chaos of clowning, a narrative structure built out of the accumulation of disruptions…" (Danzig 2007, p.159).

Danzig's exploration is based on the tensions and overlaps between narrative theatre and the contradictory and disruptive playfulness of clown. In particular, Danzig explores how these tensions and overlaps can create comedy and a secondary narrative, so that clown theatre is a comedy created by the collision of two objectives - of storytelling and of continuous playful attention to the present.

The term clown theatre is also used by Peacock who takes the long-running *Slava's Snowshow* as her main example of clown theatre, and defines it thus

> Clown theatre is theatre where all the performers are clowns and where the visual aesthetic is surreal or has elements of fantasy about it. The performance is not based on a script but will have been devised by the company in keeping with the skills and strengths of the performers. It may or may not involve the spoken word…
> These shows tend to have a narrative thrust in which plot or character motivation or both are explored… (Peacock 2009, p.30)

While Peacock identifies the presence of clowns and a narrative thrust as being important components of clown theatre, she does not specifically define a genre, relying on vague elements that "may or may not" be included. She uses a stylistic description of aesthetics that suggests the presence of imaginative activity on the part

of the audience. However, her exclusion of comedy in this definition appears to contradict Gaulier's definition of clowning. If I am to explore traces of Gaulier's teaching in clown theatre I believe it is important to include laughter or comedy in my understanding of the genre. Peacock's definition seems to be based specifically on one production, and is not the main focus of her study, although she does introduce some useful concepts, such as the levels of performance in clown theatre that I explore in Chapter Four.

Peacock and Danzig's definitions share the following elements: a noticeable story that is being told, the presence of clowns who are aware of the audience and want to make them laugh and a sense of originality or being devised by the individuals performing. The case studies I have chosen both contain an attempt at storytelling, interrupted by actors who visibly exploit the potential for play and the potential to make the audience laugh by deviating from the storytelling objective.

Similarly to the conclusions of Danzig and Peacock, I use the term "clown actor" to refer to the performers playing clown theatre. The term clown actor suggests a performer with a split or dual identity as both clown and actor, who serves both to make the audience laugh, and to act a story. The two contrasting objectives provide a dramatic tension that can be used to create comic juxtapositions and contrasts, as the two objectives are continually re-negotiated during the performance, increasing the potential for comedy. The objective of storytelling can complement the objective of comedy by providing something that is 'supposed' to be happening, which can be disrupted. Danzig points out that the audience "can only perceive a disruption if they

perceive a normal course. There is no disruption without something in place to be disrupted" (Danzig 2007, p. 150). This resonates with Davison and McManus' understanding of contradiction in clowning, and McManus' definition could be expanded to suggest that the storytelling objective contributes to clown theatre by providing an environment for the clown to contradict. 500 Clown cast as an authority figure the popular understanding of theatre; and then challenge, contradict and disrupt this authority to create comedy (Danzig 2009, p. 21). I examine theories of presence and declaration of fiction in Chapter Four in order to develop a vocabulary to examine this important aspect of clown theatre. The definition of clown theatre cannot be concrete – the definition of clowning is long debated, as is the definition of theatre itself. As a result, I use these common elements as a way to group my examples together. Gaulier encourages his actors to use the playfulness and lightness of clowning at all times on stage, and thus perhaps clown theatre is a sliding scale rather than a clear category. Peacock suggests that clown theatre is a useful term to position performance that is between the conventions of circus and theatre (2009, p. 29), but perhaps it is a spectrum in itself. Indeed the two shows use the dualities of clown and theatre, laughter and storytelling in slightly different ways, which I explore in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO
CONTEXT

There is relatively little academic discourse on Gaulier's pedagogy, despite his role as

an independent pedagogue for the last thirty years. In the 2010 edition of Alison

Hodge's, *Actor Training*, Simon Murray provides a chapter entitled "Jacques Lecoq,

Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier: Training for Play, Lightness and

Disobedience" (pp. 215-235), giving a valuable context, history and insight into the

teaching of these three closely associated pedagogues. In the opening of this chapter,

Murray suggests a straightforward reason for the scarcity of academic research in this

area, explaining that each of the three practitioners

> …would strenuously deny that their teaching practice represents a
> 'method'…one might also note a shared scepticism about the ability of
> academic writing to capture and communicate any lived sense of their
> pedagogy: its aims, strategies, inflections and underlying dynamics
> (in Hodge 2010, p. 215).

These twin problems of a practice that rejects the use of any fixed acting 'method'

and rejects the usefulness of academic writing can be seen as sufficient deterrents to

research in this area. However, Murray goes on to use the writing of Gaulier and

Lecoq, and personal experiences of studying under Gaulier and Pagneux, to 'capture

and communicate' a useful sense of the respective schools. An important conclusion

of Murray's chapter concerns the social and historical placing of the three

practitioners, who are identified as being "positioned emotionally, culturally and

politically" in post-war Europe (2010, p. 217). This, he notes, is manifested in the

internationalism encouraged in the schools, and in metaphors of fascists, journeys and

farewells that permeate the teaching. Murray concludes that the three pedagogies are

radical and alternative approaches to actor training, which celebrate the importance

and tension between the individual and the ensemble in the creation of theatre. While the work of Lecoq, Gaulier and Pagneux fits in to a paradigm of actor training, Murray distinguishes nuances of emphasis in the various pedagogies. Complicite founder Annabel Arden differentiates according to the primary relationship in their work; Lecoq's to the "universe (of the theatre and the world of which it is part)", Pagneux's to the actor as creative artist and Gaulier's to the "dynamic between performer and audience" (In Murray 2010a, p.217). This dynamic relationship is thoroughly explored through clown partnerships, which I explore in Chapter Three.

The curricula offered by Lecoq and Gaulier cover many of the same theatrical genres and training tools, including neutral and character masks, Melodrama, Tragedy, Clown and Bouffon (social outcasts who parody those who have power over them). The structure of the schools can be identified as a significant difference in the two pedagogies. Lecoq's pedagogy followed a "precise order of progression" (2002, p. 12 trans. Bradby), whereas Gaulier offers month-long classes that can be taken in or out of sequence. The more advanced courses in Clown, 'Character and Writing about…' and Bouffon can also be taken out of sequence, though Gaulier warns that these are designed for more experienced performers (2010, online). As a result of the structure, Gaulier students do not have to commit the time and money that a full year-long course entails, and have the freedom to structure their own training. It is significant that while Lecoq begins his books and curriculum with observation and mimicry of humans, animals and materials, Gaulier opens his book and his academic year with an exploration of an important theatre principle; *Le Jeu*, or play. Gaulier's course, a month of games and improvisation that explore theatre principles along with the

student's pleasure to play is explored in Chapter Three. Murray suggests that there is a difference in the invocation of play by Gaulier, Pagneux and Lecoq. In French, the verbs *to act* and *to play* are translated by the same word, *jouer*. Gaulier, teaching in English, continues to use the name *Le Jeu* to describe the first workshop of his school, emphasising the proximity of acting and play. He differentiates his school from Lecoq's on his web page, "beginnings"

> The theories on the theatre of J. Lecoq focussed on the idea of movement, the thoughts of the young rebel P. Gaulier were based around Le Jeu: the games which nature, animals and humans organise (2011, online).

The difference is not this sharply defined, as Lecoq frequently invoked playfulness as a quality to be reached through the development of the "physical imagination" (Bradby 2006 p. xv) and a freedom found through training. Gaulier, however, does identify play as the centre around which his ideas are based. This difference in emphasis is visible in the structure of the two schools, which suggests that the elusive and significant condition of play takes a more primary position in the training process for Gaulier than it does for his mentor, Lecoq.

In the British press there has been some acknowledgement of Gaulier's independent work, particularly during the ten years from 1991 in which his school was operating in London. In the year the school opened, Kenneth Rea interviewed Gaulier in *The Times*, noting that

> The name will mean nothing to theatre-goers, yet more than 20,000 British actors, teachers and directors have subjected themselves to his workshops and count him, according to their experience, a guru, a clown or a monster (Rea 1991, p.13).

This article is favourable, yet still points out the little-known nature of the school, and the enigmatic, fearsome presence of the pedagogue. At the height of popularity of the

television character, "Ali G", created by the Gaulier-trained Sacha Baron Cohen, Gaulier was interviewed in *The Telegraph* by Dominic Cavendish. Cavendish suggests that Gaulier's relative anonymity as a theatre practitioner is intentional, as his behaviour is, "Deadpan in a manner that is as intimidating as it is comical, he does not court approval or recognition" (Cavendish, 2001, online). This describes intimidation and comedy in Gaulier's personal demeanour, a significant aspect of his teaching, the functions of which are explored in Chapter Three. It also suggests the deadpan delivery functions to dissuade wider public knowledge of the school. While Gaulier 'does not court approval', ex-students have provided written material, often describing personal experience or giving a practical application of Gaulier's work rather than a theoretical one. This is symptomatic of the scepticism to academia described by Murray – researchers have not yet been able to study Gaulier from a purely theoretical basis and it is a personal, 'lived sense' and embodied understanding of the school that all these writers strive to communicate. I include myself in this group of ex-students and draw on my own experiences at the school for illustrations and case studies.

A further reason that Ecole Philippe Gaulier is relatively inaccessible for those who have not participated in its workshops is its privacy – at the end of each second year term there are semi-public performances, which are not advertised by the school or presented as showcases but advertised by the students only, for friends of the students or the school. Moreover, the school does not keep archival records of these presentations because, I was told by Michiko Miyazaki, administrator and co-director of the school, when the terms are over, "…we try to forget everything" (Private

correspondence "Re: Studies" 14th December 2009). Miyazaki was reluctant to give me further information or archive material, preferring that students learn for themselves what the school can provide them with. Cavendish identifies a pride in Gaulier's ability to encourage the students to discover their own strengths and abilities, rather than to learn a 'Gaulierian' method, saying his teaching

> is designed to leave only the subtlest traces of his involvement. There are certain principles involved, but no method. "I hate the idea of lots of little Gauliers going out into the world," he declares… (Cavendish, 2001)

Perhaps the attempt to forget the work of previous students is rooted in a desire for individual, heuristic learning rather than a school style of performance. In a journal published by the school in 2005, Gaulier rhetorically asks himself,

> Are your students like your school or are they like themselves when the warm winds of fantasy burst out at enormous speed in all four corners of their imaginary worlds? (2005, p. 3)

Gaulier's portrayal of his relationship to his students is on a personal level, which suggests that the reason for not documenting end-of-term material lies in an attempt to prevent future students aiming to emulate the work of others. With this description, the product of the school is described in an entertaining and poetic style, which demands imagination on the part of the reader. Cavendish compares Gaulier's students who are not 'like' the school to a perceived recognisable style in the work of Lecoq graduates. Read in this light, Gaulier appears to be jibing at the visual approach in his mentor's teaching. Bradby denies the existence of a specific, recognisable Lecoq style, "in so far as they share a family resemblance, it is because they share a way of working" (2002, p. 92). The 'resemblance' that Bradby acknowledges can be recognised further back into the lineage of French mime teachers. Evans (2006, p.34) points out that although Copeau was revolutionary in his emphasis on spontaneity and

creativity in acting, a group of dedicated students formed a separate company called "Les Copieaux" – literally 'the little Copeaus'. Copeau was supportive yet critical of this group, who identified themselves as belonging to his 'family'. Possibly, notwithstanding Gaulier's intentions of students being entirely 'like themselves', there remain visible traces of his training – certainly I hope to find traces of Gaulier in my case studies, although I do not suggest the features of clown theatre are visible in the acting of all Gaulier students.

Despite his resistance to academic analysis, Gaulier has published his own material on the school; available in English are the school's website, www.ecolephilippegaulier.com and two books about his teaching, *The Tormentor* (2007) and, *Lettre ou pas lettre* (2008). These are not analytical, academic texts but consist of metaphors, aphorisms, allegories and anecdotes. At times, his words require a generous scepticism to be usefully understood, as the linguistic tools used are deliberately ambiguous, imaginative and mysterious. Though statements are often gnomic, the reader frequently has to unravel the meaning behind stories, or even seemingly straightforward sentences, drawing personal conclusions. The former book discusses his approach to teaching, using allegories and descriptions of exercises from the various workshops. The latter book, through whole-page calligraphic plates, creates an analogy of the theatre to handwriting, theatrically mourning the imaginative, pleasurable calligraphy of a fountain pen and its replacement with the charmless ball-point pen. The written style of these books create a deliberate rejection of theoretical writing, as Gaulier maintains "The pleasure of going towards the inaccessible does not tolerate academicisms" (Gaulier: 2007, p.212). This is almost a

warning to those trying to 'academicise' his work, or describe it in academic terms, framing *The Tormentor* as a separate entity. Gaulier makes a further reference to academic writing in *Lettre ou pas lettre*, warning that imaginative use of writing may "die fossilised, turned to stone, stupid, academic" (2008, p. 7). Given this performance of aggression toward academic analysis of actor training, it is important to consider how to read these sources for academic research, and I believe it may be useful to think of these publications as autobiographical descriptions of Gaulier's school.

Theatre historiographer Jackie Bratton addresses the issue of using autobiographical material in research in, "Anecdote and Mimicry as History" (2003, p. 95-132). In this chapter she proposes an alternative use of autobiographical material, which she says is often disregarded, or "trawled for 'factual information'" (2003, p.95). Bratton proposes that this is a reductive use of autobiographical text, which could instead be useful for creating an understanding of what people chose to say about themselves and why. She recommends that historians can use anecdotes as examples of myth making:

> The anecdote is not the same as a story because it claims to be true, about real people; it occupies the same functional space as fiction, in that it is intended to entertain, but its instructive dimension is more overt. It purports to reveal the truths of the society, but not necessarily directly: its inner truth, its truth to some ineffable 'essence', rather than to proven facts, is what matters most – hence its mythmaking dimension (Bratton 2003, p. 103).

Bratton suggests that if historians are prepared to investigate anecdotal evidence in its own terms, they will be able to see what 'essence' the writers were aiming to communicate and why. This approach is relevant to the writing of Gaulier, which uses anecdotes and allegories almost interchangeably. The work is more substantial than a

single anecdote but is written in a style so different from academic analysis that in order for it to be a useful resource, it is important to understand the way in which it is written and what the functions of this writing could be.

The website exists primarily to convey information, including a timetable, prices, contact information, and frequently asked questions ('FAQs') for prospective students as well as a brief history of the school and some videos of Gaulier describing his philosophies of teaching. The videos, history and 'FAQs' could all be described as performative, giving the prospective student an insight into the school with a sample of the language, imagery, and metaphor used at the school. The book, available to buy either at the school or online, is framed as an interview with an interrogator, who is frequently berated for asking stupid questions or making assumptions. As a result, the book is dramatic; there is a dialogue between the two voices. A partnership is formed in both cases and, within the partnership, the voice with which Gaulier speaks is authoritative and revered, while the partner asks questions complementing the performative voice of Gaulier, in an entertaining and dramatic dialogue. On the 'FAQ' page is the following exchange:

> If I was at the school from the first workshop until the end of the second year, what would happen?
>
> The school will change you totally. This change will not come from the knowledge accumulated during the different workshops. Rather, it is a result of subterranean forces which the teaching unleashes. These undermine and explode received ideas, certainties and inhibitions. At the end of the journey you are lighter and free (Gaulier 2010, online).

The section is framed as a dialogue with a student, placing the potential student in a role and creating a dialogue with entertaining dramatic conflict. This is not dissimilar to the semi-fictional classroom environment described by Stanislavski (1988), and has

historical precedent as a style of writing about actor training. This writing style highlights the importance of the students in the teaching environment, rather than the absolute authority of the pedagogue. The text uses several metaphors for the learning process, dismissing the usefulness of "knowledge" and claiming the goal of the school is to make the student "lighter and free". The terms 'undermine' and 'explode' suggest a brutal process, which allows this freedom to be found. This use of vocabulary is suggestive of the surreal, magical metaphors and the violent, corporeal language used frequently by Gaulier in his writing and teaching. As a publicity document, this page of the website provides a performative glimpse of the teaching. If the concepts of 'subterranean forces', having ideas 'exploded' and the goals of 'lightness' and 'freedom' appeal to the student, it is because they are already engaging with the school in its own terms and are enjoying the use of both the surreal and the corporeal imagery, of which Gaulier makes frequent use. The inclusion of video footage of Gaulier on the website allows prospective students to preview Gaulier's teaching, listening to his voice and the way he speaks to students. The students can sample Gaulier's metaphorical explanations of the school, "I teach theatre in the imagination of the student, so, I teach theatre and the dream of theatre, the ghost around the dream of theatre" (Gaulier 2010, online). This metaphorical image cannot be understood literally, so it demands that the reader engages their imagination in their interpretation. If the reader of this website is not intrigued or inspired by this language, then they are unlikely to find the school to their tastes, so by being performative, the website begins the process of finding students who will benefit from the school by engaging imaginatively with the concept of theatre. Wilson, Lecoq graduate and director of The Clod Ensemble, describes Lecoq's

teaching as a 'web of meticulously thought-through metaphors" (in Bradby and Delgado 2002, p. 98) that seem impenetrable in language, but make more sense in the context of corporeal experience. With his metaphorical description, Gaulier is continuing Lecoq's technique, employing metaphor to demand the use of imaginative engagement with the study of acting.

Gaulier's theatrical lineage can be fairly directly traced, as Murray notes, the interconnectedness of French mime has been described by several writers, and the connections between Lecoq and Copeau are many (2003, p.8). However, to some extent, Gaulier creates his own mythology about the lineage to which he belongs. If we regard this book as autobiographical, we could suggest that Gaulier's writing techniques of metaphor and allegory allow him to create his own version of his theatrical lineage, and place himself in relation to other theatre practitioners of the French mime tradition. During both the workshops I attended, Gaulier told the class an anecdote about his time training with Lecoq. To paraphrase, he told us that he was not regarded as a good student and was often told to sit down before he could attempt an exercise. While the students were waiting to hear if they could progress into the second year, Gaulier had spent days at the zoo watching a bear in order to imitate it in class. After his performance, Gaulier was called to Lecoq's office and told that he had a place in the second year and, "…by the way, that was a wonderful rabbit." So, Gaulier progressed into the second year, never letting on that his 'wonderful rabbit' was in fact a bear. In this anecdote, Gaulier depicts himself as a bad student, who is reprimanded and only gains praise by accident. This reassured the class, especially those who could identify with Gaulier's struggle to be a 'good student'. It aligns the

student not only with Gaulier, but with Lecoq as well; we become part of this line of masters, and can see ourselves as having the same relationship with Gaulier as he once had with Lecoq. Gaulier creates an impression of Lecoq by impersonating him, tall, with a serious, strict manner, further increasing the apparent authenticity of the students' connection to Lecoq through Gaulier. They may also feel that they have gained a better understanding of Gaulier himself, who rarely talks autobiographically in the classes. However, the extent to which they better know Gaulier is debateable. We can imagine that, since Gaulier went on to the second and third years of Lecoq's school, and taught there subsequently, he must not have been a completely 'bad' student. We have not seen the bear impersonation, and we can only engage imaginatively with the idea of Gaulier as student at all.

Gaulier contributed to Lecoq's obituary in *The Guardian*,

> Did you ever meet a tall, strong, strapping teacher, moving through the corridors of his school without greeting his students? What is he doing? Pursuing his idea. What idea? The one his students will need.
> …Jacques Lecoq was an exceptional, great master, who spent 40 years sniffing out the desires of his students. We needed him so much. Bravo Jacques, and thank you. (1999, p. 17, translated by Heather Robb)

In this tribute, Gaulier offers a visual impression of Lecoq and his school, displaying an authenticity of memory and an affectionate, grateful relationship to his master. The middle paragraph, however, is less conventional for an obituary, and more characteristic of Gaulier, who mentions that Lecoq had "a sensational conk of a nose", used for, "sniffing out the desires of his students" (1999, p. 17). The picture of Lecoq that accompanies the obituary contradicts this statement, providing evidence that Lecoq did not have the "sensational conk" Gaulier suggests. This comic image is an exaggerated corporeal detail, which seems to be included to praise the observational

skills of his master, so that Gaulier's veneration of Lecoq is mixed with fond, grotesque mocking. Gaulier proves that he understands and has great respect for his master but enjoys adding the grotesque, the extended metaphor, and even in an obituary, something of a joke. This is a recurrent aspect of Gaulier's teaching and writing, where the fantastical, or the beautiful and imaginative, is undercut and disrupted by the inclusion of corporeal detail. It is succinctly described by Cavendish, who entitles an article on Gaulier's teaching, "From the sublime to the ridicule" (2001). The title of the article is a deviation from the phrase, "there is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous", (attributed to Tom Paine, in Evans, 1981, p. 948) and it neatly describes the sense of bathos in Gaulier's teaching and writing (Murray and Keefe, 2007, p. 150). Poetic, fantastic language is used to describe ideal performance, with elusive words such as "beauty" being common. This could be described as an invocation of the 'sublime', and is very often met by invocation of the 'ridiculous' in descriptions of the grotesque and corporeal. In Gaulier's classroom and writing, there is often very little separating the two, and this step creates comic anti-climaxes such as the joke in Lecoq's obituary. The changing of "ridiculous" to "ridicule" describes a pedagogic method of Gaulier's, to be explored in Chapter Three, where he ridicules and insults students who perform badly. The bathetic step from the sublime to the ridiculous is another example of performativity in Gaulier's writing, which entertains the student audience. Gaulier's allegories have both instructional and entertainment functions – and there is sometimes ambivalence as to which is intended, leaving the reader some space to generate her own understanding of the story. The fantastic and the corporeal are never far away from each other in Gaulier's writing, which is reflective of a carnival outlook. Embedded in the carnival

suspension of hierarchy is a raised awareness of the grotesque elements of life. Bakhtin calls this "degradation…the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body…" (1984, p. 20). This 'material level', in carnival theory, is a site for rebirth, regeneration, future possibility and comedy: we can see this detail in Lecoq's obituary as containing this ambivalence between sadness at the death of Lecoq and celebration of what he was able to give his students – and the potential for regeneration that this gave. By lowering the praise of Lecoq to a material level, Gaulier also renders his tribute accessible the reader, which is a further function of the grotesque. Bakhtin (1984) suggests that by lowering ceremonies to a material level, medieval clowns enabled the people to access the meaning of the ritual behaviour. An obituary is part of modern ritual behaviour, so here Gaulier is taking the formality from a ritual, and allowing readers another way to approach the situation.

Jacques Copeau is also mentioned in *The Tormentor*, in a semi-fictitious allegory in which he invents the neutral mask after his wife suggests he smother his students with pillows (2007, p171 – 175). Gaulier describes Copeau as "…an important director, a serious thinker and writer…" (2007, p.171) but later on the same page adds, "Jacques Copeau, like many other French people, dunks croissants in his coffee. Racoons have taught them this custom" (2007, p.171). The second detail debunks the first, humanizing Copeau and bringing him into the grotesque 'material sphere'. Comedy theorist Henri Bergson describes the same process, suggesting comedy is created when "our attention is suddenly recalled from the soul to the body" (Bergson 1980, p.93). In recalling the body of Copeau, Gaulier ignores any biographical and factual

details about Copeau's research into the neutral mask, preferring to tell an allegorical story containing comic gory images, violence and sex. Rather than contextualizing his own principles with historical details, he slightly subverts a historical understanding of his lineage. The reverence you would expect him to pay such an influential figure in his ancestry is subverted into a story that Gaulier can use to explain the neutral mask in his own terms, with the seriousness and potential for imaginative freedom provided by the neutral mask debunked by the corporeal, grotesque images in Gaulier's story.

Allegories and anecdotes told in class are often dense, punning digressions that can leave students perplexed. They can become performed illustrations of acting principles or an approach to theatre, as Gaulier claims, "My method? Pretending through play, never really being. My motto: a well-orchestrated lie is more of a turn-on than the naked truth" (2007, p. 312). Gaulier's stories, in his books and in his classroom, demonstrate this ideal acting technique, performing this method to the continued amusement of the other class members. It could be seen that the anecdotes about Copeau and Lecoq are 'well-orchestrated lies', told to entertain and inspire the imaginations of the students and thus demonstrate the principles that they explain. At the end of one allegory, in the book, *The Tormentor*, the interrogator asks "What a beautiful story. Did it really happen? For real? For pretend?" (Gaulier 2007, p. 286) This question performs the duality between the functions of entertainment and instruction that the allegories and anecdotes fulfil and the confusion that they can cause in students. The question is at the end of a chapter, left unanswered, retaining the ambivalence and space for the reader to find their own meaning or 'essence'

communicated by the story. Metaphor and allegory is used extensively in the work of others in the French mime tradition, particularly Lecoq (2003) and Decroux (2008), and despite Gaulier's apparent irreverence and independence from this lineage, he does draw on the way these predecessors discuss theatre with metaphors, ambiguity and reliance on the imagination.

When describing his own lineage and those practitioners that have influenced him, Gaulier takes an irreverent approach, debunking praise with corporeal details and preferring entertaining anecdotes to factual information. This demonstrates and performs his idea of a 'well-orchestrated lie', leaving the reader or student to imagine for herself the meaning or meanings available in the story, while often the meanings are performed in the telling of the anecdote itself. This approach also performs a principle of carnival comedy, degrading the authority of factual analytical writing, and the reverence usually paid to theatrical ancestors; Jacques Lecoq and Jacques Copeau are described with corporeal, grotesque details that bring the admiration he has for them into the 'material sphere', where it has potential for renewal. In doing so, Gaulier assimilates his historical background into his own practice, by making it serve a comic, ambivalent function in his teaching.

CHAPTER THREE
LE JEU: GAULIER'S THEATRE PRINCIPLES

Gaulier's opening course *Le Jeu* is an introduction to the theatrical principles of the

school, where students study in isolation and almost in an abstract sense the

performance skills that Gaulier demands. Murray explains that the course

> …engages with the core of Gaulier's philosophy which will underpin and
> permeate everything which follows. *Le Jeu* offers students the opportunity to
> acquaint themselves with the vocabulary or scaffolding of acting (Murray in
> Hodge 2010, p. 224)

This vocabulary includes an embodied understanding of: complicité, with the

audience, the self and playing partners; fixed point; major and minor; rhythm;

pleasure of play. Appropriately, the students learn to embody these principles through

a wide variety of games, before an audience of the rest of the class. I will illustrate

and explain some of these principles through a particular game, described in *The*

Tormentor, that I played during the *Le Jeu* course in Autumn 2008.

The game is based on a relay race, where the students are split into two teams and

each team member must run two lengths of the room then pass an imaginary baton to

the next runner. The runners start at either end of the room so that their paths will

cross, and the race finishes when all team members have run. The race is periodically

interrupted by a drumbeat: at the sound of the drum, the runners stop and look at each

other. Gaulier gnomically explains that in this moment, theatre is created:

> When the teacher stops the race, the students stop delicately, holding their
> impulse, and look into the eyes of their classmates. Do they show the
> pleasures of the game or the boredom of a boiled haddock? Enjoying oneself +
> looking for the fellow-feeling of playing = theatre (almost) (Gaulier 2007, p.
> 199)

The game is explained as though it can be used independently to teach "theatre" in its entirety. Although it is unlikely that the use of one game could be a full actor training, the game is used in class to illustrate some of his essential principles of theatre and it can be used in this study to help us to define the above terms.

The principles explored in this game are terms that Gaulier employs in common with Lecoq. The first is a term used frequently by his master, *complicité*, which roughly translates as "shared understanding" (Bradby 2002, p. 174). At the moment of stopping, the student experiences complicité with the external stimulus of the drumbeat, understanding that she must stop on hearing it. In order to stop delicately, she must have an awareness of her own body, and be sensitive to her own weight. This can be seen as a complicité with the self. Looking into the eyes of the classmate demonstrates and requires complicité with the partner, as the two runners share an understanding and enjoyment of the race. The other team members, while not running, share a competitive pleasure in the game and cheer the runners, increasing the enjoyment to be found in the game or the 'pleasure of play'. This also encourages friendship between the students and supportive teamwork in the class, a common function for team games. 'Holding the impulse', means that the student sustains the energy and intention of running in an active stillness that Gaulier calls *fixed point*. He describes this state as when "They freeze, but their eyes sparkle with playfulness, movement, jokes, pleasure. The freeze has not broken the impulse" (Gaulier 2007, p. 204). The frozen player has the potential to move, which can be seen in the energy of the face and body. Another principle explored in this game is the use of *major and minor*, when the first runner to stop is given permission to speak. These relative roles

are passed between a pair or group during a scene, where the person who plays "in major" takes the focus, and finds pleasure in using this focus to play with their voice and movement. The person playing "in minor" enjoys listening to and watching their partner, not taking the focus until it is given. Gaulier looks for these principles in all genres of theatre, and they are to be found in dramatic situations as well as in games. For example, having learnt to use fixed point through the game of a relay race, an actor can use this technique when playing a person receiving tragic news. The games in *Le Jeu* are not intended to be used in a literal sense only, but in both case studies, there were several examples of recognisable children's games. In *My Life With The Dogs*, the moment where the young Ivan befriends the dogs is shown in a ball game of 'fetch'. The scene becomes comic when the boy tricks them repeatedly by not actually throwing the ball. In *Moby Dick*, when Queequeg, the cannibal harpooner, is signing up as a sailor, he signs and hands the quill back to the official but snatches it back at the last minute, repeating this offer and snatch several times. These two games are similar in their simplicity, and both subvert a simple transaction in the story, debunking the action with a repeated physical game, to find a playful comedy between the performers. These ensembles choose to literally play children's games on stage, to comic effect. This is a manifestation of Gaulier's principles in theatre, as the clown actors interpret *Le Jeu* at its most basic level, openly declaring their play. Gaulier illustrates these principles with a variety of children's games[1] rather than explaining them in words, so that students "learn to embody the basic teaching terms"

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[1] Some examples of these games are "Grandmother's footsteps", where players chase an individual, but freeze if she turns around; "Musical chairs", where players compete to sit down on a chair each when there is one chair too few, and "I've got you; you've got me by the goatee", where, in pairs, each player takes the other's chin in their left hand, and tries to make the other laugh. If one player laughs, the opponent scores a point, and is allowed to slap the first player in the face. For more detail on these games, see Gaulier's *The Tormentor* pp. 199-214.

(Murray in Hodge 2010, p. 224) and thus develop a physical understanding and memory of what these concepts feel and look like, to make them accessible later. An embodied understanding of the pleasure of play is remembered and rediscovered through games the actors may have played as children. Murray points out that "play suffuses the moment-by-moment reality" of Gaulier's teaching (in Hodge 2010, p. 224), which applies to all workshops as much as the first. By spending a whole month teaching in more abstract ways the essential tools that underpin his whole approach to theatre, Gaulier introduces his students to an essential vocabulary of skills so that they are ready to attempt the courses that follow. The games themselves do not quite '= theatre' – he qualifies this idea with '(almost)'. Gaulier does not commit to the concept that one game can teach 'theatre', instead alluding to a mysterious extra ingredient to be discovered elsewhere. For the student, however, there is the sense that, in tiny moments of game play, the actor can learn huge lessons for playing in theatre. The use of game play in actor training, now absorbed into mainstream practice, is traced by Evans (2006) to the school of Copeau, who predated practitioners known for popularising the use of games, such as Augusto Boal (1992) and Clive Barker (1977). For Copeau, and those that have followed him, games are a useful learning tool because the "experience is unselfconscious and yet at the same time developmental – the pedagogy is unforced and the motivation to learn is inherent and not imposed" (Evans 2006, p. 66). The game, then, is the simplest heuristic technique, where the students can make their own discoveries if they observe their own play.

It is important to note that Gaulier gives two options for judgement in his description of the game – players show either "the pleasures of the game" or the "boredom of a boiled haddock". If a student does not play appropriately in performance, they are judged and, as suggested by Cavendish (2001), ridiculed with precise and total value judgements such as this, with "boiled haddock" being one of the gentler insults. The student's attempt at 'sublime' acting is interrupted by the grotesque or corporeal insult, which creates an anti-climax to the 'pleasures of the game', and provokes laughter at the expense of the students. The grotesque criticism of students is a pedagogical method for which Gaulier is renowned. Murray and Keefe suggest that Gaulier uses such dismissals as part of a technique similar to that which Grotowski calls *via negativa*, which they describe as "an approach which rejects prescription and illustration by example in favour of a search for the "answer" through negation" (2007, p. 151). Murray describes Lecoq's teaching as using negation in order to generate urgency and creative energy, to foster heuristic learning and self-discovery, and to make Lecoq's praise more meaningful when it was eventually gained (2003, p. 49-50). Murray and Keefe describe this additional feature of Gaulier's teaching that I have identified in the example of the "boiled haddock". They align Gaulier's technique with Grotowski's because

> Although there can be few teachers of contemporary theatre who are more direct, fearless, and less equivocating that Gaulier in terms of comment, feedback and dismissal…he *never* tells students how to do it" (2007, p. 151).

In my experience it was these unequivocal, direct comments and grotesque insults that were the most striking aspect of Gaulier's pedagogical style. Murray and Keefe (2007, p.151) suggest that Lecoq's via negativa simply refused what the student had proposed. Lecoq described the technique as "pedagogy of the constraint" (2006, p. 76

trans. Bradby). He likens the learning process to that of a high jumper, "who can only improve if the bar is at the right height to be a 'positive provocation'" (2006, p. 76 trans. Bradby). This suggests that Lecoq altered the point at which he refused the offer, dependant on what he perceived as the needs of the student. According to Gaulier's classroom anecdote, this could include being told 'no' as soon as the student stood to attempt an exercise. Gaulier's insults add a further layer of provocation to Lecoq's *via negativa* technique.

Gaulier controls the timing of his classes and exercises with a large drum. If a student does not make use of the correct principles, she is stopped with a beat of the drum, following which the whole class waits for Gaulier's feedback. The responses are delivered with "ruthless candour…made bearable for the recipient only by virtue of its wit and hilarity" (Murray and Keefe 2007, p. 151). They predominantly take the form of ruthless and entertaining insults, including bad-taste, violent descriptions of a way he wants to kill the student, comparisons to bodily functions, national stereotypes and frequently, a simple '*Thank you for this horrible moment'*, accompanied by a wave of the drumstick[2]. As well as the function of negation, these insults often contain highly personal feedback, tailored precisely to what the student has offered - albeit in an unequivocally negative way. The student must be prepared to unravel the insult and find meaning in what Gaulier tells her. In the classes I attended he gave the students aphorisms such as, "Don't move your arms!", "You talk too much", or "You move from side to side like a penguin with bowel problems". These are memorable and clear ways to get a message across, and can strip away specific problems that are

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[2] See Appendix One for specific examples of Gaulier's insults.

preventing the performance from reaching the high standard demanded, in the same way as Grotowski intended his technique to facilitate an "eradication of blocks" (1975, p. 17). An understanding of medieval insults and grotesque language can be used to illuminate Gaulier's use of insults. For Bakhtin (1984, p. 16), jokes and insults featuring bodily functions in Rabelaisian literature related to a universal cycle of life, death and birth, containing an inherent notion of renewal. Insults, in medieval culture, were "ambivalent: while humiliating and mortifying they at the same time revived and renewed". Gaulier's insults fulfil this carnival function, using descriptions of violence and corporeality to both humiliate the student and give her another chance. This chance is created by giving a voice to what the audience is thinking, or could think, teaching the students to respond to audience feedback and begin to develop a relationship with the spectators. When the student is next in front of an audience, she is still able to bear in mind that the audience can see imperfections or superfluous activity in performance and is thus able to correct herself by remembering the insult. In addition to this, the workshop participants find these insults very funny; many after-school conversations revolve around the funniest insults of the day, and there is a group for ex-students on the social networking site, *facebook*, entitled "Philippe Gaulier hit me with a stick" (Stamp 2007, online). On this web page, students proudly share the insults that they received at the school. The insults have the same dual functions of instruction (to the student) and entertainment (of the audience) that Bratton ascribes to anecdotes, and that Gaulier uses in his allegorical and anecdotal writing. The performative writing style in Gaulier's book and website is connected to a highly performative style in the classroom.

Though he does not directly illustrate by example the exercises he wishes the students to follow, when Gaulier doles out these insults, he performs all of the principles he advocates, using fixed point, rhythm, complicité with his audience and above all pleasure of the game. Here we can see Gaulier's performativity at work in the classroom, where "the game of playfulness – the pleasure of play – is embodied and taught by Gaulier through employing the very same quality" (Murray in Hodge 2010, p. 225). The insults are delivered with such relish, and Gaulier embodies the game of the insult so completely that on many occasions they became the comic highlight of the session. I believe that this performativity is fundamental in the way it helps the student access some complex aspects of clowning. Davison draws a connection between via negativa and the traditional circus clown types, saying that the clown teacher using via negativa is the "one place that the white face does appear in contemporary European clowning" (2008, p. 6). Davison does not elaborate on this observation but it is one that can be extremely beneficial in looking at Gaulier's use of via negativa. The whiteface was a circus clown, described by Towsen as authoritative and elegant, bullying, with a "cunning wisdom" (1976, p. 207). The whiteface was often part of a double act, with his partner being the auguste. The traditional auguste was "clumsy, incompetent, and eager to do well, but, ultimately, incapable and provided a butt for the tricks and jokes of the white face" (Peacock 2009, p. 21). These partners worked together to create comic scenarios and dialogue, where the apparent differences and conflict of interest between them provided the comedy of the circus act. The idea of Gaulier's appearance as whiteface clown in the classroom environment is explored in the images overleaf.

Figure 1. (above)
Gaulier with students of the summer clown course at Ecole Philippe Gaulier, 2009

Figure 2. (left)
The author taking part in an exercise during the summer clown course at Ecole Philippe Gaulier, 2009

Figure one, with Gaulier in the white hat and red glasses, supports Davison's viewpoint of Gaulier as the authoritative, cunning whiteface, and the students he insults every day as the eager, clumsy augustes, surrounding him and grinning inanely. This relationship is visible in the photograph but is most clearly seen during the workshop in the moments when a student does not perform an exercise well or, in Gaulier's terms, "flops". After a flop, Gaulier stops the game, and it seems that the student's performance opportunity is over. However, this is not necessarily the case - often the student remains on stage, in her red nose, still keen to impress, but now in minor while Gaulier takes the role of major. The student, in minor, listens and responds to Gaulier's tirade, and in this role, the student is given further opportunities to be funny. I believe it is the partnership between Gaulier and the student that makes these exchanges comic, and by creating this partnership Gaulier teaches complicité between partners. The student becomes an auguste when she takes the insults as a provocation to be funnier, and is able to respond comically. Murray points out that Gaulier forms relationships with his students based on "playful provocation, constantly teasing, often elliptical…" (Murray in Hodge 2010, p. 225), which demands an active involvement in the workshop performances from both the student and Gaulier himself. To illustrate this point from my own experience, I refer to Figure 2, a picture of myself during the same course. I had just finished an exercise when I started to cough because my snorkel was filling with saliva. Gaulier shouted at me, "Don't cough! You are not allowed to cough!". I tried to explain why I was coughing, but because I still had the snorkel in my mouth, nobody understood what I said and the class laughed. Following this laugh, Gaulier continued to chastise me, and the laugh increased in volume as I struggled to retort but was incomprehensible. In this

moment I did not feel victimised, as I was aware of what the audience were laughing at, able to recognise the partnership that we had created and knew what my role needed to be in that partnership in order to make the audience laugh. This enabled me to realise that the audience enjoyed the fact I was arguing despite being incomprehensible and Gaulier facilitated this realisation by joining in the performance and giving me a partner in the argument. Thus the teaching became performative and Gaulier took on the major role of whiteface clown.

Writers who have experienced Gaulier's workshops suggest this performative style in their descriptions of the classes, creating a visual and comical image of the teacher. In 2009, Purcell Gates described him as a "grizzled man sat slumping in a chair…cradling his frame drum on his lap" (2009, p.1). This recent description suggests an older man but it is surprisingly similar to older descriptions; Victoria Worseley remembers "Philippe's weary eyes on the afternoons when it seemed that his lumbago was particularly bad as he sat hunched over his drum" (2002, p. 85). Cavendish also suggests the weariness of age as, "Two sleepy, unimpressed brown eyes gaze out from a pair of heavily rimmed round spectacles" (2001, online). Ten years previously, Rea describes him as having a similar, if more lively disposition, with, "comic glasses, an unlikely moustache and a tendency to slap people" (1991, p.13). The image created by these various descriptions is of an irritable, tired and violent man, which contrasts with the way all of these writers speak fondly of Gaulier's sense of humour and focus on pleasure and fun. The fact that these descriptions correlate, up to twenty years apart, suggests that the grumpy, miserable figure is a whiteface role performed by Gaulier. Clown director and teacher John

Wright refers to Gaulier as "a clown who has taken to teaching theatre" (1990, p. 25) and the descriptions provide an example of Gaulier acting as both clown and teacher simultaneously, teaching through clown performance. It is important to note that Gaulier does occasionally give compliments, and does laugh if he finds a student funny, but does not make these easy to come by. The persona described here is a performed, whiteface role, which is used to provoke students into giving their best performances, whilst demonstrating many of his performance principles.

This performative method cannot work unless the student is prepared to accept the partnership, and trust that Gaulier is partnering rather than attacking them. The statement previously quoted from the 'FAQ' page of the website, contains within it an inherent idea of investment, "The school will change you totally… At the end of the journey you are lighter and free" (Gaulier 2010). An actor brings with her to any school a certain level of training, her own understanding of theatre, and perhaps a certain level of confidence in her own ability as a performer. At Gaulier's school, anything the student brings that does not match Gaulier's expectations is "undermined and exploded" (Gaulier 2010). These words hint at a potentially brutal and painful process for the student, who risks something of her own in the belief that the reward will be great. If the student does not accept the partnership, there is no complicité between the partners, which causes students to get very upset and nervous during classes. Victoria Worsley describes the experience "I'll never forget the terror that I might be the wretched performer…at whom despair forced him to shout "Amusez-vous, merde!"" (in Chamberlain and Yarrow 2002, p. 85). We can see from Worsley's experience that it is easy for students to take the insults personally rather than as part

of a teaching performance, meaning that each time they begin an exercise, the student has to risk being personally insulted, making emotional risk integral to the training. Worsley concludes that this sentiment was "crucially important advice" (in Chamberlain and Yarrow 2002, p. 85) that she has used throughout her career, but suggests that the fear involved in the classes was a difficult experience.   Danzig remembers how at Gaulier's school as well as at Lecoq's, "the bathrooms are often full of distraught students pulling out their hair, trying to get a handle on how clowning works" (2007, p. 16). That students become 'distraught' demonstrates the level of personal risk that students take. In fact, students can risk having their faith in their acting career completely taken from them. In an interview with Gaulier, Cavendish finds that Gaulier is honest if he feels the student is incapable of learning:

> Gaulier presses students to look for that magic something: if they keep coming back empty-handed, there is no point carrying on. "I have to tell them they shouldn't be actors." (Cavendish, 2001)

Performers are risking not just ridicule for a moment, but a destruction of their self-confidence and even ability to continue performing. Murray (2007) concludes that Lecoq's style celebrates the unfixed and ambiguous in theatre training. By allowing for the possibility of actual failure for the student, Gaulier and Lecoq maintain a real instability, pushing the student to a real risk of failure that has to be accepted as part of actor and clown training. Lecoq admits to creating crisis points artificially when students do not experience them, as they are a necessary process for students to undergo (Leabhart 1989, p. 94). Many students view these crises as creating a positive change, even a strengthened character. In Alan Clay's practical and allegorical clown guide, *Angels Can Fly,* Susan Broadway remembers,

> Training in clown with P.G. was…painful, dragging, distressing and exhausting, but afterwards! The next time I went in front of an audience I was fearless. I had suffered P.G. and survived! (2005, p.77)

Broadway remembers her time as a Gaulier student as a period of emotional risk, of danger and negativity that was necessary in order to receive the benefit of the school. The insults of a whiteface clown can be dangerous for students who are not always able to join the play of the insult, which can result in a highly painful personal experience.

Throughout the school each student will receive her share of Gaulier's lengthy insults, while her classmates roll around with laughter. This repeated presence of the whiteface clown delivering insults that both inform the student and entertain the rest of the class has a larger impact on the school. With the insult, Gaulier continues the performance, turning the failure into an opportunity for laughter, encouraging students to enjoy moments of failure, even to associate fun and laughter with the disappointment of being unable to complete a task. Lecoq refers to using the "teaching method…of the flop" from his early clown workshops, but does not go into detail about how this method worked. Performer and researcher Barry Laing (2002, p. 180) clarifies how this association can help the student to learn clown, by including Gaulier in a list of practitioners who "all conceive of fragility and the fall as bound up with a place of lightness which can defy weightiness". If 'weightiness' represents too forceful an approach, or one that lacks play, the flop (or fall) helps the clown to be free of this weight, and reach a better level of imagination and fun. Murray explores this invocation of lightness in Gaulier's teaching, particularly in contrast to the weightiness caused by "trying too hard" (2010b, p. 1). Lightness is described as an

elusive quality that cannot be taught, "although the multiple conditions of its invention and attainment can be imagined, encouraged, constructed and enabled" (Murray 2010b, p. 1). While Gaulier's encouragement and invocation of lightness enables the student to heuristically "find an engaged distance" (2010b, p. 2) when playing a character, perhaps the use of insults in via negativa enables the clown student to find a lightness in her approach to failure. Laing describes this process using an allegorical character of Gaulier's, "Mr. Flop", who visits the clown when the audience does not laugh, warning the performer to "to do something fast" (Gaulier 2007, p. 283-286). With this story, Gaulier encourages his students to befriend Mr. Flop and recognise his appearance as something to respond to in performance. For Laing, Mr. Flop is the personification of the performer's own fragility, so to befriend Mr. Flop is to "accept to be ridiculous" (2002, p. 181). In learning to metaphorically befriend Mr. Flop, playfully accept her own ridiculousness and use it to make people laugh, the student is introduced to self-reflexive comedy. An awareness of the potential of flop, or failure, is essential to Gaulier's principles of theatre and especially clown, where fragility and danger must be enjoyed in performance. The principles of *Le Jeu* pervade the whole school programme, creating actors who are playful, understanding and aware. Also present throughout the year is Gaulier's unequivocal, performative feedback, delivered through the insults of a whiteface clown. These aspects of the school create an environment in which the student learns to be self-reflexive, while taking themselves and their flops lightly. This important aspect of Gaulier's teaching is evident in the self-reflexivity of clown theatre, which I explore in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR
PRESENCE AND INTERMEDIALITY

I have discussed two of the objectives visible in clown theatre, which are to tell a story and to make the audience laugh. In order to explore the influence of Gaulier's teaching on clown theatre, I will concentrate on these two aspects. In the two case studies, the combination of storytelling and making the audience laugh leads to a narrative drama with playful, comic interruptions and diversions, or what appears to be a double-layered narrative, in which a group of clown actors try to tell a story and often fail. The performer-audience relationship taught by Gaulier and the disruptions in the layering of these narratives can be explored more fully according to theories of presence in the theatre. Cormac Power (2008, p.1) points out that this concept has "formed one of the twentieth century's key battlegrounds" in theatre studies. In his book, *Presence in Play*, Power makes a critical analysis of twentieth-century theories of presence, attempting to demystify this complex concept and seeking to understand the way that theatre works with many modes of presence as a distinctive feature of the art form. He divides "presence" into three modes in which it has been theorised, the first being the process by which theatre creates fiction, "Making-Present: The Fictional Mode" (Power, 2008 p. 15). Power questions the ability of theatre to make fiction completely present, instead suggesting that theatre makes illusions present with a collusive, imaginative act on the part of the actors and audience. He concludes, "Theatre is a form of representation that works by infusing a present context (a stage, or actor-audience relationship) with pretence" (2008, p.45). The process of making-present is overtly shown in my case studies, and is a process often discussed by Gaulier. Power's use of the word 'pretence' can be directly connected to Gaulier's vocabulary, with its emphasis on "pretending through play," (2007, p. 312) over any

psychological transformation of the actor. Gaulier maintains, "It is better to enjoy pretending, rather than to "be" water. So many patients are locked up in mental hospitals because they think they are Napoleon…" (2007, p. 184). In Clown Theatre, the process of making-present, or pretending, is declared to the audience, making the fictional mode of presence especially significant when the audience are asked to be complicit in the making-present process. The audience must also be prepared for the pretence to be removed during moments where the narrative is disrupted. Daniel Bye, in his recent PhD thesis, *Clowning in the Brechtian Tradition,* investigates similarities between clown performance and Brecht's Verfremdungseffekt, which

> indicates a disjunction between what is presented and the means of its presentation… the Verfremdungseffekt seeks to emphasise their separateness, to emphasise the process by which the performance represents and signifies reality without ever allowing the illusion to be fostered that the performance is reality (2008, p.25-26).

For Bye, who trained with Gaulier and Wright, the clearest example of this process in clown theatre is the "debunking of character through game play that manifestly belongs to the performer" (2008, p. 204). Where Spymonkey and NIE include literal play of children's games, transposed directly from Gaulier's classroom, they emphasise the separateness of the performer and the character, and remind the audience of the process of making-present. Bye also describes the Brechtian tool of opening the play by introducing the actors, as seen in *My Life With The Dogs*, which opens with a welcome speech made by the clown actors. Alex Byrne, dressed as a Russian policeman, imitates a Russian accent, addressing the audience through a loudhailer, "Imagine if you will that this man is not a forty year old actor from Manchester, but a small boy in Moscow…" (Tobacco Factory Theatre, Bristol, 9/10/2009) With this statement, the framework of the storytelling is set up and the

ensemble asks the audience to recognise the process by which NIE make their pretence present. The fictional mode of clown theatre highlights the fact that the 'forty year old actor' does not become the 'small boy in Moscow' but merely pretends. It is a game that demands the audience's complicité, which echoes Gaulier's use of the grotesque by making a joke with a degrading reminder of the corporeal – the actor is forty, so his physical body prevents him from doing anything more than pretending to be a small boy – and this casting is made comical. Bye concludes that the techniques used to make the audience aware of pretence do not become *Verfremdung* unless they are politically motivated. While the clown has historically been seen as a social commentator, it would be difficult to define the motivation of the company as wholly political, as they also have clear intentions of comedy and storytelling. In order to find other effects of declaring the process of creating fictional presence, I will examine Power's other modes of presence.

The second mode is ascribed primarily to actors, as it is either constructed through fame and reputation or the way an actor engages with the space and audience. "Having Presence: The Auratic Mode" (Power 2008, p. 47) is sometimes seen as mystical, the name deriving from the idea of a performer having a spiritual 'aura'. As a result it is "perhaps most difficult to define, but which an audience member may easily recognise and experience" (2008, p. 47). Power points out that a pre-expressive or neutral presence has been at the centre of the actor training of Barba and Lecoq, which seeks to help a student "develop her capacity to exhibit this quality of presence" (Power 2008, p. 77). Gaulier's performance qualities of fixed point, play and complicité can also be seen as tools for generating auratic presence.

Power points out that fictional and auratic presence can be used simultaneously and advocates a way of looking at theatre that recognises the "ambiguities between the reality of the pretending and the unreality of that which is pretended" (2008, p. 83-84). The verb *to pretend* is resonant of children's games, simpler than the verb *to act* and does not suggest any negation of reality, and is especially useful in this context as it is a term frequently employed in Gaulier's terminology. Clown theatre embraces exactly this ambiguity in its own pretence, providing a way of seeing theatre in the way Power suggests.

The third mode of presence, "Being-Present: The Literal Mode" (Power, 2008, p. 87), rests on the fact that theatre is contingent on the actors and the audience being in the same place at the same time. Performance art and post-modern criticism has focused on this mode of presence and Power finds problems with discussing this mode of presence centred on poststructural problems with the concept of 'real'. He points to several examples when performers are framed as being "themselves" but because of the staging process, they are perceived by the audience as signifiers of something else. Because of this semiotic deferral, he finds that

> the auratic and literal modes of presence – envisaged as being beyond signification – actually overlap with the fictional mode of presence; theatre constructs and *re*presents an idea of the present (Power 2008, p.114)

We can see evidence of this overlapping in the structure of clown theatre, in the moments where the narrative is interrupted and the clowns try to make the audience laugh. At first, it seems that these are moments of literal presence, where the performers stop pretending to be the characters. However, despite the apparent spontaneity in the actions, these moments are often carefully planned and rehearsed,

so that the companies can be sure of the quality of their shows. Basauri told the participants of Spymonkey's clown workshop "Your Funny" (sic) that every element in Spymonkey's shows is repeatable: while the clown actors do play games on stage, and are aware of external events such as the arrival of latecomers, there are no moments left entirely open for improvisation because the company want to ensure their material will make the audience laugh (May 2010). Nevertheless, the workshop's title refers to the comedy of the clown emerging directly from the individual performer. An ambiguity surrounding literal presence is very important in clown theatre, making the discussion of declaring pretence even more complex and interesting. If clown theatre embraces its own pretence, then it is worth noting that occasionally it also conceals it with moments that appear spontaneous but are in fact rehearsed. This complicated ambivalence is also experienced in the classroom, where students struggle to accept the authenticity of the clowns as a version of themselves rather than as assumed characters. In 2009, one student of the clowning course often became vocally frustrated with herself when she flopped. Gaulier repeatedly provoked her to this point of frustration as she made the class laugh with her physical spasms and shouting. Recognising this laugh, but unable to recognise the signs of anger as a funny trait of her personality, she asked, "Is this *me*?". When the student attempted to replicate the actions and sounds unprovoked, it was less funny to the group, who could see that it was rehearsed and artificial. In order to use this moment in a piece of clown theatre, she would have to find a way to repeat it, maintaining the sense of 'authenticity' felt in the classroom. Clown theatre's endeavour to both embrace and conceal its own pretence of presence can be seen as developing from struggles such as

this in Gaulier's classroom. Here I turn to media reception theories to consider how this ambivalence may operate.

Clown theatre is a comic form, specifically in these moments where the story is interrupted, although the stories told are not intrinsically comic. In the case studies used here and by Danzig, all the shows tell stories which are either tragic or epic. The stories become comic because of the disruptions, meaning that the story and the clown players become partners in the creation of clown theatre. These moments of disruption create a double presence, where on one hand we have the performance of a story (or the fictional presence) and on the other we have the clown actors' interactions with the audience, which demands auratic presence and appears to enable the literal presence of the individuals in the ensemble. By looking at various approaches in reception theory, I hope to identify useful terms and a framework for discussing this doubling of presence, how it is taught by Gaulier and how it can be used to transform tragic or epic stories into comedy.

Daphna Ben Chaim, in a historical survey, *Distance in the Theatre*, investigates techniques used to highlight distance between the actors and the fictional presence, with a prominent example being direct address. She suggests that "Distancing techniques are… reminders of our original contract with the object: that its existence as an aesthetic object rests on our complicity" (Ben Chaim 1984, p. 24). The moments of disruption, then, facilitate complicité with the audience, by reminding them of the act of making-present. Steve Tillis, writing about folk drama, describes concisely the

agreement in Ben Chaim's "original contract", refuting Samuel Taylor Coleridge's commonly accepted concept of suspension of disbelief

> Logically, if one suspends ones disbelief, then one is left in a state of belief. But…the audience of a drama… chooses to make believe, for a limited time and in a given space, along with the performers. (Tillis 1999, p. 86)

Tillis calls this a "conditional belief" (1999, p. 86), but there is something more playful and active in the term 'to make believe' which resonates with Gaulier's language and so seems more descriptive of clown theatre. If the distancing techniques are reminders of our complicité, then we can also see them as reminders of our choice to make believe, and prompts to enjoy this choice. As a result, although interruptions to the story disrupt the presence of the fiction, they simultaneously remind the audience that there is a communal and enjoyable act of making believe taking place. "We take pleasure because we know, on some level of our consciousness, that the event is not real, and because we experience the freedom of our imaginations" (Ben Chaim 1984, p. 76). Ben Chaim's references to pleasure and imagination leave some room for interpretation by the reader, and use surprisingly similar terms to Gaulier, "Pretence helps the pleasure of imagining, stimulates it, leads it on to delights: the unimaginable" (2007, p. 211). This similarity in vocabulary suggests that the terms of Power and Ben Chaim can be used to discuss the disruptions in clown theatre, which remind the audience of the act of making-present and the pleasure to be found in this imaginative act. These terms can also be used to demystify the way Gaulier describes his concepts of pretence, pleasure and the imagination in acting, allowing a more theoretical understanding of Gaulier's approach.

Media reception theorists Bolter and Grusin use the term *hypermediacy* to describe a

use of media that asks the viewer to delight in its construction

> In the logic of hypermediacy, the artist…strives to make the viewer
> acknowledge the medium as a medium and delight in that acknowledgement.
> She does so by multiplying spaces and media and by repeatedly redefining the
> visual and conceptual relationships among mediated spaces – relationships
> that may range from simple juxtaposition to complete absorption (2001, p. 41-
> 42).

Bolter and Grusin's argument applies specifically to digital media, but this 'logic' can

be applied to clown theatre if we use the term 'media' to describe different

performance genres. Spymonkey and NIE combine the use of melodrama, tragedy and

dance with clown and reminders of complicité, presenting these genres according to

the logic of hypermediacy, allowing the audience to recognise the different genres as

different genres and "delight" in the acknowledgment of the medium of theatre.

Chapple and Kattenbelt apply Bolter and Grusin's study to theatre, arguing that

theatre is hypermedial for its use of various arts and media, and the way that it

encourages its audience to create meaning from the various interactions of media. For

Chapple and Kattenbelt, contemporary theatre

> "provides a space where art forms of theatre, opera, and dance meet, interact
> and integrate with the media of cinema, television, video and new
> technologies; creating profusions of texts, inter-texts, inter-media and spaces
> in between." (2006, p. 24)

The 'space' provided by theatre and the 'spaces in between' the art forms are given

the term *intermedial*, a term which can be applied to the disruptions in clown theatre.

When a clown actor disrupts the storytelling objective in order to make the audience

laugh, there is an intermedial space between the way the story is told and the way it is

interrupted. There are also intermedial spaces between the clown actors and the

audience, between the objectives of laughter and storytelling and between the various

clown actors. These ideas originate in media reception studies and their audience theories do not start from a point that deals with comedy. However, Bolter and Grusin claim that hypermediacy can adopt a "playful or subversive attitude" (2001, p. 34) and Peter Boenisch (in Chapple and Kattenbelt, 2006, p. 115) claims "intermedial theatrical performances aim to foster intermediality playfully". The use of the term 'play', which is so significant to Gaulier, suggests but does not explore the potential for comedy in these intermedial moments. While Gaulier would not use the term 'intermediality', he demands a playful approach to theatre and the case studies use the attitudes and techniques taught by Gaulier to create intermedial spaces in their shows. Their clown theatre exploits these spaces in-between for comedy purposes, creating comic juxtapositions or subversions, exploiting intermediality to highlight contrasts and provoke laughter. This can highlight comic elements of theatre and its conventions, so that it is with these intermedial spaces that the makers of clown theatre draw attention to theatre as a process of creating fiction and thus develop a self-reflexive comedy that laughs at and with performance as performance. By pointing out this process, clown theatre reminds its audience that the clown actors are in fact playing, which is the 'method' advocated by Gaulier, "pretending through play, never really being" (2007, p. 312). This declaration means that the storytelling aspect of the show is openly shared as a game, and enjoyed as such. A self-reflexive comedy is created by allowing audiences to acknowledge the medium of theatre, delight in their acknowledgment and then, seeing theatre as theatre, laugh at the juxtapositions, contrasts and contradictions it entails. In this way, the intermediality found in the structure of clown theatre can be seen as a literal, declared manifestation of Gaulier's "pretending through play".

Earlier in their book, Chapple and Kattenbelt point out that

> …intermediality is associated with the blurring of generic boundaries… and a self-conscious reflexivity that displays the devices of performance in performance (Chapple and Kattenbelt, 2006, p. 11)

They recognise the self-reflexivity that is created when a medium seeks to be acknowledged but clown theatre, rather than *blurring* generic boundaries, makes the boundaries and spaces between genres explicit and plays with them, creating collisions and conflicts that allow for comedy. By drawing attention to the boundaries, clown theatre finds the ridiculous elements of these "devices of performance in performance". The performers create a collage of genres in order to tell the story, thus the stories of *Moby Dick* and *My Life With The Dogs* are told using melodrama, music, popular songs, dance, puppetry, horror, mime, acrobatics and tragedy. These combinations do not always blur smoothly into one another but are often comically irreconcilable. In addition, the genres are occasionally dropped completely in favour of children's games, slapstick or any other available means of making the audience laugh. As a result, clown theatre posits live performance as live performance, with the logic of hypermediacy; it also demonstrates spaces not just between media but also between genres of the medium of live theatre, finding self-reflexive comedy in these spaces. The audience is thus aware of the ridiculous nature of performance, with theatre conventions being subverted, parodied and destroyed, while giving the audience the opportunity to take pleasure in their awareness of theatre as an enjoyable, ridiculous pastime. I propose calling this *comic intermediality*, whereby theatre becomes so recognisable as theatre through exploitation of spaces in-between that it becomes comic.

In order to construct comic intermediality, the company must make the audience aware of different levels of the performance between which comedy is to be found. These levels can be likened to Power's three modes of presence but can also be separated into levels of play, or pretending, that is taking place at any time. Boenisch describes the intermediality of theatre working on three semiotic levels; "presence, presentation and representation" (2006, p. 114). Boenisch's 'presence' is similar to Power's "literal presence", and refers to the individual being in the room with the spectators. 'Presentation' is an aspect of the individual that is being declared to the audience and 'representation' is the playing of a character. These three layers are explicitly explored in clown theatre and the jumps, clashes and spaces between the three are a rich source of conflict that can generate comedy. Peacock, in the context of clown theatre, applies slightly different terms than Boenisch, "the performer, the persona (the clown found within the performer) and the personage (the part played by the performer whilst in the clown state)" (2009, p. 31). These different terms appear to refer to the same apparent levels of presence:

The (literal) person	-	Presence	-	Performer
The clown	-	Presentation	-	Persona
The (fictional) character	-	Representation	-	Personage

During a clown theatre production, the audience sees constant movement between the performer, the persona and the personage; or, the presence, the presentation and the representation. Peacock's terms suggest a complete transformation between the performer and the persona – the vocabulary of a "clown state" and "the clown found within" suggests a focus on the psychology of the performer, which mystifies the process of performing clown. While some clown teachers take a spiritual route into clowning, Gaulier does not, saying instead that "a good clown loves selling

themselves as a ridiculous being…Students who present themselves as 'little ones' should get an earful from the teacher." (2007, p. 295) Thus, for Gaulier, the clown is something that is sold, a presentation of the ridiculous elements of the performer, rather than a persona or alter ego. Though Peacock describes the persona as being 'found within', I believe the term *persona* can be misleading and suggest the assumed 'little character', of which Gaulier is disdainful. When writing in French, Gaulier does use the term *personage*, but translates this as *character* (2008, p. 26). Because of the way they resonate with Gaulier's language, I prefer to use Boenisch's terms: presentation, as it indicates a process of showing and sharing, or 'selling' aspects of the performer with the audience; and representation, as it indicates a suggestion of character, but not a transformation. The spaces between the clowning presentation and character representation are ripe for intermedial play, especially when there is a jolt or sudden leap between the two. This oscillation is taught in Gaulier's clown exercises that are based on the idea that the clown believes in the quality of her acting. In one exercise, the clown believes she can convince the audience she is a doctor, by instructing the audience, "Take off your clothes". According to Gaulier, this enables the audience to see the clown finding pleasure in her own ridiculous idea (July 2009). The performer can generate laughter in two places, firstly with presentation, sharing their ridiculousness with the audience, and secondly by alternating presentation and representation, breaking the representation of the character and showing the practice of representation to be ridiculous.

Basauri's performance in *Moby Dick* is useful in clarifying these concepts. He enters the stage towards the beginning of the show wearing a false beard and a small sailor's

outfit, saying the famous opening line, "Call me Ishmael" (Mellville 1946, p. 11). He explains that he has been chosen as the narrator because his "English is a bit special, so you have to pay more attention" (Warwick Arts Centre, 27th October 2009). As in the novel, Ishmael is the narrator, telling the story in the past tense. However I believe that this Ishmael is not a character but a presentation of Basauri, with his own accent exaggerated, his baldness highlighted by a false beard, his belly highlighted with badly fitting costumes and his enjoyment of authority shared with the audience. In presenting these aspects of himself to the audience Basauri invites the audience to laugh at him as a ridiculous person. During *Le Jeu* in 2008, Gaulier jibed that a man with no hair looked "like he had the skin of his arse stretched over his head" and it is likely Gaulier drew attention to Basauri's appearance in a similar way. These personal, corporeal details of Basauri's appearance are used to create comic moments in the show as part of his clown presentation. The presentation level thus contains elements of the corporeal and even the grotesque, bringing disruptions to the story that follow the same pattern as the corporeal insults used by Gaulier in his classroom and writing, interrupting the dramatic action to create bathetic and grotesque comedy. As well as narrating, Basauri represents characters in the story, both the young Ishmael and Moby Dick the whale. There are many comedy moments in the piece where Basauri stops playing these parts and addresses the audience as Ishmael the narrator, which cause jolts between the levels of representation and presentation.

It is interesting to note that Basauri explains the three levels of presence at the start of the show with a joke. Wearing a false beard he tells the audience, "This is me when I tell the story" (presentation). He takes the beard off and says, "This is me, the actor"

(presence) then puts it back on, upside down like a toupee, saying, "This is me when the story takes place" (representation). This is a corporeal, presentational joke, which points out Basauri's baldness. It also subverts and parodies the conventions of costume while playing several parts, as it is ridiculous to imagine that an upside-down beard is a good disguise. Being at the start of the play, this joke also prepares the audience for the fact that during the show, Basauri will be visible on three semiotic levels, as a real person, narrator and character.

The comic intermediality of clown theatre is self-reflexive, often referring to what we imagine may happen in rehearsal processes and theatre companies as well as stage conventions. At one point in *My Life With The Dogs*, the dogs chase a policeman (David Pagan) away from the little boy. As he reaches the side of the stage the dogs continue to chase and bark but Pagan stops and points off stage, saying, "I'm not here any more, I've gone off up a corridor". The audience laughed as the drama of the chase was instantly debunked by the declaration of the fiction. We were suddenly made aware of the ridiculous idea that the fictional world extends beyond the stage but that Pagan cannot go off the stage and into it. He is restricted from representing the character by the real world and is instead forced to defend the fiction, so he has to abandon the representation of the policeman and remind everybody about the conventions he has tried to follow. In trying to preserve stage conventions, he has drawn attention to them and therefore debunked them and made them comical. The company take Gaulier's lesson of self-reflexivity and laugh at themselves for being a theatre company, exposing and parodying conventions of the stage.

The fact that the representational level is frequently subverted for comic purposes in clown theatre does not mean that it is neglected or that the characters are represented badly. The actors need the skills to represent character and the story well so that there is comedy when it is debunked. These skills can be traced back to Ecole Philippe Gaulier where the teacher strives, "through various poetic theatrical genres, to discover the students' spirit and to hand it them back" (Gaulier 2005, p. 5). These genres include Neutral Mask, Mask Play, Characters, Melodrama, 'Shakespeare – Tchékhov', Bouffon, and 'Writing and Directing'. The students who follow the whole course discover which of these genres they most enjoy and in which they have the most skill and use this discovery to make the best work they can. In the making of these two shows, the actors make use of their knowledge and enjoyment of several genres, and that different members have different strengths, as multiple genres are combined and exploited for their comedy potential. Both case studies use a mixture of dramatic modes, or genres, which can include melodrama, physical theatre, mime, puppetry, music and dance. These genres are subverted, deconstructed or parodied by clowning, to create comic intermediality. This can be traced to the performative insults in Gaulier's pedagogy - moments of grotesque and personal comedy are present throughout all of the courses that Gaulier teaches, meaning that the school is permeated by comedy that comments on theatre. In the context of the classroom this comedy helps the student identify skills to improve, but in the context of clown theatre, self-reflexive comments allow the audience to see the ridiculous nature of performance itself, and the corporeal nature of the performers. The comic intermediality of clown theatre could be traced to a continuous pervasion of reflexive comedy throughout Gaulier's workshops. The structure of the school with its study of

varied genres and Gaulier's own performative skill enables the students to understand not only a variety of theatre genres but also the intermedial spaces between them and an embodied sense of the pleasurable and ridiculous in each.

Clown theatre creates comic intermediality, finding comedy in the intermedial spaces between semiotic levels of presence and between theatrical conventions. The two case studies tell stories with tragic and melodramatic content but by drawing attention to and subverting these genres, create a comedy that is as much about delighting in the ridiculousness of theatre itself as it is about the stories told. The comic intermediality of clown theatre demonstrates three traces of the Ecole Philippe Gaulier. Firstly, the oscillation between two levels of presence allows the company to declare the process of "pretending though play, never really being", demonstrating this fundamental theatre tool taught by Gaulier. By asking the audience to recognise this play, but also be complicit in the make-believe process, clown theatre asks its audience to delight in this pretence and to find the comic spaces therein. Secondly, clown theatre assimilates the many genres and styles taught by Gaulier, combining tragedy, melodrama, acrobatics and clown to create comedy. Thirdly, these many genres are frequently interrupted by grotesque and performative comedy that reflects on the nature of theatre, as are the lessons at Ecole Philippe Gaulier.

CHAPTER FIVE
PARTNERSHIPS IN CLOWN THEATRE

In Gaulier's teaching there is a focus on the partnership between the performer and the audience. In his clown teaching the opinions of the audience are explored through partnership between the auguste student and whiteface teacher. Clown theatre creates a similar partnership, replacing Gaulier's whiteface with another authority figure, the story.

Spymonkey re-tell a canonical text, the American *Moby Dick*, whereas NIE tell a story about a young child at the bottom of Russian society, living in the underground with dogs. These stories are integral to the formation and structure of the shows, being represented and then subverted with comic intermediality. Danzig explains that stories can provide a necessary authority in clown theatre

> Clown exists in relation to authority…500 Clown, which creates productions to be seen in theaters, has found that theater itself provides a rich and multi-dimensional authority for the clown. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that popular cultural knowledge of theater provides that authority. (Danzig 2007, p. 21)

Danzig casts the popular knowledge of theatre as the authority against which the clowns must rebel, referring to the ability of clowns to contradict and disrupt their environment. However, the specific nature of this authority differs in my two case studies. 500 Clown and Spymonkey both choose western canonical texts to be subverted and deconstructed. The use of a little-known story of an 'underdog' character is a choice which sets NIE apart from the other two examples: the story, while still the authority which is deviated from, has a different role for this company,

which can be seen when examining the level of (re)presentation on which the audience are addressed.

Both Spymonkey and NIE prefix the play with an introduction to themselves as theatre companies. This serves as an introduction to the multiple levels of presence that the show would operate on, "shifting focus when the shows begin to that which is normally hidden or simply ignored" (Danzig 2007, p.128). However, the differences between these shows are also apparent from the outset. While the audience were arriving, the members of Spymonkey appeared onstage to present themselves as "Compagnie Tony Parks". Tony Parks is a representation of the performer, Toby Park, and the opening establishes a relationship between the clowns. Here, the contrasting objectives are assigned to particular players whereby Parks has aspirations to tell the story of *Moby Dick* faithfully and theatrically, while the others are happy to be onstage entertaining the audience. From this point on, it is in this mode of presentation that the actors address the audience. Parks is the defender of serious theatre, looking down on his fellow actors and often foiled by their games and deviations from the plot. Represented characters do not address the audience but the performers abandon the representations of character frequently with distracted and amusing presentations.

At the Tobacco Factory Theatre, Bristol, two members of NIE came into the bar area with an accordion and a bottle of vodka, giving drinks to the waiting audience members and welcoming them to the show. The opening introduced the main protagonist of the story, Ivan, as described in Chapter Four. Following his

introduction as 'not a forty year old actor from Manchester, but a small boy in Moscow…', Orr did not break the character of Ivan, maintaining the body language and voice of the young boy character so that it was on this semiotic level that he spoke to the audience. In contrast, all the other characters were abandoned as the actors played various roles including the Russian policeman, Ivan's disinterested mother and a paedophile in the streets, as well as the pack of wild dogs. The representation of these characters was broken by games, music and presentational jokes. While the supporting performers came out of role, looking at the audience, speaking to each other and playing games, the majority of direct audience address was from Ivan. The representation of Ivan was not subverted or parodied, allowing the fictional presence of Ivan to be undisturbed, allowing empathy to be built with the character. In contrast, the subverted characters were those with power over Ivan's life, or the authority figures. Thus, the fiction of the authority figures was subverted more than the fiction of the protagonist, leaving an interesting power balance in the eyes of the spectator. In these openings both pieces use levels of (re)presentation to cast an authority figure, but these figures are different – Spymonkey challenge the authority of the conventions of theatre and NIE challenge the authority of oppressive adults in the life of an impoverished small boy. As a result, the audience of *Moby Dick* are complicit with the clowns who do not understand theatre, whereas the audience of *My Life With The Dogs* are complicit with Ivan and with the actors who laugh at authority figures. This difference, noticeable particularly in the mode of address can be traced to the stated intentions of the respective companies as described in publicity material such as websites. On their homepage, NIE state that

> NIE uses all theatrical means available - music, light, animation, design, words, dancing, sounds, clown, buffoon, tragedy, puppets, singing - to create

theatre that is alive and by turns comic, tragic, ridiculous and disturbing. (NIE 2010, online)

For this company, clown is one of many in a list of genres used. While this use of multiple genres with an objective of comedy will create a comic intermediality, it is also important to note that NIE intend to create theatre that is 'tragic' and 'disturbing' as well as 'comic' and 'ridiculous'.

Despite the fact that Spymonkey do not use the word clown on their website, instead describing their work as "dark, edgy physical comedy" (Spymonkey 2010), I would argue that Spymonkey's stated intentions are closer to clowning than are NIE's. In response to Lyn Gardner's online review criticising the show for being over-reliant on comedy, Petra Massey, co-founder of the company, explained, "Spymonkey is a clown company. Our job is to make people laugh" (Massey 2010, online). In addition to this prerogative, Massey describes this show as having "weight and gravitas in a clown style" (2010, online). This suggests that the application of the term 'clown theatre' is in line with the intentions of Spymonkey to a greater extent than it is to those of NIE. If clown theatre is more like a sliding scale than an absolute definition, Spymonkey are leaning further towards clown than NIE, by placing more importance on the impulse to make the audience laugh.

The relationship of clown to authority is one that has existed throughout the history of comedy, from Bahktin's clowns disrupting official and ritual ceremonies, through having licence to disrupt formal occasions, have been seen as having subversive power over traditional authority. The question of authority and power is raised in analysis of the partnership between auguste and whiteface. Towsen describes this

partnership as being part of the historical development of the clown partners, or the "two zanies, the first a scheming rogue and the second his less clever butt – the stooge…" (1976, p. 206) Towsen describes the mutually complementary relationship of this pair, working together to create comedy. This partnership relates to the partnership between storytelling and clown in the two shows: the story is set up as the authority, and the clown actors become clumsy augustes by trying (and failing) to play serious scenes, oscillating between levels of presence, distracted by games and the audience and thus failing at their task to play the story. The partnership is sometimes transposed to two clown actors, one of whom wants to perform the play and the other wants to do something unrelated but entertaining. Davison notices a trend in clown teaching to focus on auguste clowns but that, away from the classroom, "The white clown's contemporary absence has left the auguste alone and inexplicable without her partner" (2008, p. 6). Davison laments this loss, blaming a misunderstanding of the balance between the two partners. He cites Bernard de Fallois' introduction to Tristan Rémy's, *Les Clowns* (1945) (translated by Davison 2008, p. 6),

> The beautiful dialogue between the white face and the auguste does not set at each others throats the superior and the inferior, the executioner and the victim, the exploiter and the exploited. The two partners are at the same level. They are two equal forces, two principles one as positive as the other.

This balance of equal forces is important to the understanding of the story as whiteface. The balance of major and minor between these partners moves throughout the performance, so that themes and emotions available in the story are explored as well as the comic play of the clowns and the comic intermediality of the disruptions to the story. As a result there is 'beautiful dialogue' rather than competition between the

objectives of comedy and storytelling, which provide each other with an equal, opposite force, creating space for comedy. In *My Life With The Dogs*, the objective to tell the story is stronger than the objective to get laughs, so the forces are not equal and there is less space for comedy. The dialogue created between the story and clown actors of clown theatre can be related to the dialogues and partnerships created at Ecole Philippe Gaulier between the whiteface pedagogue and the students. The presence of both whiteface partners allows the clown actors to work with a partner, building laughter and comedy through the balance of authority and rebellion, expectations and disruptions, fantasy and corporeal reality.

There is one further partnership to be considered in clown theatre – that with the audience. Throughout training with Gaulier, students are taught to seek complicité with the audience and in clown theatre a large proportion of the show is dedicated to making the audience laugh. To have an objective that is concentrated on the audience increases awareness of the literal presence of the spectators and a complicité is created so that the audience's presence is valuable to the clown actors. Danzig describes the methods used to create this environment, "expanding play to include the audience or, to put it another way, inviting the audience to play…500 Clown's invitation begins with eye contact…"(2007, p. 127-129). Noting the influence of Gaulier, Danzig employs eye contact to invite "involvement, communication and cooperation" (2007, p. 130) from the audience, by the performers offering these same qualities. In *Moby Dick*, Basauri asks the audience to cooperate with him in preserving his role as narrator, encouraging the audience to imitate a storm if Parks tries to usurp the role. This moment takes a device commonly used in contemporary

pantomime and children's theatre but transforms it into an interaction relevant to clown theatre. In asking the audience to imitate a storm, he invites them to literally play along with the narrative objective, creating a soundscape that is in keeping with the fictional presence of the story. However, at the moment when Parks does attempt narration, the narrative demands that the ship is becalmed. When the audience, encouraged by Basauri, begins their imitation they are contradicting the narrative and interrupting it for the purpose of playing a game. In this moment the audience rebel against Parks, who tries to maintain the fiction of the becalmed ship, and against the narrative objective of the production, becoming accomplices to the disruption. In addition to sympathising with particular characters or presentations and imaginatively joining the make-believe process, the audience are invited to actively join the play. By including the audience in this scene, Spymonkey creates a shared experience of play, allowing the audience to understand more clearly the approach to theatre advocated by Gaulier. Danzig points out that asking the audience to join in an experience of play "often involves risk-taking, thereby transferring the site of risk from stage to audience…" (2007, p. 131). The experience of risk being an important part of clown teaching, it is possible that by experiencing some discomfort or embarrassment at being asked to play, clown theatre audiences are further sharing in the experience of play in a clown context. As part of the imitation of a storm, Basauri chooses an individual to make the sound of a seagull. The individuals chosen on the two performances I attended both seemed to enjoy this task, despite showing signs of embarrassment, and the rest of the audience laughed loudly. The individuals are likely to have experienced similar emotions to the students of Gaulier's clown courses. In an article on contemporary performance events, Lancaster describes methods of

facilitating audience participation. He notes that interactive events such as karaoke nights encourage audience participation with the creation of an environment where "it's okay to be an amateur" (1997, p. 80). In clown theatre, conflict between two performance elements can result in failures to meet either objective, increasing the potential of flops. The audience members have seen these failures, which are associated throughout with laughter and fun; thus when the audience members are given small performance tasks, the participant is aware that the result of failure will be no worse than a moment of laughter. The audience is provided with a relatively safe environment to participate in the disruptive play of the clown actor and one audience member is given the opportunity to make the rest of the audience laugh. This heightens the experience of play in clown theatre and enables the clown actors to develop complicité with the audience.

The partnerships created in clown theatre originate in clowning, as the narrative objective of the story is framed as a type of whiteface partner, that sets the clown actors a challenge doomed to failure and provides an authority to be deviated from. The partnership between the clown actors and the audience is one of complicité, in the sense of shared understanding and in the sense of being complicit in each other's actions, as the audience are given an environment in which to experience clown play for themselves.

CONCLUSION

I have identified three ways in which Spymonkey and NIE's clown theatre productions demonstrate the training and theatrical principles of Ecole Philippe Gaulier, allowing us to trace the influence of the school. In doing so, I have been able to explain principles of Gaulier's teaching through their manifestation in a theatrical context.

Firstly, clown theatre directly places games on stage, which can be traced to Gaulier's introductory course *Le Jeu* and the principle of pleasure of play. This principle of the school, taught through children's games, is directly included in the shows and used to disrupt the storytelling objective and provide comic and entertaining performance. Clown theatre communicates to its audience Gaulier's principle of pretending through play. Clown actors repeatedly remind the audience of the act of play inherent in theatre, by interrupting the act of storytelling to present to the audience comical aspects of themselves, children's games or tensions in the narrative. They also provide the audience with an opportunity to experience play for themselves, by participating in the make-believe process and joining in games played.

Secondly, clown theatre finds comedy in the intermedial spaces of theatre, when genres, objectives and conventions collide. Clown actors oscillate between levels of presentation and representation, finding intermedial spaces between the fictional presence of the story and the auratic presence of the playing clown actors. In doing so, clown theatre presents an irreverent self-reflexive attitude to theatre and storytelling. We can trace the structure of clown theatre and the many theatrical techniques it

combines to the multi-generic teaching of Gaulier. The contrast between these genres and the disruption of performance that this intermedial comedy causes can be traced to two elements of Gaulier's teaching, his irreverent attitude to his own theatrical lineage and the pedagogical use of the corporeal and the grotesque that infuses his teaching with a carnival spirit. Throughout the school, Gaulier performs in a role comparable to the whiteface clown, where he delivers corporeal, personal and grotesque insults, which contrast with the fantastic, metaphorical language used to describe theatre. These insults both instruct and entertain the participants of the workshop and we can trace the physical, grotesque and presentational disruptions of clown theatre to the school.

The third manifestation of Gaulier's teaching in clown theatre is the performance partnerships - complicit partnership with the audience and balanced partnership between story telling and comedy. I have likened this latter partnership to a clown double act between the whiteface and the auguste, being mutually complementary, performative and balanced in their opposition, creating spaces and conflicts in order to create comedy. The two case studies offer slightly different authority figures to perform the role of whiteface but both exploit the conventions and expectations of performance by deviating from them and creating intermedial spaces between the expectations and the reality of the productions. There are partnerships throughout Gaulier's school, from the performative conversations in his writing, to the performative role of whiteface in the classroom that allows the students to learn clown while simultaneously being entertained. Partnership, with its opportunities for conflict and complicité, is regarded as necessary throughout Gaulier's work. Gaulier teaches

these partnerships through performance, either inventing fictional partners in his writing or joining the performance of the students through his insults and criticisms. Clown theatre thus inherits Gaulier's use of twin functions of information and entertainment, telling the story and simultaneously creating as much comedy as possible.

By its use of *Le Jeu,* intermediality and partnerships to create theatre that both communicates a narrative and entertains, clown theatre demonstrates an actual theatrical influence of Ecole Philippe Gaulier.

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LIST OF COURSES AND PRODUCTIONS ATTENDED

NIE	*My Life with the Dogs*, Tobacco Factory Theatre, Bristol, Friday 9th October 2009 *The End of Everything Ever*, Warwick Arts Centre, 23rd February 2009
Spymonkey	*Moby Dick*, Warwick Arts Centre, 27th October 2009 *Moby Dick*, Lyric Hammersmith, 29th May 2009 *Your Funny*, Lyric Hammersmith, May 2010
Ecole Philippe Gaulier	Summer School: *Clowns*, July 2009 *Le Jeu*, October 2008

APPENDIX ONE
A SAMPLE OF GAULIER'S INSULTS

Insults were either delivered directly to the student on stage, or Gaulier would ask the rest of the class what they thought, giving violent suggestions, and asking the rest of the class to agree. The following examples were transcribed by Sam Gibbs, a student of *Le Jeu* 2008.

- *You look like a girl scout with puberty problems.*

- *You look like a woman who's husband is dead, mother died 2 days ago, father is dying, and children live in Alaska and are fans of Sarah Palin.*

- *We want to parachute you to Iraq with a T-Shirt saying 'I love George Bush'*

- *This makes [the audience] feel so bad they won't have sex for nine months.*

- *Do you want to spend six months on a boat with them, listening to them recite poetry and making passionate love, or do you want to leave the country as soon as they say one word?*