University of Southern Queensland

Clown-Based Social Work for Child Protection Practice: Transdisciplinary Correlations on Failure.

An Exegesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

Social Work Practice in the child protection context is a fraught endeavour as children, family members and practitioners inevitably become caught in a complex rotation of trying and failing. Social Work Theory is a contested site, rife with ambiguity in its pursuit for knowledge about how to achieve individual and social change. Child protection work is presented as impossible, with practitioners unable to resolve inherent contradictions in their role. This Practice as Research (PaR) doctorate undertakes practical experiments in clowning: training, devising, performing, and drawing in order to discover the correlations between clown and social work. These correlations are then explored further to inform an alternative way of working in the child protection field. Based on the historical clown-archetypes of the Whiteface and Auguste clown, Lecoq's pedagogy of the New Clown and more recent conceptualisations for clown logic from the field, this research presents a distinct clown theory. Clown theory discovers the world with naivety and stupidity; and boldly attempts impossible tasks, while accepting inevitable failure that leads to play and pleasure in the here and now. These concepts appear to enact a relational presence that is empowering and can lead to a new awareness of self and the social world. This project is transdisciplinary as it crosses boundaries, swerves right and left, gets lost, folds back over and discovers a new approach to engaging with children and families in the child protection field, termed *Clown Based Social Work.* Clown Based Social Work is presented as unfinished and not-yet-known, however, is posited as a form of Dissenting Social Work Practice in the Child Protection Field.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS WITH CREATIVE WORK

I David John Steggall declare that the DCA Thesis with creative work component entitled Clown-Based Social Work for Child Protection Practice: Transdisciplinary Correlations on Failure consists of the specified word length of 50,189 words not including references or preliminary material, such as the abstract, acknowledgements, or table of contents. My creative component consists of a 60% of the overall 'practice-led research'. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged. I have acknowledged any key collaborators and their level and type of contribution, where deemed appropriate in the statement of contribution.

Date: 30/03/2023

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Eilleen, you have given and given and given, with so much patience and care throughout this long process. Your encouragement brought me here and your commitment to me has seen it through and your love has meant I have survived. I love you.

To my children, Evie and Milly, you have inspired the play, joy and love that are written about throughout these pages. Despite so many words about play, I am sorry this work has meant I have not always been available to play with you. Thank you for always reminding me that your joy is so much more important than work. I love you both so much.

To my mother, Stephany, thank you for modelling the discipline of writing; witnessing your own doctorial journey inspired my own, I am so grateful for your love and support.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I performed child protection practice for over 10 years, engaging with children and families in non-government programs. For the most part I worked in Family Intervention Programs that aimed to work with families across the spectrum of the child protection system. The value base for this work was family preservation and family reunification, a belief that the best place for a child was with their family of origin. I worked across regional and remote south-west Queensland, Australia from the city of Toowoomba to smaller townships such as Stanthorpe, Roma, Charleville, Cunnamulla and all stops in-between, a distance of over 600kms.

In 2017, I walked away from social work practice in the child protection field because I was overwhelmed with a sense of failure. I was disillusioned by the social work discipline and I had reached the view that there is little a social worker can do in the current system but fail, and I was not sure which way to turn to find solutions. After resigning I took to the task of cleaning my garage, where I found my old clowning suitcase. Many years before becoming a social worker I trained as a clown.

FIGURE 1: DAVID STEGGALL, MY SUITCASE (FROM 'THE DREAMS OF BRICKS'), 2017, UNISQ ARTS THEATRE, TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

When I saw my old suitcase, I had that perplexed nostalgic emotion you get when looking at an old photo album, both happy and sad. I opened it. Sitting inside was a very weathered but still very red nose. I picked it up and put it on – sneezing from the dust. I breathed in a gasp of air and the eyes of that playful, stupid, vulnerable self, opened and wondered, "What is all this heavy stuff about?"

Inside the suitcase was my notebook from a workshop in 2003 with clown teacher Andrew Cory. While most of the writing had faded, I could still make the lines: 'Poo is funny' and 'The clown is always in the shit'. I smiled, remembering the pain in my cheeks after those two weeks of training and the lightness of play. I turned the page and read more words: *empathy, hope, relationship, playfulness, not-knowing* and it occurred to me that these words paralleled terms and ideas in social work. Playfulness seems obvious when working with children; however, it was so lacking in child protection work.

I stood in my shed wondering about the possible connections between clowning and social work. I thought about Charlie Chaplin's mirroring of poverty in his films and 'The Kid' where his little Tramp stumbles into fatherhood and rails against the Child Protection System. I wondered, if child protection was about children, then what would practice look like if it came from the position of the child?

This became the formulation of my key question: *To what extent is there a correlation between clowning, social work and the child protection field*

and what are the possibilities for direct practice? In social work, *direct practice* refers to the helping process a practitioner undertakes with a *service-user.* Direct practice involves engagement, relationship building, information gathering and assessment, prioritising problems, setting goals and intervention. In child protection work, the service-user refers to the parents, children and family that the social worker is helping. An intervention refers to taking action around a particular problem or goal, which, may refer to removing children or safety planning to keep a child safely in the home. Typically, in the child protection field, *direct practice* occurs in the family home during *home visits*.

To answer my question, *to what extent is there a correlation between clowning, social work and the child protection field and what are the possibilities for direct practice?* I knew I had to return to clown practice; I had to learn more to understand. I have since immersed myself in clown practice in this research as a way to think through how clowning might correlate with social work and could be enacted in the child protection field. This has not generated a single creative outcome, but a pedagogy of clown practices resulting in a relational way of being in the world and encountering problems.

1.1 Overview of chapters

This study consists of six chapters, including this *Introduction*. Chapter 2, *Literature Review*, is set out in three sections: 2.1 *Social Work Theory,* 2.2

Clown Theory and Practice and 2.3 *Correlations between Clown Theory and Social Work Theory*. Social Work Theory is presented first to provide a scholarly context to my own feelings of disillusionment in child protection practice and my rationale for looking outside of the social work discipline for an alternative way to approach knowing and doing. In the second section, a distinct Clown Theory is proposed based on the conceptual themes found in the literature that aims to theorise clowning. Lastly, the emerging correlations between clown theory and social work theory are contextualised in the child protection field and considered as a foundation for further investigation of clown practice as relevant to social work.

Chapter 3, *Methodology and Creative Practice*, is set out in three sections: 3.1.1 *Research Paradigm,* 3.1.2 *Methodology,* 3.1.2 *Methods.* The *performative research* paradigm applies a creative arts practice as research methodology (eds Barrett & Bolt 2014; Sullivan 2010)**.** The Research Paradigm adopts Kershaw's definition of Practice as Research (PaR) as 'a method and methodology in search of results across disciplines: a collection of transdisciplinary research "tools"' (Kershaw, 2009, p. 5). The Methods section highlights clown practice for research purposes as: *A): Clown Training and Workshops, (B) Clown Devising and Performing, (C) Theatre Laboratory as Experimentation, (D) Clown Journaling and Drawing.* These are presented as 'practical experiments' that can cross disciplinary boundaries; in this case the social work discipline, child protection field and clowning practice (Heron and Kershaw, 2018, On 'meadow meanders' and transdisciplinarity section).

Chapter 4, *Clowning Practice Insights* consists of five key clowning principles that enact (put into practice with people) a relational presence: 1) The clown engages with the world: *The clown does not aim to make people laugh*; *the clown aims to connect*. 2) The clown fails: *The clown is the one who will always stuff up his turn*. 3) The clown is stupid: *The clown wants to understand but never will*. 4) The clown finds the game: *The clown discovers pleasure in the game and wants the play to continue*. 5) The clown is a problem solver with an en-vital spirit: *The clown will not give-up.* These principles are discussed as discoveries that I find while 'meandering' through clown practice.

Chapter 5, *Findings and Discussion*, consists of two sections: *5.1 Findings: Towards a Clown-Based Social Work and 5.2 Discussion: Clown-Based Social Work as Dissent.* Child protection practice is presented as an Impossible Task with Inevitable Failure. The clown's propensity to 1) engage with a hopeful anticipation for success, 2) be willing to fail, 3) share their failure with the audience, 4) accept, 5) leave and 6) come back to try again – all the while remaining open to finding play, joy and pleasure – constitutes a curious way to be in relationship to the world and to encounter impossible problems. Clown practice has been proposed as a pedagogical tool to bring out relational states that can enact an embodied baseline for social work. Hence in this chapter, based on insights from my clown practice, I present *Clown-Based Social Work,* as an alternative approach to engaging families and children in the child protection context.

Chapter 6, *Conclusion*, consists of three sections: 6.1 *Correlations on Failure,* 6.2 *Future Implications,* 6.3 *Chapter Summary*. The research concludes with a review of the key findings and consideration of future research possibilities stemming from the outcomes.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social work theory

Social work seeks to lighten human suffering through a range of practice methods that target the service user and their structural social context. Social work theory draws on an array of knowledges from varying disciplines – prominently sociology and psychology (Grey and Webb, 2013; Healy, 2014; Payne, 2020). This literature review aims to identify the practice tensions in social work theory that have contributed to my own disillusionment in practice: *the uncertainty of truth, the dilemma of scientific evidence, the confusion of subjectivity and objectivity*, *the dichotomy of change efforts,* and *the divide between theory and practice.* The discussion of these tensions highlights that the knowledge base continues to challenge the social work profession, which has caused problems with understanding the child practitioner role. These challenges contribute to my sense of *being stuck* in child protection work.

2.1.1 Overview of practice tensions

Social Work Theory provides an explanation for causality, method and technique when social workers engage with people and their circumstances (Connolly, Harms, & Maidment, 2017, p. 4). In describing the cause of the problem, the theory proposes a method for practice that offers specific skills and techniques for the social worker to enact in alliance with the theoretical view of choice (Connolly, Harms, & Maidment, 2017, p. 4). It is important when supporting people in difficult contexts to make sense,

find order, and discover meaning to negotiate responses around problems (Howe, 2009, p. 2). Social work theories aim to understand a person's social circumstance, an explanation of the problems, and the means for change (Fook, 2002, p. 68; Gray and Webb, 2013, p. 2; Connolly, Harms, & Maidment, 2017, p. 4; Langer and Lietz, 2014, p. 8; Trevithick, 2008, p. 1214; Payne, 2021, p. 44). Trevithick (2008, p. 1221) identifies the predominant practice theories as '…cognitive–behavioural approaches, client-centred, task-centred, psycho-social approaches, solution-focused and strength-based approaches…'. Healy offers five groups of contemporary social work theories for practice: '…systems theories, problem-solving theories, strengths and solution-focused theories, modern critical social work theories, and postmodern social work theories' (2014, p. 7). She favours these theories because social workers have been a part of their theoretical formation and they have been developed with relevant fields of practice in mind (Healy, 2014, p. 7).

However, social work theory is rife with disagreement among practitioners and theorists regarding contradictions that exist in the profession's knowledge base (Maidment and Egan, 2016, pp. 13 – 14; Trevithick, 2008, p. 1220). These include the effectiveness of theories (Hepworth et al., 2002, p. 17), definitional ambiguity (Hicks, 2016, p. 400) and a gap between the knowledge base and challenges faced in direct practice with service users (McNeill and Nicholas, 2019, p. 359). Social work draws on multiple theories from varying perspectives to inform the skills, techniques, and approaches in direct practice (Trevithick, 2008, p.

1221). The ambidextrous nature of social work has meant that there is not a homogenous knowledge base for professional practice (Chenoweth and McAuliffe, 2021, p. 127). There is confusion because of the varying language practices for describing direct practice. Chenoweth and McAuliffe (2021, p. 123) illustrate these distinctions between theory, model, framework, paradigm, perspectives, and knowledge as a 'mental slippery slide'. Knowledge is confused by differing terminology; however, in summary, practice theories refer to an ordered set of ideas that constitute a theory for understanding behaviour and identifying or arriving at solutions that lead to change.

Multiple sources of knowledge can cause epistemological difficulties for the profession but Huss (2019, pp. 1 - 2) has argued that the integration of creative arts '… connects between these elements, rather than adding another element'. Creative arts provide a method that can embody *diverse social work elements.* This perspective will be discussed further below as the correlations between clown theory and social work theory are explored.

2.1.2 The uncertainty of truth

The theories that social work draw from are either forged-in or pre-owned by different disciplines; typically, psychology, sociology, medicine, law/legislation, education, and philosophy (Trevithick, 2008, p. 1219; Connolly, Harms, & Maidment, 2017, p. 4). A social work theory is therefore an idea that has been borrowed and re-interpreted through what

Harms and Maidment (2017, p. 4) refer to as a '…disciplinary lens that incorporates social work values, beliefs and knowledge'. The authors propose that it is the disciplinary lens that recycles ideas from other disciplines and transposes them into social work theories (Connolly, Harms, & Maidment, 2017, p. 4). This has resulted in a mix of approaches and ideas under the banner of Social Work Theory that may be incompatible due to varied explanations of causation, human behaviour, society, and change.

The incongruity of truth claims that might be legitimised in social work theory derive from the different notions of understanding that describe professional knowledge-in-practice. Jacobs (2009, p. 15) distinguishes between *knowing that,* described as indicative knowledge, and *knowing how,* described as practical knowledge. Payne (2021, pp. 42 - 44) expands on Jacobs (2009), distinguishing between theory, knowledge, reality and practice. Theory requires *thinking about* something, namely in the social work context, thinking about a service user and their world. Knowledge on the other hand is a described understanding of reality and subsequently, reality is an interpretation of the world that is recognised as true: *knowing-that* (Payne, 2021, pp. 42 - 44).

Knowing-how to perform or enact theory and knowledge is identified as practice (Payne 2021, pp. 42 - 44). Payne (2021, p. 46) asserts that 'practice needs theory to use knowledge…', detailing that, in order to practice, social workers need to *know-how* and *know-how* relies on

knowledge of reality. Significantly, knowledge of reality is reliant on interpretations from theory, which may vary *depending on theory* (Payne, 2021, pp. 44 - 47). Theory, practice and knowledge are fundamentally linked in their pursuit of *knowing* the truth of reality: people, society (*knowing that*) and how to improve both (*knowing how*). Reality exists autonomous from theory; however, what constitutes the truth of reality is contentious.

Social workers are required to comprehend and incorporate multifaceted and evolving knowledge from a scientific evidence-base with practice that appreciates the personal, professional, and cultural contexts of service users (Connolly, Harms, & Maidment, 2017, p. 3). The dilemma for different notions of understanding theory, practice and knowledge is that there are multiple and at times, incompatible truth claims. Truth claims are significant in child protection work as practitioners are tasked with determining whether or not child abuse has occurred and then making decisions on how to act. Varying perspectives from different knowledge bases will alter the certainty of such claims. The uncertainty of truth raises epistemological questions in social work as to the nature of understanding and of reality, and how to pursue both. This tension is discussed further below in the context of the clown's naivety and stupidity as a way forward in approaching uncertainty.

2.1.3 The dilemma of scientific evidence

In the 17th Century the Scientific Revolution redefined knowledge and truth as produced by rational thought. Chenoweth and McAuliffe (2021, p. 126) detail that scientific methods of knowledge production popular from the Enlightenment have been viewed as legitimate claims to truth. The world, and as such human beings, during this period was understood as a machine that could be known, controlled, and changed (Sarup, 1989, p. 54; Howe, 1994, p. 514). Modernism claimed that there was one *truth*, and answers to any questions were *knowable* if there was consistency between *truth* and *knowledge* (Howe, 1994, p. 514).

The social sciences, including sociology and psychology, surfaced in the 19th Century to understand people, arguably so society could control and improve behaviour (Howe, 1994, p. 516). The social sciences used rational analysis to advance the modern project aimed at achieving social control and morality. It was in this epistemological and political context that the formation of social work in the 19th Century occurred (Howe, 1994, p. 517). Social work's perspective has been generated from these modernist ideals such as social progress and the mitigation of human suffering (Reisch, 2013, p. 73; Maylea, 2020, p. 773).

The modern project was the catalyst for the '…industrial revolution, the philosophy of liberalism, the development of disciplines in the sciences and the development of public education' (Smith, 2012, p. 61). Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p. 61) writes that knowledge and culture were '…there to be

discovered, extracted, appropriated and distributed' and this was '…as much part of imperialism as raw materials and military strength'. So many disciplines and fields reflect Western and Eurocentric norms that pathologise the individual and can contradict social work values that aim for social justice. Theories that have been traditionally adopted and endorsed in social work to assist the practitioner to develop knowledge about people and their difficulties tend to have been generated outside of Australia. Thus '…questions have been raised as to their cultural relevance, particularly to indigenous peoples' (Connolly, Harms, & Maidment, 2017, p. 6).

The Western scientific modes of knowledge production that aim to organise, classify, and store new information and discoveries were used to warrant imperialism and colonialism (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012, p. 63). These methods are the means to which, the Western 'civilised' world '…came to 'see', to 'name' and to 'know' First Nations people (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012, p. 63). Approaches to understand the Other were enacted in the context of modern progress of industrial revolution and scientific 'discovery' (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012, p. 63). The European Enlightenment engaged Indigenous communities with an attitude of being the most advanced and successful people and society (Bazin, 1993). Western culture viewed itself as the nucleus for the most legitimate knowledge and made claims of being a superior civilization (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012, pp. 66 – 67).

Wilkie's (1997) *Bringing Them Home Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* states that children were forcibly removed from their families and communities from 1814, in the initial days of European colonisation. Wilkie (1997) writes: 'Nationally we can conclude with confidence that between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities in the period from approximately 1910 until 1970'. Social workers were professionally complicit to the policies and practices of the Stolen Generations (Maylea 2020). The Australian Association of Social Work (AASW, 2004, p. 21) has acknowledged the '…role that non-Indigenous social workers had in the creation of the Stolen Generation'. Social work has not been able to reconcile its past nor contribute to improving the social and emotional contexts of First Nations Australians (Maylea, 2020).

It has been reported that First Nations children in Australia are: 6.5 times more likely to be involved in the child protection system; 11.4 times more likely to be removed from their families; and 10 times more likely to live in out-of-home care (AIFS, 2017, pp. 43 - 51). Furthermore, between 2012 – 2016 the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on care and protection orders have risen 46.1 to 61.9 per 1,000 (AIFS, 2017, p. 46). Nietz (2019, p. 2022) observes that despite reform efforts the high rates of First Nations children and families represented in the Child Protection System continue to rise. There are several varying components, such as social determinants and intergenerational impact of the Stolen

Generation that contribute to First Nation families drawing the attention of Child Safety (Nietz, 2019, p. 2022).

The dilemma of scientific evidence is that the modern vision of understanding, categorising, and progressing enacts the colonising of certain groups by more powerful social groups or assumed 'elites'. In determining truth claims other ways-of-knowing and being are classified as wrong, abnormal, or unsafe. The scientific method emanates from Eurocentric values and has contributed to the colonisation of First Nations people that lead to the Stolen Generation. However, to reject scientific reasoning, a further dilemma emerges: the tension between subjective and objective truth (Trevithick, 2008, p. 1214). The clown's stupidity is discussed below as creating a fissure in the ideals of modernity that resists categorising and determining and instead discovers the world without trying to know it.

2.1.4 The confusion of subjectivity and objectivity

The terms *objectivity* and *subjectivity* are divided, ambiguous and lack feasibility in social work theory and knowledge (Munro and Hardie, 2019, p. 411). They are understood in relationship to each other; for example, if a matter is not objective; it is subjective (Munro and Hardie, 2019, p. 413). Furthermore, objectivity is defined as a means to protect from subjective interpretations and meanings. Objective truth and knowledge are meant to not show any mark of prejudice from the beliefs and values of the social

worker, who is constructing their knowledge of the parent (Munro and Hardie, 2019, p. 413). Whereas subjective knowledge is viewed as comprising truths that people have understood and believed through the lens of their own experiences. People enact different truths based on their unique experiences; thus, truth becomes subjective to experience and perception (Trevithick, 2008, p. 1214). There are two consistent readings of objectivity and subjectivity within the field of Social Work: 1) knowledge that attests to being objective is a defence for truth and reliability; 2) knowledge that attests to being objective suggests and endorses that the findings can be trusted. In both these readings, subjectivity is subjugated as unreliable and objectivity is privileged as more reliable (Munro and Hardie, 2019, p. 416). These perspectives have complicated consequences for the social work knowledge base and child protection practice.

Empirical research based on scientific methods has been considered the standard to obtain objectivity in theory and knowledge (Munro and Hardie, 2019, p. 416). Evidence-based practice in social work has been misinterpreted, according to Munro and Hardie (2019, pp. 412 - 413) as an '…evaluated method of intervention'. The authors argue its original meaning whereby a '…practitioner drawing upon the best evidence from research as well as their clinical expertise and the user's preferences in deciding what to do, namely making an expert judgement' (Munro and Hardie, 2019, pp. 412 - 413).

Munro and Hardie (2019, p. 417) outline two further tensions regarding scientific research and objectivity. First, evidence-based research methodologies, while they aim to curtail bias, cannot claim infallible truths from knowledge production that are absolutely free of the researchers' own values. Second, while in practice certain research findings can be considered as sheer truth, in reality, resolute research findings are scarce. Social work does not have a knowledge-base underpinned by a research archive that provides absolute truths '…but more nuanced indications that some variables tend to be influenced by some other factors on some occasions' (Munro and Hardie, 2019, p. 417). There is a disparity between the circumstances of the service user in practice and the characteristics of people participating in the evidence-based research study (McNeill and Nicholas, 2019, p. 359). There may be some consistent features between the study group and individual service users due to the multiple and intersectional attributes of client groups; however, that does not mean the findings are transferable.

In addition, this disparity, while applicable to every service user, is more apparent for people in minority groups facing more pronounced structural inequalities (McNeill and Nicholas, 2019, p. 359). There is a body of literature that identifies the gaps and practice complications when applying evidence-based practice research findings to culturally diverse service users, partly due to the lack of inclusion of peoples from ethnic minorities in the studies (Aisenberg, 2008; McNeill and Nicholas, 2019, p. 359).

Organisational managers, policy makers and researchers consider objectivity as a preferred ideal for producing knowledge and decision-making – particularly in legal contexts, such as child protection work. However, Munro and Hardie (2019, p. 412) point out that practitioners engaging with service users in direct practice have to draw on subjective knowledges, such as feelings, interpersonal skills, and understanding. Social workers in the child protection context have reported that they feel as though they have either foot standing in two worlds (Hardesty, 2015).

Social work theory is caught in-between subjective and objective knowledge practices: in direct work practitioners engage their emotions, imagination, and the interpersonal attributes of *caring* in order to build rapport with parents and children. However, when they return to their office and prepare court reports or make legal decisions they are asked to remove any remnants of subjective practice in service of objective reasoning (Munro and Hardie, 2019, p. 412). Subjectivity is also problematic, the reliability of knowledge based on values, consciously or unconsciously can result in practices that enact racial prejudice and self-interest. Cleaver and Freeman (1995) found that in risk assessment practices where the mother was West Indian the risk was rated higher among practitioners.

Many frameworks and processes have been imbedded into child protection practice for the purpose of removing the subjectivity of the individual practitioner. Prescriptive language and timeframes for tasks

such as assessment, goal setting and interventions, and decision-making tools to calculate knowledge production diminish the practitioner's own skills (Munro and Hardie, 2019, p. 412). Child protection governance privileges following standardised rules and procedures in knowledge production and reasoning as required for objective decision making (Munro, 2019; Ponnert & Svensson, 2016; Skillmark & Oscarsson, 2020). The confusion of subjectivity and objectivity does not point to a failure in understanding but rather an acknowledgment of the complexity of the social world and human beings (Munro & Hardie, 2019, p. 423). There are so many unique experiences and features of people's lives that a set of rules will only produce superficial understanding and ineffectual practices. Clowning is discussed as approaching the social world with an attitude that considers every step as a new possibility to understand and perceive reality as it is.

2.1.5 The dichotomy of change efforts

Criticism of social work and psychological practices in the 1960s led to the discipline returning to sociological and political perspectives (Howe, 1994, p. 519). The emphasis in social work shifted to focusing on society changes to accommodate the individual rather than the individual changing to fit into society (Howe, 1994, p. 519). The core dilemma in social work has become the dichotomy of focus in its efforts for change – the individual or the system? This is a foundational problem to social work theory and

practice: the service user's ability to have self-determination (linked to their capacity for individual change) and the socio-cultural factors or social determinants, such as poverty that hinder their life (McNeill and Nicholas, 2019, p. 351). Social work is built on a principle of social justice and recognises that there are structural causes to individual social problems; however, most funded programmes aim only for direct work that addresses the individual day-to-day problems of service-users. Social workers employed in roles where the core practice is engaging and supporting service users achieve change; however, their social obstacles are outside the scope and control of the funded service (McNeill and Nicholas, 2019, p. 351).

Maylea (2020, p. 772) states that the social work profession is lacking a logical theory base that navigates its contradictory aims. Trevithick (2008, p. 1220) spotlights the confusion of focus in social work: '…reform or revolution—should it "fit" people into the system, change the system—or both?' There are counter-tempo objectives in social work between social justice and day-to-day realities of what is achievable in direct practice (Williams and Briskman, 2015, p. 3). Leung (2012, p. 348) writes that social work theory is 'baffled by a basic dissonance, in its intention to help people accommodate to the status quo whilst challenging the status quo by attempting to bring about social change'.

Theoretical approaches in social work have attempted to address this problem, in particular *Systems Theory* (Maylea, 2020, p. 776). The aim of

Systems Theory is to understand the social and structural interactions contributing to social difficulties for service users. People experience difficulties when there is a problem of 'fit' between the person's needs and one or more of their systems. Social workers can understand the systems making up a person's environment, across a Micro, Messo and Macro continuum through Eco-Maps and subsequently make plans for action (Healy, 2014, pp. 116 - 136). However, the central purpose of social work, social justice and human rights cannot be mastered or attained in a system wired unfairly (Maylea, 2020, p. 777). Critical and radical perspectives in social work also recognise the structural barriers in society and how they contribute to service users' experience of oppression (Webb, 2019, p. xxxii). However, while social work is built on principles of social justice, most funded programmes aim only for direct work that addresses the individual day to day problems of service-users. Social work practice is performed in '…a highly individualistic climate in which social problems are seen more as personal issues and clients are expected to care for themselves, with minimum government support' (Feldman, 2022, p. 760).

Maylea (2020, p. 776) argues that social work has no theory that navigates the practice reality that service users lack self-determination in an unfair system; one in which social work serves to perpetuate. In response to Maylea (2020), Paul Michael Garrett (2021b), who agrees mostly with Maylea's assessment of social work, suggests an alternative approach – Dissenting Social Work (DSW). Garrett (2021b, p. 1143) draws on terms such as resistance, subversiveness, dissidence, and disruption to

loosely define DSW as an alternative way of responding to a social problem that is opposite to the dominant or hegemonic ideology. Despite this, DSW has not offered a clear approach for direct social work practice within organisational roles. As of yet these attempts have failed to achieve social equity or advances in social justice to help people overcome their environmental circumstances (Maylea, 2020, p. 776). The dichotomy of change efforts is a theoretical duality that culminates in confusion and uncertainty in practice (Maylea, 2020, p. 778). This will be discussed further below with consideration to how clowning disrupts powerful social structures.

2.1.6 The divide between theory and practice

Disputes exist in trying to understand the social work knowledge base that often result in practice confusions. These tensions discussed result in the divide between theory and practice in social work. Significantly this is a divide between understanding social problems and solutions that aim to change them. Social work theorists have drawn on frameworks to help with understanding this divide and the multifaceted nature of social work theory. However, these can serve to confuse further.

Hicks (2016, pp. 400 - 401) has found ambiguity in the way social work theory is understood. First, the explanatory function of theory that interprets people, behaviour and society, rather than theory constructing understanding, features in the literature. Second, theory either justifies or

suggests methods of action and practice in social work (Hicks, 2016, p. 400). Several ideas are often discussed: theories, theories for practice, theoretical approaches, practice theories, practice approaches, perspectives, frameworks, models, techniques, interventions and how these integrate to produce what social workers do. These are often attempting to make understandable the breadth of theoretical ideas in social work that aim to integrate sociological and psychological approaches to individual problems (Healy, 2014). However, the application of so many ideas into practical ways of working with people is problematic. The divide between theory and practice highlights the epistemological misfit of ideas in social work that contributes to confusion and a sense of '*being stuck'* among/between an empathetic aim to help people and the reality that social structures that cause problems are not changeable in everyday practice. A sense of being *stuck* is a feeling supported by Maylea (2020, p. 777):

> Social work is stuck…Social work has no coherent evidence base of its own, drawing on other professions and disciplines in an eclectic and disordered fashion, and has failed to assuage individual suffering…Social work has not held back the flood of oppression, inequality, neoliberalism or managerialism. Social work is stuck and it has failed.

The history of the Child Protection System is one of individuals and governments trying to be helpful and failing. Arguably, the number of

whole-of-system reviews by State Governments indicates a sense that the Child Protection System is at the least *not working* (Northern Territory Government, 2010; Parliament of Tasmania, 2011; Scott, Scales and Cummins, 2012; Carmody, 2013; Nyland, 2016) . In child protection practice, systems are oftentimes not willing to acknowledge failure. It took almost 40 years for the Australian Government to offer a formal apology to members of the Stolen Generation on behalf of the Australian parliament. These practice divides and tensions have contributed to the systematic failures of the child protection system; failures, which continually corner practitioners into undertaking an impossible role. Clown theory (discussed below) accepts inevitable failure and finds a way to move forward despite impossibility. The impossibility of child protection work will now be discussed: a) Child Protection and Family Support; b) Doing Harm while Doing Good; c) Higher Rates of Child Removal and Low Rates of Reunification.

2.1.7 Child protection and family support

Child protection intervention is typically understood as involving two *opposing* practices: *child protection* and *family support* (Venables, Healy & Harrison, 2015, p. 10). The dichotomous dual role in child protection work is described by Syrstad and Slettebø (2020, p. 100) as a complex cycle between parents and children. In the Australian practice context, the *child protection* focus is dominant, placing priority on evidence gathering,

investigation, assessment, and monitoring (Venables, Healy & Harrison, 2015, p. 10). In conflict with this, internationally there is broad acknowledgement that children and parents should be preserved, and services should aim to keep families together safely (Fargion, 2014, p. 24; UNCRC, 1986). The child protection continuum reflects a multifaceted approach to addressing and responding to child abuse that has a dual focus – to *rescue* children from harm and *preserve* the family – this dual aim is complicated.

The child protection approach prioritises prevention and reducing risk through interventions that promote the surveillance role of services (Fargion, 2014, p. 25). This role erodes the practitioners' propensity to build genuine caring partnerships with parents, crucial for family support, as they always have one eye turned to suspicion – concerned that parents are harming their children (Fargion, 2014, p. 25). This is partly due to criticism and recognition that overly investigative and coercive interventions impact families negatively and lead to poor outcomes (Forrester, Westlake, & Glynn, 2012). Conclusions formed from risk assessments, according to Goddard, Broadley and Hunt (2017, p. 138) can be inaccurate and parents mistakenly assessed, and children unjustifiably removed; breaking developmentally detrimental emotional bonds between parents and children. Similarly, practitioners may fail to correctly assess a child who is at risk of harm and who is later found to be experiencing abuse or is murdered (Goddard, Broadley and Hunt, 2017, p. 138).

2.1.8 Doing harm while doing good

While removing children in order to protect them from harm is observed as *good,* there exists a paradoxical dilemma in that removal also causes trauma in children as well as pain, grief, and distress in parents. Ainsworth and Hansen (2012, p. 146) describe this paradox as '…doing harm while doing good'. In Australia and internationally, the precept *the best interests of the child* is enshrined in legislation in order to protect children from harm and safeguard their right to safety.

Ainsworth and Hansen (2012, p. 147) scrutinise the theoretical and legal uncertainty that surrounds the construct of what is meant by children's *best interests*. There is a theoretical misfit in the accepted knowledge that by removing a child and placing them into foster care is preventing them from being harmed when the intervention itself is *harmful.* Hansen and Ainsworth (2009, 2011) and Reece (2010) argue that the constructed premise of foster care preventing harm is enacted to justify unfair and poor practice. McPherson et. al., (2018, p. 525) highlight that children and young people in out-of-home care experience ongoing adversity and failing outcomes across homelessness, difficulty with mental health, representation in the criminal justice system, and poor education. Furthermore, there is a sound international canon of research that features concerns regarding children's wellbeing from being removed and placed in foster care, as having low educational and behavioural outcomes (Cusick,

Courtney, Havlicek, & Hess, 2012; Doyle, 2007, 2008; Fernandez & Barth, 2010; Lawrence, Carlson, & Egeland, 2006). Roughly 20% of foster placements fail the first time; the predictor of a placement failing is a child having a previous failed placement (Ainsworth & Hansen, 2012, p. 151; Barber and Delfabbro, 2004).

2.1.9 Higher rates of child removal and low rates of reunification

In Australia, child protection systems, in principle, are intent on children remaining in the care of their biological family and only remove children as a last resort due to significant safety concerns (Cocks, 2019, p. 204). However, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019) has reported that the number of children in out-of-home care has continued to increase, partly a consequence of children spending longer periods of time in care. This is even more so for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The rates of families successfully reunified in Australia is unclear; however, Cocks (2019, p. 204) reports:

> There is evidence suggesting that reunification rates may be low in Australia, especially for children who have been in care for longer than a few months, for young babies and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The Marsh, Browne, Taylor, and Davis (2017) study on the child protection system in New South Wales found that the reunification rate of 1,834 infants placed in care at birth was 6.9% after two years. In South Australia,

Fernandez and Delfabbro (2010) found that 36% of children were reunified within eight months of being removed; however, this fell significantly after that time. This study highlighted that the reunification of Aboriginal children with their birth families was five times less likely (Fernandez & Delfabbro, 2010).

There is a range of social and emotional circumstances that are concurrent with child protection intervention and contribute to higher rates of child removal and lower rates of reunification; substantially, poverty, experiencing homelessness and social isolation (Bywaters, Brady, Sparks, & Bos 2014; Fidler, 2018; Raissian & Bullinger, 2016). Significantly, in Australia, First Nations families, single parents, parents who have themselves grown up in foster care, and being a teenage parent are further concurrent to child removal and low rates of reunification (Cocks, 2019, p. 206; Delfabbro, Barber, & Cooper, 2002; Fernandez, 2018; Fernandez & Delfabbro, 2010).

2.1.10 Summary

Social work theory is a contested site, rife with ambiguity in its pursuit for knowledge about how to achieve individual and social change. These ambiguities have been summarised as *the uncertainty of truth, the dilemma of scientific evidence, the confusion of subjectivity and objectivity*, *the dichotomy of change efforts* and *the divide between theory and practice*. The central purpose of social work, social justice and human

rights cannot be mastered or attained in a system wired unfairly. Social workers perform an impossible role in the child protection field entangled in a socio-political web of inevitable failure. The theoretical basis for social work is limited in its propensity to navigate the practice reality that service users lack self-determination in an unfair system; one which social work serves to perpetuate. These attempts have failed to achieve social equity or advances in social justice to help people overcome their environmental circumstances (Maylea, 2020, p. 776). The ambiguities and tensions discussed in this section provoked my own sense of being *stuck as a child protection officer.* Practice *stuck-ness* has been the instigator for looking elsewhere, including other disciplines, for an alternative approach to knowing and doing child protection work. Clown theory will be presented as an approach which enables one to keep moving forward despite inevitable and ongoing failure, while remaining engaged in relationship with vulnerable people.

2.2 Clown theory and practice

Clowns are a social and cultural phenomenon that evoke many different representations and meanings (Davison 2016, p. 14; Otto 2001). This literature review aims to consider the history and research of clowning within the conceptual and thematic parameters of *clown logic*. It is proposed that the concept of clown-logic is found in the history of clowning, beginning with the Whiteface and Auguste clown duo. There are many cultural entry points to clown history and practice. Otto (2001, p. 34; 39) writes Jesters and Fools were historically a cultural phenomenon that permeated almost every culture: '…they exist or have existed

in China, Europe, Central Asia, Persia, the Middle East, Africa, India, North and South America, Russia and Japan'. Furthermore, and even more curious, was the role they held within these cultures, the jester was not an entertainer but was a close confident of the king (Otto, 2001, p. 34). This project however, focuses on the European developments in clown practice, not to ignore the many diverse cultural contributions to contemporary clown practice but to concentrate on three predominant conceptual themes, that can be mapped to constitute a distinct clown-logic. First the clown's *Low Status, Misfitness* and *Foolishness*; second, the clown's *Stupidity, Naivety and Not-Knowing*; third, the clown's inevitable *Failure and Flop*. These concepts relate to the figure of the European Auguste clown and have been explored by Jacques Lecoq's concept of the *New Clown*, theorised further by his lineage of clown teachers and performers. Hence, the nature of this literature review will examine clown history from the European tradition beginning in the 19th century.

The literature grafts the three concepts onto critical pedagogy and cultural theory relevant to social work theory. The conceptualisation of Queer Failure as explored by Jack Halberstam (2011) is explored as a critical underpinning for a possible clown theory. Therefore, the literature demonstrates how clown-logic might be considered as a distinct clown theory that can enact a *relational presence* with people who are suffering and oppressed. The potential for clown theory to be examined as a possible social work theory in the child protection context that may offer alternative ways of knowing and responding to the tensions already discussed, is introduced.

2.2.1 Incompetence and uncertainty: The Auguste clown

Throughout history, comedy has consistently drawn upon the failure and outwitting of a stupid clown by a second cleverer idiot (Whiteface clown – discussed further below) as an integral method for eliciting humour in an audience. The stupid clown, has been referred to as *he who gets slapped,* known as the stupidus or Auguste clown (Towsen,1976, p. 206). The Auguste clown originated in early circus folklore, where truth is somewhat exaggerated; however, the stories consistently feature the accidental nature of the clown's beginning. The tales consist of either an audience member, stagehand, or horseman, stumbling drunk (his cheeks and nose red from the alcohol) into the circus drawing the attention of the audience, causing an unplanned accident that results in the raucous laughter of the audience (Carlyon, 2016, p. 188; Davison, 2013, pp. 66 – 68).

The infamous Fratellini brothers' version of this story is set in Berlin where the word *Auguste* is slang for *stupid* (Davison, 2013, p. 66). The director or ringmaster invites the accidental performer back the next day to repeat the act. Pierre Byland (2016, p. 90) has claimed that the *clown* (whom he refers to as the *stupid Auguste*) was born by accident. Byland (2016, p. 90) suggests that the discovery of Lecoq's New Theatre Clown was also an accident (see further below). The Auguste became a cultural phenomenon in late 19th Century Europe, a popularity that reflects the prevalent social concerns (Davison, 2013, p. 68). In a time of desire for control and certainty, the emergence of a figure that represented a collective uncertainty may have acted as a social cathartic release. In the

circus the Auguste resists mastery of acts, skills or tasks; instead, he is incompetent at everything (Davison, 2013, p. 71). The Auguste's costume was marked by incompetence, including all the components of a gentleman's suit, but all the pieces of clothing are ill-fitting and mis-sized: *too long or too short, too tight or too baggy, too big or too small* (Peacock, 2009, p. 2).

2.2.2 Socio-Politico statements: The Whiteface and Auguste duo

The refined whiteface clown has its theatrical roots in the commedia dell'arte stock characters: the hapless Harlequin (Arlecchino) and the poetic Pierrot (Davison, 2013, p. 34; Pietrini, 2018, p. 198). The Whiteface is characterised by holding a stature of cultural competency conveyed by a sense of self-importance, high-status and sophistication (Bouisac, 2015, p. 50; Peacock, 2009, p. 2). He performs *rhetorical excellence* to present himself as a dominant evolutionary figure – he wants to be the best (Bouisacc, 2015, p. 56). However, Bouisacc (2015, p. 56) explains that the Whiteface is a 'semiotic bubble', a ruse to trick people into believing he is important and sophisticated. The Whiteface and Auguste clowns were quickly formed into a duo from their inception, creating a circus act that rose in popularity and became the dominant form of clowning (Davison, 2013, p. 72; Peacock, 2009, p. 4; Peacock, 2014, p. 2). The pairing created the comedic convention of the high-status Whiteface in control and the Auguste, struggling desperately to match the power and position of his

partner (Peacock, 2009, p. 4; Towsen, 1976, pp. 214 - 223). Thematically in the evolution of the *clown*, the imbalance of status is both a source of play and an instigator for reflection on rules and power. Contradiction appears to underpin the *know-how* of *clown logic* as a theoretical concept (Varró, 2010, p. 212). McManus (2003, p. 74) explains this conflict between the Whiteface and the Auguste:

> …the White Clown, continually looks for a logical explanation, insisting on some kind of order to whatever situation presents itself or some cultural information that he thinks he understands better than his Auguste partner. The other member of the team…understands neither the actual logic of a given situation nor his partner's efforts to explain it to him.

One of the most famous and enduring Whiteface and Auguste pairings was Chocolat and Footit, which provides a helpful example for understanding the clown archetypes. The Auguste, Chocolat, was an untrained clown, named Raphael Padilla (died 1919), born in Havana, Cuba. Padilla was an orphan who was sold into servitude as a child and taken to Portugal and enslaved by a wealthy European. However, as an adolescent he ran away to Bilbao, in Northern Spain, where the Whiteface clown, Tony Grice, found him in a cabaret performing feats of strength. Grice employed Padilla as his family's servant as well as in the circus, where he performed as the Auguste in Grice's *The Train Station*. Eventually, Chocolat left Grice and encountered George Footit (1864–1921), an Englishman from Manchester,

with whom the conceptualisation of the Auguste developed further (Smalls, 2002, p. 367). Footit, a Whiteface clown, was an apprentice in his father's circus and had combined acrobatics and clowning, impressing audiences with somersaults and words (Towsen, 1976, pp. 216 - 218). Footit found the ideal Auguste partner in Chocolat; the pair started performing together in France in 1894 and became the prototype of the Whiteface and Auguste (Peacock, 2009, p. 4). Footit and Chocolat widened the dramatic and comedic possibilities of the clown duo; they could '…play longer scenes, take up more time and evolve more intricate gags' (Davison, 2013, p. 71). Davison (2013, p. 71) continues:

> Chocolat was the perfect opposite to Footit: slow, stoic, clumsy and stupid, versus Footit's intelligence, nervousness and lightness. Together they heralded a new era for the clown repertoire: dramatic scenes with dialogue and slapstick, and an end to acrobatic trick pantomime and any remnants of the old nonsensical mock-Shakespeareans.

Their clown act exposed the social and political contrasts inherent in the bullish Whiteface and the stupid Auguste (Towsen, 1976, pp. 219 -223). The duo symbolized the relationship between 'whites' and 'blacks' at the time. It was a representation of colonial domination. The Auguste is mocked by the Whiteface clown, victimizing him in front of the public in the circus or on the theatre stage (Bouisacc, 2015, p. 172). Footit's bullish oppression of Chocolat was frivolous and unnecessary; Towsen (1976, p.

219) describes it as a '…slapstick equivalent of a harsh social order'. There was no logical reason for the master Whiteface clown to punish the lowly Auguste, nor was he obliged to provide a fair rationale.

The social position of the Auguste as an undermining victim of the domineering Whiteface clown emerged with the socio-political backdrop '…of the socialist revolutions at the beginning of the twentieth century…in reaction to the stereotypes then reigning in the rest of capitalist Europe' (Bouisacc, 2015, p. 172). The Whiteface and Auguste duo represented the oppressive nature of elitist masters exploiting the underclass (Bouisacc, 2015, p. 172). This social mirror was glaringly overt in Footit and Chocolat's act. Footit and Chocolat's act provokes critical questions regarding whether the clown duo were countering or enabling racist social structures. The undermining antics of a black man under a white master in the socio-political context of French colonialism was overtly political (Bouisacc, 2015, p. 172). McMahan (2019, p. 226) argues that Chocolat's use of clown mechanisms such as subversion and insubordination '…undermined the black/white dichotomy within the clown/auguste paradigm'. Despite the Whiteface Foottit often winning the give-and-take routines in their entrees, Chocolat's various forms of resistance, reveals Foottit the true idiot and his authority as ridiculous (Manea, 1994, pp. 36 – 37, 41; McMahan, 2019, p. 232).

2.2.3 Order and disorder: The clown entrée

Davison (2013, p. 71 - 72) explains that the clown duo act expanded into mini-dramas called *clown entrées*, which instigated theatre performances. In this ensemble, the dramatic use of conflict and resolution takes clowning to a higher thematic level. The Whiteface Clown and Auguste was the focus for the narrative of these acts and grew in popularity up and into the 1930s (Davison, 2013, p. 71 - 72). Davison (2013, p. 87) argues that clown entrée was a developed form of clowning as drama. Little (1988, p. 150) describes the clown entrée as a twenty-minute sketch that presents a narrative based on the opposition between the Whiteface and the Auguste.

In the basic dramaturgical structure, the Whiteface aims to master a task or trick for the public, but their *know-how* is interrupted by the Auguste and/or Counter-Auguste (Little, 1988, p. 150). The Augustes involve themselves in the actions by enlisting the Whiteface to help by playing on their vanity – the Whiteface's ambition to be centre stage. However, regardless of their intention the Augustes '…dissolve the Whiteface's carefully articulated endeavours into chaos, thereby disarranging conventional authority, meaning, and control' (Little, 1988, p. 150). Catastrophe and disorder ensue as the Whiteface's plans collapse and they are left to pick up the ruins of disaster.

Tristan Remy's collection of Clown Entrées entitled *Clown Scenes* (1962) is a written record of *one-ring* circus entrées from 1890 until the mid-20th Century. Davison (2013, p. 89) reports that '…Remy's selection…focuses

on those which rely for their impact not on props or mechanical effects but on the drama of clown and auguste…'. Remy (1997, p. 10) writes that these Clown Entrées consist of the Whiteface, Auguste and the Ringmaster. Bouisaac (2015, p. 173) argues that clown routines consist of three r*ecurring narrative patterns* and offer a dynamic that has sustained numerous clown acts across generations from clown to clown '…who are prone to imitate each other…'. First, clown routines limit the number of protagonists in a narrative to two: the Whiteface and the Auguste. This pair is then pitted against either the audience or the ringmaster. Even when the routine includes both an Auguste and Counter-Auguste with the Whiteface '…the basic pair of opposite agencies remains the dialogic core of the act' (Bouisaac, 2015, p. 173).

The second *narrative pattern* highlighted by Bouisaac (2015, p. 173) consists of a clown routine commencing with either a disruption or an interruption of the expected normal order of things. Bouisaac (2015, p. 173) explains this disruption further:

> An announcement by the ringmaster or a musical performance by the whiteface is interrupted by the auguste, who triggers a cascade of unexpected events. Solo augustes often enter the ring unannounced, without using the artists' entrance, emerging from the public and crossing the border that delimits the ritual space of the ring or mingling in the audience and causing some brouhaha requiring the intervention of the ringmaster.

The third *narrative pattern* in a clown routine is an act that relies on a complete transformation of the circumstance '…such as the breaking of an object, of a rule, the loss of a game, a punishment, a reversal of fortune, or a surprising development' (Bouisaac, 2015, p. 174). McManus (2003, p. 12) writes that a clown routine centres on an encounter of a rationally simple problem but for which the clown is confused and creates a complex web of problems in their search for a solution. The clown's solution to a problem enacts a logic that can redefine the original problem in unexpected ways and take an audience by surprise (McManus, 2003, p. 13). As such, clown routines unfasten conventions and rules, exposing them to ridicule and contradiction, thus effecting chaos in a performance. McManus (2003, p. 13) discusses the rule breaking function of clowns in performance:

> The key feature uniting all clowns, therefore, is their ability, through skill or stupidity, to break the rules governing the fictional world. But in practice, this definition of clown becomes extremely complex. The rules governing the fictional world come in two distinct categories. There are the rules of performance, governing the mimetic conventions being used, and social rules, governing the cultural norms of the world being imitated on stage. The two phenomena affect each other because disruption of the mimetic conventions usually implies disruption of cultural norms, and the clown's difficulty with the cultural norm often leads to his disrupting the mimetic convention.

Bouisaac (2015, p. 174) highlights, however, that clowns will bring chaos and restore the order that they have provoked and disturbed. Clowning had reached an advanced theatrical level. Many clown acts often closed with the clowns performing a song or a dance to symbolize the restoration of harmony. This *narrative pattern* can be replayed with different stories involving the exact-same dramaturgical structure '…as long as it involves a transgression and the punishment of the transgressor followed by the restoration of order' (Bouisaac, 2015, p. 175).

2.2.4 The 'archetypal' clown: 20th century theatre

The clown as a central figure in 20th Century Theatre questions, criticises and agonises against the catastrophe of two World Wars and their aftermath. The clown has *stood-in* for the hero who is a distinctly contradictory stage character (McManus, 2003, p. 12). Davison (2013, p. 51) writes that the predominant figures of 20th Century theatre, '…are not only influenced by, but virtually founded upon clowning'. Modernist dramatists, such as Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett and Dario Fo, used the clown as protagonist for political purposes (McManus, 2003, p. 15).

The Whiteface and Auguste dichotomy, central to clown logic, is mimetic of many typical relationships; for example, Master/Servant; Major/Soldier or Boss/Employee. Manea (1994, p. 36) argues that humanity's tragicomedy is condensed in the relationship between the Whiteface and the foolish Auguste. The Whiteface represents a *ridiculous authority* and

will act with an uncompromising embodiment of ideals and follow the rules at any cost (Manea, 1994, pp. 36 – 37, 41). The Auguste is an '…anti-authoritarian character…a voice for a reactionary, oppressive ethos…a voice for underprivileged proletarian culture' (McManus, 2003, pp. 15 – 16). The clowns' distance themselves from the norm and enact a new and alienated mode of being and behaving in the world (Davison, 2013, p. 54).

In the play *Mann ist Mann*, Brecht adopts the Whiteface and Auguste dichotomy for the battlefield. The archetype is mimic of the Major/Soldier relationship as Brecht was writing in the political context between the aftermath of World War I and the commencement of World War II. The protagonist Galy Gay in *Mann ist Mann* is the Auguste; his opposite Whiteface clowns are a British machine-gun squad and their sergeant Charles Fairchild ('Bloody Five') (McManus, 2003, p. 56). Galy Gay is inept at orders, he cannot master marching, or look after his gun or wear his uniform correctly (McManus, 2003, p. 56). The Whiteface are full of confidence, experts of rules and orders; however, they are also inept at military tasks despite their rhetoric (McManus, 2003, p. 56).

Galy Gay reverses the power relations when he turns into "a human fighting machine," and terrorises the other soldiers (Speirs, 2021, pp. 39); a metamorphosis, according to McManus (2003, p. 69) from Auguste to Whiteface. Galy Gay only becomes a man when he joins the collective and therefore a representation of the illusion of bourgeois class as a private individual (Silberman, 2012, p. 179). Silberman (2012, p. 178) asserts

that the play is an illustration on class mobility: Galy Gay, '…has no individual personality but conforms to the changing circumstances around him because he simply cannot say no'. However, World War II and the Nazis caused the main theme to shift to being about a *bad collective* and Gal Gay's identity reconstruction and criminalisation as a commentary on Hitler's impact (Schechter, 2007, p. 96; Silberman, 2012, p. 179). Central to Brecht is the concept of people and the nature of change; people must be able to modify and transform (McManus, 2003, p. 54).

Beckett's plays reflected a world almost extinguished by World War II (McManus, 2003, p. 71). His clowns linger in what appears to be a meaningless void, seemingly with no purpose or justification for existence (Varró, 2010, p. 207). These clowns approach the grim reality of the world laughing with a resigned sense of helplessness, while questioning whether the only option left is suicide: a 'tragicomic approach to the world…', whereby the only option left is to laugh at the misery of mankind (Varró, 2010, p. 207).

In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett draws on the Whiteface Clown and Auguste archetype for his main characters Didi and Gogo (Varró, 2010, p. 209). Didi is the Whiteface Clown who '…continually looks for a logical explanation, insisting on some kind of order to whatever situation presents itself or some cultural information that he thinks he understands better than his Auguste partner' (McManus, 2003, p. 74). Gogo is the Auguste who '…understands neither the actual logic of a given situation nor his

partner's efforts to explain it to him' (McManus, 2003, p. 74). This dichotomy is important for the critical stance of the clown in Beckett's plays: the clowns can laugh and keep moving, regardless '…of the unbearable anguish of the human condition, and at the improbability that it will ever change for the better…' (Varró, 2010, p. 207). Beckett, in contrast to Brecht, presents the clown in an environment with little opportunity for transformation or individual change. The hostile and oppressive contexts are immovable and man's efforts for change appear to be futile. Didi and Gogo depict humanity's pursuit of fulfilment in the face of emptiness and meaninglessness (Fletcher, 1998, p. 201). They can laugh despite the situation being hopeless.

Similarly, Dario Fo links the clown archetypes to socio-political power structures. The approach of Brecht and Beckett to the Whiteface and Auguste relationship is metaphorical, but for Fo it is literal and he wants his audience to clearly understand: 'The Auguste (Tony) represents proletarian man and anyone who prefers the White Clown (Louis), allies himself with the bosses' (McManus, 2003, p. 116). Fo highlights this archetype as a class struggle: '…Augustes representing anti-authoritarian, class-conscious values, and White Clowns representing pawns of the existing power structure' (McManus, 2003, p. 16). The action is not the drama of the play; rather it is the socio-cultural and political history as a narrative full of oppressors and oppressed. The audience laughter he generates serves a political purpose. According to Valleriani (2017, p. 82), in 1960s Italy there

was a significant power imbalance between the proletarian workers and their masters, which accords with Fo's intention (1991, p. 172):

> In the world of clowns there are two alternatives: to be dominated…or else to dominate, which gives us the boss, the white clown… while various…Augustes…live on their wits, occasionally rebelling but generally getting by as best they can.

Fo's clown represents a social class: the proletarian is fundamentally political and encounters the power structures around him. The Whiteface and Auguste dichotomy as mimetic of class struggle is the basis for his work (McManus, 2003, p. 163). In *Mistero Buffo* (1969), Fo is a solo clown moving between lectures, storytelling, monologues, dialogue between characters (he plays every character) and breaking the fourth wall – engaging frequently with the audience. Fo replicates the dichotomy by placing characters into two groups: The Whiteface clown is God, clergy and wealthy, while the Auguste is Christ, peasants, and radicals (McManus, 2003, pp. 117 - 119). The play is a series of historical and biblical episodes as told by those just out of the action, an account of subjugated knowledges. There is the aftermath of Christ's miracles, with the newly healed upset that they will now have to go to work; the drunk priest whose sermon declares wine as God's idea not the Devil's and a Jester flirting with the Grim Reaper (Dunnett, 2006, p. 118). Dario Fo's clown archetype questions, provokes and challenges oppressive social and religious

structures with the aim of prompting audiences to challenge those in power themselves (Guzzetta, 2018, p. 258).

Brecht, Beckett and Fo all draw on the Whiteface and Auguste archetype to reveal and comment on oppressive social structures, seemingly with the aim to spark reflection and action on socio-political concerns. The contradictory dynamic between these two opposites has been utilized by 20th Century Theatre Practitioners because the pair both reflect and provoke socio-political realities inherent in class structures (Manea, 1994, p. 37, 52; McManus, 2003, p. 17). The Auguste's misunderstanding of the Whiteface's rules exposes them as ridiculous and creates space for criticism and reflection (McManus, 2003, p. 16). Tobias (2007, p. 38) argues that clowns are inherently critical due to their inability to behave in line with social norms that leads to crossing defined boundaries. The clown's boundary crossing fuses disparate elements that are normally kept separate by social constructs. Consequently '…the basic assumptions, hierarchies and values of the established order that are upheld by the various boundaries are questioned, reassessed and subverted' (Tobias 2007, p. 38). *Clown logic* is generated through contradiction; that is, clowns counter the norms, rules, and behaviours of their social context, allowing for reflection and discussion.

Brecht also enacts a type of *clown logic* in his *epic theatre*, which involves '…the direct telling of a story in order to encourage the viewer to assess the situation explained in the narrative and consider how it could be altered or

adapted in different circumstances' (McManus, 2003, p. 54). His approach includes the technique *Verfremdungseffek* as a device to estrange or defamiliarise the audience, to rupture their empathy for the characters to make them more aware they are watching a play and to provoke discussion (Hake, 2021, p. 158; Jameson, 1998, p.39; Speirs, 2021, pp. 37 - 38). According to Mele (2021, p. 4), the estrangement or distancing of the audience protects them from emotional participation, freeing them to reflect on solutions to the socio-political problems presented. Like the naivety of the Auguste, Brecht disrupts the rules governing classical theatre, where characters and plots are received passively by audiences as fixed; instead, he opens the possibilities for change (Mele, 2021, p. 4). Fo draws on a similar approach called *Umorismo*, to create conflicts of perception, while simultaneously provoking laughter. Laughter is invoked via an awareness of the opposite; however, the humour is disrupted through a feeling to the contrary. Fo aims to challenge audience perception, invoking a dialect about social and political concerns and empathy for the oppressed (McManus, 2003, p. 114).

The Whiteface and Auguste duo remained popular throughout the 20th Century, while clowning evolved. The two roles changed, instigated by the Auguste's triumph in upstaging the Whiteface (Davison, 2013, p. 72). By the late 20th century, the simple Auguste created a new identity as a solo performer (Bouisacc, 2015, p. 172). Davison (2013, p. 65) argues that the Auguste clown is crucial to present understandings of clowning and has '…come to signify "clown" itself'. The Auguste clown emerges as the figure

who breaks the rules, makes strange the reflection of social structure projected by the Whiteface and reveals an awareness of the opposite – that is, a different perception of the world. The Auguste, or as he would become known, the New Clown, can disrupt the rules of any social context. The New Clown undermines authority through his low status, misfitness, stupidity, naivety, failure and playfulness; concepts explored further below. The clown enacts a distinct *clown logic* that both ridicules authority and perceives reality differently, leading to dialogue and problem solving.

2.3 The new clown

In 1962 the pedagogy of *the 'new clown'* was developed by Jacques Lecoq at the L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris. It completes the journey of the clown from the commedia dell'arte to the circus and to the theatre (Mele, 2021, pp. 5 – 7). Lecoq (2000, p. 150) recounts the incorporation of clown training in his pedagogy:

> Clowns first appeared in the 1960s, when I was investigating the relationship between the commedia dell'arte and circus clowns. My main discovery came in answer to a simple question: the clown makes us laugh, but how? One day I suggested that the students should arrange themselves in a circle – recalling the circus ring – and make us laugh. One after the other, they tumbled, fooled around, tried out puns, each one more fanciful than the one before, but in vain! The result was catastrophic. Our throats dried up, our stomachs

> tensed, it was becoming tragic. When they realised what a failure it was, they stopped improvising and went back to their seats feeling frustrated, confused and embarrassed. It was at that point, when they saw their weaknesses, that everyone burst out laughing, not at the characters that they had been trying to show us, but at the person underneath, stripped bare for all to see.

The pedagogy involved in the new clown training involves the students finding their own *inner clowns.* Gaulier (2007, p. 302) explains that the clown is the student's '…hidden twin, ridiculous, comic, vulnerable and stupid'. Lecoq (2002, p. 150) asserts that 'the clown doesn't exist aside from the actor performing him. We are all clowns, we all think we are beautiful, clever and strong, whereas we all have our weaknesses, our ridiculous side, which can make people laugh when we allow it to express itself'.

Mele (2021, p. 8) refers to Lecoq's New Clown as *the search for one's clown*, an approach that was less interested in the make-up and costumes of the Whiteface and Auguste circus clown. Instead, he drew on the pedagogical developments of one of his students, Pierre Byland, who was more concerned with an *internal clown* that aims to feature the distinctive movement, idiosyncrasies, and traits of the actor themselves – *the person* (Mele, 2021, pp. 4 - 5). Byland (2016, pp. 79 – 80) was present during Lecoq's (2000, p. 150) anecdote in class when he explored clowning and discovered the importance of weakness. Byland (2016, p. 80) recalls:

> Aber Lecoq hatte es sofort kapiert: Wir lachten über das Fiasko. Nicht die Improvisation brach- te uns zum Lachen, sondern der Improvisierende, und zwar nachträglich, weil er uns lächerlich vorkam. Die ›Pädagogik des Fiaskos‹ war erfunden worden, ausgelöst durch einen Unfall – durch die Erfahrung unfreiwilli- ger Komik… Das Prinzip des Fiaskos: Es klappt nicht, niemand lacht. Mit dieser Entdeckung entstand der neue Clown, zufällig, durch einen Unfall. Es war der 6. Oktober 1962, halb elf Uhr morgens.
>
> [Lecoq understood it immediately: We laughed at the fiasco. It was not the improvisation that made us laugh, but the improviser, and afterwards, because he seemed ridiculous to us. The pedagogy of the fiasco had been invented, triggered by an accident – by the experience of involuntary comedy… The principle of the fiasco: It doesn't work, nobody laughs. With this discovery, the new clown was created, by chance, by accident].

The *internal clown* is simply the person, the human, exposed of social layers used to impress our peers and social worlds. Angela de Castro, taught by Byland (2015, p. 147), asserts clowning is not a technique, but a state:

> …A state that you put yourself in, to be able to play, or to create, or to be. There are many lines of clowning - which are all different, but no one is better than one or the other. They all live in this state. I understood that suddenly. When Byland said that, it was the most

> clear statement I had ever heard. It's not something that you can learn technically. It's something that you have to put yourself in it. A different intelligence.

Weitz (2012, p. 86) says that clown training as exercises help a student to peel back the social veneer to reveal the vulnerable person who does not understand the world. Clown training is the practice of unlearning the certainty inherent in modernist ideals of knowledge production. The essence of clown is that the performers dare to show their own stupidity when confronted with the unknown (Laanela and Sacks, 2015, p. 19). The world is for exploration, and nothing is known, hence the clowns' eyes are open wide in their attempt to understand it.

Clown training has been significantly impacted by another of Lecoq's students, Philippe Gaulier, who would later teach at the E'cole Jacques Lecoq between 1976 and 1980. Gaulier further developed the school's clown pedagogy as instigated by both Lecoq and Byland (Purcell Gates, 2011, p. 232). Angela de Castro (p. 147) has pointed out that the clown pedagogy of both Pierre Byland and Philippe Gaulier are two sides of a coin: with Gaulier there was no *bullshit*; with Byland there was *simplicity:* No bullshit and simplicity. Gaulier's attention to *no bullshit* aims to remove the serious, egocentric adult that hides the playful and genuine child underneath. Gaulier (2007, p. 174) writes:

> If an actor hides the child they once were, they will play the character too much and underline it. Thus, they are boring. What do you do

> to bring the child's face back to life? You don't bring the face back to life; you remove the layers of bad make-up put on as they became an adult…If you have someone who hides the child they were, put them in a light, on the chair, right in the middle of the audience. Ask them to sing a lullaby. They can't beat out the time with their head, their feet or their fingers**.**

Lecoq's 'New Clown', promoted by him and his adherents as the way forward in Clown practice, has had the advantage and benefit of centuries-old themes and theories from which to teach and appreciate the new. The next section of this chapter considers specific theories that have influenced Lecoq as well as generations of clown practitioners.

2.3.1 Low status and misfitness

The terms *clown* and *Auguste* originated as demeaning insults towards people who were at odds with social normalities and rules (Bouisacc, 2015, pp. 171 - 172). *Clown* first emerged in the late 16th Century as a derogatory label for country dwellers arriving in London for the first time (Bouissac, 2015, p. 171; Wiles, 1987, p. 23). *Clown* is derived from the terms 'colonus' and 'clod', referring to a farmer or a rustic, used to refer to a stupid person (Towsen, 1976, p. 56). The rustic clown described a new social class who did not know how to behave in the city and was therefore considered inferior. *Clown* describes both a social class and how that class behaves: their idiocy in the context of chivalry (Davison, 2013, p. 24).

The clown takes a marginal and low position regarding social status as 'other' or an outsider whose thinking, knowing and doing is different from normality (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 159; Tobias, 2007, p. 38; Varró, 2010, p. 219). Bakhtin's (1981, p. 159) writes the clown sees the falseness in every situation:

> …The right to be "other" in this world, the right not to make common cause with any single one of the existing categories that life makes available; none of these categories quite suits them, they see the underside and the falseness of every situation. Therefore, they can exploit any position they choose, but only as a mask. The rogue still has some ties that bind him to real life; the clown and the fool, however, are "not of this world"

Bere (2016, p. 76) terms the clown's low status and outsider position as *Misfitness* or the *misfit clown.* He argues that the clown is the ultimate representation of the misfit on stage (Bere, 2019, p. 3). Misfitness is seen as a condition that is universally experienced; everyone tries to fit in and everyone fails to do so in a particular manner. The way everyone dresses, walks, speaks and so on are all socialised to fit-in and to have some form of status in the world. The clown, however, is a misfit not only because he fails to fit in but because he accepts his position as a misfit and subsequently *makes the most of it*. To clown is to deliberately make a feature of the unique misfitting qualities of the person performing as a clown.

Misfitness relates to the way people try to fit in with others through social conventions with more or less success. The notion of *more or less* is important for understanding Bere's concept (2016, p. 76), as it is in this difference that the person can fail, and it is these failures that constitute their *misfitness.* He explains how the performer practices clown technique to display and enact *misfitness* (Bere, 2019, p. 7). Importantly, the clown's misfitness signifies that he does not fit into everyday contexts such as: a) bodily failure (misfitting clothes), b) failing objects, c) failure to fit into social norms or failure at understanding a situation (Bere, 2019, p. 7 - 8). Rather than using failure to learn the correct or best way (as in the dominant discourse on failure), the clown's failure – their misfitness – reveals something about the world and social behaviour.

Bere (2019, p. 3) asserts that the clown's embodiment of *misfitness* is a form of hermeneutics as clowns become *agents of disclosure.* He terms this concept a *hermeneutics of failure* and explains that the clown's contrasting understanding of the world reveals or discloses the tacit rules that govern the social and political world. He considers how clowns disclose the world through their failure to fit into society, referring to clowning as *practiced failure,* which he describes as the way clowns interpret and understand the concept of failure. In addition, Bere (2019, p. 3) argues that as *agents of disclosure* once the clown reveals these rules, they are also able to challenge and subvert them.

Bere's (2013, 2016, 2019) notion of misfit logic is supported by authors such as Varró (2010) who asserts that the dramatists of the Theatre of the Absurd draw on the clown's low status position as outsider and critical approach to society (Varró, 2010, p. 212). According to Varró (2010, p. 206) the clown's distinctive outsider position to society allows him to approach and view the world differently. To clown is to be subversive, counter-hegemonic and socially critical. The clown's position is far apart from status and socially accepted ways of knowing and being (Varró, 2010, p. 218).

The clown characters in the Absurd draw on the marginalised position of the clowns and their propensity for critical thinking, especially revealing the gaps in the social and political systems of modernism and the 20th Century (Varró, 2010, p. 219). Varró (2010, p. 219) highlights that because *clown logic* is enacted from a marginalised position '…visions of hopelessness and despair become crystallized'. Bere (2019, p. 5) also argues that, since human beings are continually trying to fit into the world, being a *misfit* is a defining universal feature of humanity. Importantly, in Bere's *hermeneutics of failure* the clown accepts his misfitness and continues. The author introduces a principle for his argument: '…the clown represents the one who accepts his condition as misfit and makes the most of it' (Bere, 2019, p. 7). He refers to his concept of *hermeneutics of failure* as a *misfit logic* that aims to '…disclose and create new possibilities for understanding and solving our everyday problems' (Bere 2019, p. 21).

In the healthcare setting, clowns are low status beings who do not fit into the seriousness of the medical context. Tener, et. al. (2012, p. 14) claim that the clown is lonely and vulnerable in the hospital setting, which aligns the clown with the patient. The clown is inferior to the child patient, so the low status position of the clown empowers the child, who does not feel weak in this relationship (Koller & Gryski, 2008; Tener, et. al. 2012, p. 14). Tener, et al. (2016, p. 60) also examine the interactions between hospital clowns and child patients, referring to a clown's engagement with a girl that empowered her to feel valuable: the clown refers to the girl as *the queen of the class* and to himself as *the cockroach of the class.* This simple reframing of power relations moved the patient's feeling of rejection and disempowerment in the hospital setting to a sense of having power and status (Tener, et al. 2016, p. 60). Empowerment for Tener, et al. (2016, p. 63) aims to help people regard themselves as having the strength and power to cope with their circumstances. In the medical clown context, they conclude that since children in hospital express disempowerment and a lack of control as medical teams look after them, the strength they experience from clowns helps to reduce stress.

Linge (2011, p. 7) describes this as a reversed relationship, whereby the child patient is strong and smart (high status) and the hospital clown is weak and silly (low status). Linge explores how the clown from low status engages in play with the child in a manner that elicits a relational interaction *without demands.* The child, encouraged by their status and the silliness of the clown, can *just exist.* Linge (2011, p. 7) further affirms that this

experience is enabling for the child as the clown's position allows the child to influence what is happening in their interaction with the clown.

2.3.2 Stupidity, naivety and not knowing

In Laurel Butler's essay, "'Everything seemed new': Clown as Embodied Critical Pedagogy," the author asserts the theoretical function of clowning for critical thinking. Significantly, Butler (2012, p. 71) argues that clowning is not about entertainment but social criticism and transformation. A key premise of Butler's (2012, p. 71) argument is the clown's stupidity and naivety that she refers to as a state of not-knowing:

> …Clowning is about relinquishing one's knowledge, certainties, and reliance on conventional symbols and cultural codes; it is about stripping down, leveling, paring away, arriving at the most basic state of humanity and then re-approaching the world, rediscovering it and repossessing our ability to create and assign meaning and value to our experiences.

From this position clown logic draws on a state of not-knowing to engage the world and to enter exploration and discovery resulting in collective creativity and reflection (Butler, 2012, p. 71). Butler (2012, p. 69) states that clowns operate and exist in a '…state of "not-knowing"', a position that she describes as *counter-intuitive.* She asserts that *not-knowing* and *naiveté* are foundational to what she refers to as the *clown's*

epistemological imperative. Butler also proposes that clown practice has an '…epistemological imperative of awareness, curiosity, discovery, and play'. She suggests that the clown's state of not-knowing is analogous with Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, whereby '…the not-knowing of both the educator and the student as crucial conditions for democratic learning'. The clown's lack of understanding can allow the audience to make connections and create their own conclusions and generate their own knowledge (Butler, 2012, p. 69).

Naivety became an important concept for *Epic Theatre*, Brooker (2007, p. 222) argues that Brecht asserted that 'the 'naive' united acting and theatre, performance and theory'. The actor, for Brecht, was the one who takes a position of naivety: '…it was a look, a posture, an attitude of mind; it implied an intelligent simplicity, innocence and shrewdness, joining the conceptual and concrete, the popular and philosophical (Brooker, 2007, pp. 222 - 223). McManus (2003, p. 12) highlights the clowns' blurred boundaries between the audience/the actors, critical commentary/plot and in/out occurs because either 'the clown is either too smart or too dumb'. First, the clown might be aware they are in a theatrical play, whereas the other players do not, in this way the clown is smart and the actors are revealed to be stupid. Second, the clown might be too stupid to understand the theatrical spectacle and the rules that govern popular entertainment and the theatre space, revealing themselves as dumb and the actors as smart (McManus, 2003, p. 12). McManus (2003, p. 12) discusses further:

> The clown's genius, or stupidity, is more than just a character trait. It constitutes a distinct performance mode from that of the non-clown characters…clown can be defined as a character with a peculiar status both inside and outside of the dramatic fiction. Clown achieves this special status, or alternate performance mode, by employing a different logic of performance practice from the other characters. While the behavior of normative characters is based on their emotional responses to the plot and other characters, the clown's behavior stems from an attempt to logically negotiate the arbitrary rules that govern the plot and characters.

Clowns have an essential ambition to *go for the unknown* and to blur the boundaries between knowing/not-knowing, certainty/uncertainty, and doing/undoing (Lane, 2016, p. 32). Their willingness to discover the unknown is linked to the clown's stupidity. Mele, refers to a pedagogy of *Homo Stupidens* to describe the clown's stupidity. The term "stupidens" stems from the word 'stupefied'; that is, the inability to think but to be astonished. Mele (2021, p. 9) defines 'Stupidens' as 'someone who is amazed, surprised by something he has never seen or expected: there you see the man in his naive aspect, who does not understand'. It is this clown, the state of *Homo Stupidens,* that creates a fissure or a gap in the modern project by resisting progress through stupidity. Mele (2021, p. 8) explains that "the search for one's clown" opens a gap in the actor's conscience considering the aspects of modernity of the last historical period, where

contemporary Homo Sapiens has stopped evolution to settle in technological and economic progress.

The clown emerges through their playful encounter with the boundaries '…of the known, the unknown, the not-known, and the not-yet known…' (Lane, 2016, p. 32). This concept highlighted by both Butler (2012) and Lane (2016) theorises that the clown's stupidity, their 'not-knowing', 'unlearning' and "undoing" enact a creative action to find out and discover the world anew.

For Mele (2021, p. 9 – 10) naivety frees the expressive abilities of man, which opens alternative ways of knowing and being. Stupidity drives the search for an alternative way – for a new theory that has been dislodged from the fixed notions of truth and knowledge and is open to any possibility. Butler (2012, p. 63) meanwhile, asserts that clown training is a process of unlearning accepted knowledge; most significantly a '…mechanistic view of reality'. Davison (2015, p. 15) supposes the benefits of confusion, not-knowing in clown logic, is a path of discovery as opposed to the path directed by modernism. Modernity aims for a clear and certain path to knowledge; when there is confusion, no one knows what has happened, what is happening or what is going to happen, not-knowing is stupidity. The clown creates a fissure or a gap in the modern project by resisting progress through stupidity (Mele, 2021, p. 8). So stupidity is a path to discovery and understanding; not-knowing, asserts Davison (2015, p. 15) leads to a knowing that removes the modernist aim of being in control.

Mele (2021, p. 3) also examines the way certainty generates a sense of safety and control, however, causes damage because there are no certainties. He explains that the clown's stupidity and naivety free people from intelligence, which can block our understanding of the world (Mele, 2021, p. 3).

Laanela and Sacks (2015, p. 19) argue that stupidity and naivety are linked and enacted in the clown as they discover the world. Clowns realise that they are small in comparison to the immensity of the world and its objects. As the clowns discover the world from a position of stupidity and naivety, they aim to understand with this proportional awareness – *the world is enormous for the clown* and therefore he is *astonished*. Awareness of the magnitude of the world amplifies the clown's sense of wonder that is struck by a sense that that which is infront of you is beyond your understanding (Laanela and Sacks, 2015, p. 59).

Laanela and Sacks (2015, p. 19), explaining the nature of astonishment, contend that stupidity serves to slow clowns down so that they react to every moment – anything and everything that happens. The prolonged moment between action and reaction, '…the more naïve your clown is, the longer the moment between someone stepping on your foot and you realising it'. For the homo stupidens every step or moment is a new possibility to understand, he can restart and step beyond himself to perceive reality as it is (Mele, 2021, p. 9 – 10).

Naivety and stupidity serve to free the pursuit of understanding and knowledge from ambition, power and control. The clown is incapable of manipulative tactics that aim to advance his own cause (Mele, 2021, p. 10 – 11). Amoore and Hall (2013, p. 106) consider that the clown's approach to understanding is experimental, with '…no ambition to explain the present or predict the future…'. Therefore clown-logic resists mastering knowledge and does not aim to control; the clown has no desire for ambition (Amoore and Hall, 2013, p. 106; Mele, 2021, p. 10 – 11). His ambition in understanding is not in defence of his own ego but rather to connect, discover and understand, even though he never will (Mele, 2021, p. 10 – 11). This fundamental basis for stupidity is linked to Lecoq's accidental discovery of the *new clown*. Pierre Byland (2016, p. 91) writes:

> Die rote Nase war gleichfalls ein Unfall. Eigentlich beginnt es damit: Wenn man doof ist, kapiert man nicht. Man möchte aber kapieren. Wenn man nicht kapiert und kapieren möchte, wird das Gehirn intensiv bean- sprucht. Es treten hierbei Symptome auf, wenn man so fest nachdenkt: Die Hautfarbe ändert sich, man wird rot, dann violett, dann braun und zum Schluss fast weiß – und hat immer noch nicht kapiert. Dann ändert sich die Farbe der Haare: Sie werden grau, etwas später fallen sie aus. Alle Haare sind weg. Man ist kahl. Und man hat immer noch nicht kapiert! Sodann macht es der Clown wie die Kinder: Um zu kapieren, geht er nä- her hin. Er ist so neugierig, dass er zu bremsen vergisst und mit der Nase anstößt oder er achtet nicht mehr auf den Boden, stolpert über etwas

> und fällt. Die Nase schwillt an, wird rot, er dreht sich um. Und heute sagen wir: Sieht aus wie ein Clown. Es war ein Unfall. Es war so nicht vorgese- hen.
>
> [The red nose was also an accident. Actually, it starts with this: If you are stupid, you do not understand. But you want to understand. If you don't want to understand and understand, the brain is intensively challenged. Symptoms occur when you think so hard: The skin color changes, you turn red, then purple, then brown and finally almost white – and still haven't understood. Then the color of the hair changes: they turn gray, a little later they fall out. All the hair is gone. You are bald. And you still haven't got it! Then the clown does it like the children: in order to understand, he goes nowhere. He is so curious that he forgets to brake and bumps his nose or he no longer pays attention to the ground, stumbles over something and falls. The nose swells, turns red, he turns around. And today we say: Looks like a clown. It was an accident. It was not intended to be so].

A state of not-knowing is linked to humility and the propensity for the clown and audience to simply bear witness to each other. This is Butler's theory (2012, p. 69), supported by Lecoq's notion of the modesty that stems from silence. Lecoq refers to the moment before speech and words, highlighting that the moment prior to words being spoken, people are in a *state of modesty.* With regard to the theory about silence before speech, it has

been shown that clowns can choose to be silent. In Lecoq's thinking, '…the spoken word often forgets the roots from which it grew…' (Lecoq, 2001, 29).

Gray, Donnelly and Gibson (2019, p. 460) take the concept into healthcare, understanding clown logic as an '…embodied, active, improvisational, experimental, multi-faceted and relational between people, things and within space and time (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, pp. 460 – 461). Lecoq's *explanatory discourse* (2001, pp. 26 – 27) is framed as an apt descriptor for the language practices of health care professionals in hospital settings who aim to educate through *dispelling knowledge* on patients (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 460). Gray, Donnelly and Gibson (2019, p. 460) argue that the clown's attention to silence and the actions between people constitutes a *playing with* that is a subjugation to another person. The clown's stupidity and naivety therefore allows the *other* to lead and inform the clown's actions and play (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 460). From this *state of modesty,* the person engaging with another resists *explanatory discourse*, allowing words to emerge from silence (Lecoq 2001, pp. 26 – 27).

Gray, Donnelly and Gibson (2019, pp. 460 – 461) argue it is through the clowns' playfulness that they enact a silence whereby they discover '…those moments when the words do not yet exist' (LeCoq 2001, p. 27). LeCoq (2001, pp. 26 – 27) explains that there are only two interpersonal avenues out of silence – speech or action:

> At a given moment, when silence becomes too highly charged, the theme breaks loose, and speech takes over. So one may speak, but only where necessary. The other way is action: 'I'll do something.' At the start all the students are so keen to act that they throw themselves into situations irrespective of motivation. In so doing, they overlook the other players and fail to act with them. But true play can only be founded on one's reaction to another. They have to understand this essential fact: to react is to throw into relief suggestions that come from the external world. The interior world is revealed through a process of reaction to the provocations of the world outside. The actor cannot afford to rely on an interior search for sensitivities, memories, a childhood world.

Lecoq goes on to say that these moments *before* both speech and movement are important for both play and theatre: words originate from *silence* and movement from *immobility* (2001, p. 34). The clown's not-knowing and naivety propels him into a subjugated position with anyone he engages with. As such the clown attends to the emotions, ideas and physicality of others, which is heightened and valuable to social contexts such as hospital wards (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 460).

2.3.3 Failure and flop

The failure and flop of the clown as the cornerstone to the practice and performance has its contemporary source in the experiments by Jacques

Lecoq discussed above (Davison 2016, p. 14). Clown theory has been understood in the Lecoq tradition (2001, pp. 143-144) as making people laugh from revealing the clown performer's fragilities, weaknesses, and failures. The Clown-Flop has its theoretical origin with Jacques Lecoq who emphasised that the laughter should be a response to the audience finding the clown himself the joke (Davison 2016, p. 14). The performer's vulnerable and honest admission of failure is central to contemporary clown pedagogy. The Clown-Flop involves the inability of a clown to perform a task but when met with failure the clown discovers pleasure rather than defeat. Clowns eradicate '…the masking of failure' (Davison, 2013, p. 220) in their practice.

In her paper *Monsieur Marcel and Monsieur Flop: failure in clown training at Ecole Philippe Gaulier*, Lucy Amsden (2017, p. 129) explores the '…different registers of 'failure' in clown performance' as taught by Philippe Gaulier. Amsden (2017, p. 130) highlights the difference between *failure* and *flop;* while the clown might fail to do tasks, the clown might also fail at making the audience laugh. When the clown enters the stage in front of an audience and attempts something intended to be funny, but no-one laughs – this is referred to as *the flop* (Amsden, 2017, 130). Flops may occur because of the performer's own thinking, approach or limits to their skill; however, if *the flop* is recognised by the performer and they show the audience awareness of their own stupidity – the spectators may still laugh (Amsden, 2017, 130). Davison (2015, p. 104) explains that clowns accept and acknowledge failure, which is critical to understanding that 'you can't

change reality – it will always remain reality'. He explains further that this '…acceptance parallels the recognition of the flop in performance, when one accepts one has failed, and the audience duly laugh' (Davison, 2015, p. 104). Gaulier (2007, p. 280) supports this view, asserting that the audience laugh at '…the absurdity and humanity of the numbskull'. In addition, Lecoq (2002, p. 156) writes that the clown's failure '…reveals his profoundly human nature, which moves us and makes us laugh'. *Clown logic* is therefore presented by Amsden (2017, 140) to both form and cross a bridge between failure and laughter, hopefulness and hopelessness – which may even be summarised as the distance between intention and failure.

Amsden (2017, 140) argues that when an audience encounters the clown-flop, they recognise the fact that people will *inevitably fail* and are able to counter the sense of hopelessness in human existence with laughter. The ability to laugh at the clown's flop, argues Amsden empowers spectators with what she refers to as an *energy of being* and therefore resist succumbing to hopelessness. Amsden's concept of *inevitable failure* considers the clown's eliciting of laughter regarding inevitably of human failure as '…an energetic and alive acknowledgement of humanity, and as such transforms knowledge of ultimate failure into something that reaffirms being' (2017, 140). Prendergast (2014, p. 89) says that the clown is both fearful and fearless when repeatedly encountering failure. The author introduces the notion of the bravery of clown, who continues to engage the *impossible task* despite inevitable failure.

Monica Prendergast (2014, p. 86) in her paper *Misperformance Ethnography* argues that clowns are experts in the 'matters and consequences of failure…' due to their propensity to fail repeatedly. In discussing the clown's *inevitable failure,* Prendergast (2014, p. 89) introduces the concept of the *impossible task* that emerges when observing clown performance. She argues the concept of the *impossible task* is observed in John Caswell Jr's (2011) play: *Shots: A Love Story.* The play explores Caswell's experience of alcoholism, in particular the hopelessness and '…impasse faced by an alcoholic in the ongoing attempt to recover and to break the cycle of addiction' (Prendergast, 2014, p. 89). Prendergast (2014, p. 89) further describes that the clown is both fearful and fearless as they repeatedly encounter failure. The author introduces the notion of the bravery of clown, who continues to engage the *impossible task* despite inevitable failure.

2.3.4 The Clown-flop as embodied theory

Peterson (2016, pp. 154 – 156) studies the clown pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq and Philippe Gaulier to understand the Clown-Flop '…not just for clown pedagogy, but to understand how this pedagogy is embodied theory, or use-based theory' (Peterson, 2016, p. 154). Crucially Peterson argues that the Clown-Flop finds social significance as an embodiment of Jack Halberstam's formulation of *queer failure* as a tool to find alternative ways of knowing and doing.

Halberstam (2011) aims to produce, identify and enact alternative modes of knowledge production associated with alternative modes of being. Halberstam posits that, in "a basic desire to live life otherwise," failure maps onto queer knowledge in useful ways. Importantly, Halberstam does not argue in their book for simply re-evaluating the way success and failure are conventionally upheld – through a heteronormative, capitalist society. Instead, the book 'dismantles the logics of success and failure which we currently live' (Halberstam, 2011, What's the alternative? section)[1]. In other words, Halberstam is embracing failure as a site of opportunity that interrupts hegemonic ways of being and of knowledge production (Brown, 2014). The success-driven model of being in and creating meaning exists in the heteronormative and capitalist system that looks to consumption and reproduction (Peterson, 2016, p. 157).

Halberstam (2011) makes it their goal to 'lose the idealism of hope in order to gain wisdom and a new spongy relationship to life, culture, knowledge, and pleasure'. Peterson (2016, p. 157) emphasizes that Halberstam is not suggesting greater or more competition; rather, within failure exists alternative possibilities within the system. Alternatives that suggest 'losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world' (Halberstam, 2011, Low theory section). Since they

[1] APA referencing for a Kindle eBook includes the *book section* rather than the page number for the n-text citation.

have experienced exclusion under hegemonic power, queer identities are experienced in existing on the outside of the success/failure system (Peterson, 2016, p. 157). The Clown-Flop as understood in the pedagogical methods of failure, play, pleasure, vulnerability and misfitness (as described above) can be argued as an embodied theory of failure.

Peterson (2016, p. 158) argues '…that clown itself, an embodied theory that demonstrates 'failure', is a concept that cannot just be theorized, but can and must be practiced...' Clown practitioners that perform the flop discover the propensity to create complicity with an audience through enacting playfulness. According to Peterson (2016, p. 155) Lecoq's clowning pedagogy instructs students into a play-state where they are prepared to respond to any situation. Gaulier also insists that the vulnerability of not understanding results in failure, which is funny. 'I tell Gregor that when he doesn't understand, people laugh at his vulnerability and his foolishness and that his clown must be found somewhere around there' (Peterson, 2016, p. 156; Gaulier, 2007). Gaulier refers to Monsieur Flop in clown teaching, who enters by accident into the theatre space when the performer is failing (Amsden, 2017; Gaulier, 2007; Peterson, 2016). He teaches the clown to work with Monsieur Flop rather than trying to succeed and perform better (Peterson, 2016, p. 156). The Clown-Flop then according to Peterson (2016, p. 156) '…is the ability to recognize potential failures not as misery but as pleasure to be shared with the audience'. It is this propensity of clown – realised in the Flop to fail with pleasure, to be

vulnerable and to be open to an audience to witness and share in the failure, that resonates with Halberstam's theoretical formation of failure.

Gray, Donnelly and Gibson's paper, '*Seriously Foolish and Foolishly Serious: The Art and Practice of Clowning in Children's Rehabilitation'*, explores clown practice in children's rehabilitation as foolish (2019, p. 454). Their formulation of the concept of *foolishness* continues Peterson's application of Halberstam's notion of Failure to clown theory and practice (2016). The authors term clown practice as *Foolish Engagement* that consists of relational and aesthetic participatory practice with children and families in hospitals.

Foolish Engagement is defined as engagement with people that is characterised by a '…brave and vulnerable emotional engagement with…a willingness to fail' (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 454). Clown practices that enact *Foolish Engagement* aim to be *physically, emotionally and sensorily* relationally engaged with people in the present moment. Gray, Donnelly and Gibson, (2019, p. 454) juxtapose the clowns' commitment to the present *time and space* to the future-focused, fixed therapeutic goals that dominate healthcare practices. The authors therefore discuss the concept of *foolishness* as the '…opposite of "being clever" as a "high" or intellectual sophistication' (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 455).

Salverson uses the term foolishness to describe the clown's embrace of failure and weakness rather than intellect. Commenting on Salverson,

Gray, Donnelly and Gibson (2019, p. 455) reflect that foolishness is the opposite of "high" forms of cleverness and intelligence. Halberstam's (2011) conceptualisation of *failure* is crucial to this understanding of *foolishness: failure* creates space to reflect and reassess what is considered successful or productive in society (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 455). *Failure* is understood as a concept that disrupts normative ideals and social standards that privileges wealth accumulation and reproductive maturity as the dominant marker for success in a neo-liberal society. Furthermore, the authors agree with Halberstam (2011, p. 3) who asserts that *failure* generates a re-evaluation of *positivism,* revealing the harmful nature of overly positive-thinking (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 455). Gray, Donnelly and Gibson (2019, p. 456) highlight further:

> Foolishness subverts the tyranny of cheerfulness and positive thinking by embracing failure and the sincere willingness to step forward with genuine uncertainty. It holds the potential to lose one's way, opening up unexpected directions. Foolishness privileges the nonsensible and nonsensical (and even the naïve, ignorant and stupid), centring these as different ways of being in and understanding the world. What might be traditionally dismissed by "the serious" (as academic research, bioscience and health care) as redundant or irrelevant is precisely what clowns embrace.

Halberstam (2011) draws on Stuart Hall's notion of *low theory* to describe what they refer to as *knowledge from below. Low theory is* unplanned and

unexpected, an approach that '…detaches itself from prescriptive methods, fixed logics and epistemes' (Halberstam, 2011, p. 16 – 17). For Gray, Donnelly & Gibson (2019, p. 456) *foolishness* relates to *low theory* as an embodied instigator for revaluating what Halberstam (2011, p. 7) describes as the '…project of learning and thinking…' *Foolishness* may effectively assist with re-thinking prescribed conceptions of *success* and productiveness in healthcare a notion that conceptually fits with Halberstam's (2011) conceptualisations of *failure* (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 456).

Gray, Donnelly and Gibson (2019, p. 453) contend the primacy of clowning as a *foolish* practice that exposes neoliberal ideals for success and failure in healthcare. The clowns' *foolish engagement* in hospital settings uncovers, how *seriousness* is privileged as the approved approach to successful learning (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 454). *Foolish engagement* resists legitimising healthcare clowning as serious, such as practitioners' and researchers' attempts to prove how humour might '…assist with "curing" or "fixing" sick or disabled children' (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 454). The authors conclude that clown practice re-centres professional approaches toward the importance of relational practice and aesthetic experiences that encourage pleasure and play in the *here and now* as valuable (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 453).

The contention of Gray, Donnelly and Gibson (2019, p. 461) is that clown practice may have *outcomes* such as humour, joy and empathy, but these

are not pre-established aims of clown practice. Instead, the primacy for clown practice is *foolish engagement:* a way to build relationships and finding ways to *live well in the present*. The goal of *foolish engagement* is not for '…clown practitioners to "fix" children through their plays but to engage in the art of clown as ongoing, fluid ways of being playful, imaginative, sensory, emotional, vulnerable, and in-relation' (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 461). This reinforces Butler's (2012, p. 69) argument that clown-logic operates in the *here and now*, free of the past and resistant of the future.

2.3.5 Playfulness and pleasure

The Theatre of the Absurd, writes Varró (2010, p. 207) spotlights the moment people laugh at a hopeless circumstance against their will. As discussed in Chapter 2.2.4 clowns enact an *unintentional laughter* at the improbability that the human condition will ever change for the better (Varró 2010, p. 207). She argues further that humour and laughter provide comfort and empowerment, describing it as a *sense of superiority* in humankind's encounter with despair.

Davison (2015, p. 19) explains that playfulness in clown training produces an acceptance of non-control and the ability to let go of the desire to control. Weitz (2012, p. 80) highlights a key juxtaposition in clown logic – that is the clown, who is hopeless, described by the author as a

pathologically pathetic condition does not act as if they are failing – the clown remains hopeful and willing. Weitz (2012, p. 80) writes:

> This can, of course, be perceived as the clown's ridiculous or pitiable inability to assume the disappointment and shame appropriate to failure. But it is also possible to read the clown's buoyant attitude toward setback as somehow liberating, shrugging off social expectation to shoulder the weight of the world playfully…The clown participates in the cultural care and feeding of ideas about success and failure, at the same time imparting shadow advice about a useful spirit in which to approach the frustrations of everyday living.

Weitz (2012, p. 87) highlights that clowns continue to play at all costs, despite the inevitability of failure. Playfulness and pleasure are rarely valued as an aim in the healthcare context but rather are employed by medical professionals as a means towards more serious therapeutic goals (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 457). Gray, Donnelly and Gibson (2019, p. 457) highlight how medical disciplines use *play* as a device to either gain children's compliance or as a form of assessment. The authors instead refer to an approach whereby the clowns work with patients to find meaning each day, a concept they have termed *living well in the present.* This approach is discussed further by Gray, Donnelly and Gibson (2019, p. 458) who write:

> Such an approach encourages a re-focus on practices that build relationships and support personally meaningful projects for children

> as children rather than future adults. Here we extend this work to include engaging in practices and research that support aesthetic attention including focusing on sensory engagement, emotional awareness, and creative and imaginative possibilities for the child as person in the here and now.

Re-visiting and discovering the play state from our childhood is key to clown training and practice (Davison, 2015, p. 3). For Gaulier (2007, p. 187) the game is about engaging with activity for the purpose of joy and pleasure, likening the state of playfulness to wild horses galloping and whinnying. Play is the genuine discovery of life, as vital as breath. Joy is central, he discusses the game of hide and seek, emphasizing that when playing the aim is to *enjoy disappearing*. The absence of joy for Gaulier results in heaviness and being *too true* causes theatre to die.

Gaulier draws on children's games in his pedagogy to teach playfulness, in particular games such as *Grandmother's Footsteps* and *Tag.* Gaulier's method for using *Grandmother's footsteps* is because it is a game whereby the players must pause and is therefore full of what he calls *fixed points.* Gaulier (2007, pp. 196 – 198) explains further:

> This time of stopping is a fixed point, absolutely motionless, eyes shining with pleasure and desire for action…The game 'Grandmother's Footsteps' is full of fixed points. I turn my back and everyone wriggles about, to get closer. I look at the people who are wriggling about. They freeze, but their eyes sparkle with playfulness,

> movement, jokes and pleasure. The freeze has not broken the impulse. This state is called 'the fixed point'.

Gaulier's (2007, p. 201) pedagogy of play aims for actors to reveal their pleasure and fun in a way that '…illuminates their face, like a child who is playing…smooth, mysterious and transparent'. Lecoq (2000, p. 154) agrees that the clown *surfaces* from the actors' childhood not from a character or person. As a game that all participants have a collective memory of enjoying as a child, it takes little instruction and students' competitive urges are often immediately triggered.

Clown practice is grounded in an eagerness to play and to find pleasure in failure and stupidity, rather than finding pleasure winning or being the best (Davison, 2015, p. 10; Gaulier, 2007, p. 279). Anything can be turned in to a game and clowns dedicate themselves to the fullness of the game, with a ceaseless attitude (Laanela and Sacks, 2015, p. 38). Laanela and Sacks (2015, p. 38) write that '…if you run too fast, it's hard to dance'; winning the game restricts students from playing and they can become negative and angry if they lose. Clown training aims to remove competition as to train the student to break out of the restrictive notions of winning and losing. Rather, the clown plays to play and to continue the game until it is exhausted of all possibility. Importantly, pushing the play as far as it can go is being aware that if a student goes straight for 110% then the game will quickly end.

Laanela and Sacks (2015, p. 59) write that 'children are masters of play yet for some reason our culture has created a value system which encourages grown-ups to stop playing'. Davison (2015, p. 11) further asserts that a state of playfulness in clown practice resists rejecting something as bad but instead '…playfully subvert it on new terms'. This type of game clearly does not solve the "serious" problems, but this moment is *different* and instead of talking or thinking about how things could be, should be or would be they are *in-the-moment* playing.

Kendrick (2011, p. 76) argues that Gaulier pedagogy of play draws on '…two distinct but related ways of playing which are in a dialectic relationship…paidia and ludus, which Gaulier describes as a continuum, from 'turbulence to rules'. Paidia is likened to the play-instinct and the free, imaginative play of a child, the ludus describes the structures, forms and rules that are not concrete but can change depending on the game (Kendrick, 2011, p. 76). Kendrick (2011, p. 77) explains that ludic theory suggests there is an interactive relationship between ludus and paidia and it is this relationship that '…provides an opportunity for describing the intrinsic function of Gaulier's games in his pedagogy'. Kendrick delineates a methodology in Gaulier's pedagogical approach, which is a reflexive process of constructing a game structure, critiquing the players' play and adjusting the ludus, the rules to create the paidic response in his students he is looking for (Kendrick L, 2011, p. 79; Amsden, 2015, p. 28). Kendrick writes (2011, p. 78) '…increasing ludus, in turn intensifies the pending paidic release. The more restrictive the game becomes, the greater the

urge for the paidic abandon'. According to Kendrick (2011, p. 78) the paidic abandon is the play-state that Gaulier is seeking for performer training in clown practice.

Weitz (2012, p. 80) draws on the term *élan vital* when describing the clown as a '…creature fending for itself, tumbling and stumbling…from one situation into another, getting into scrape after scrape and getting out again…He is the personified elan vital…coping with a world that is forever taking new uncalculated turns…'. For Weitz (2012, p. 80), Langer's (1981, p. 78) assertion of the clown as *élan vital* draws attention to the clown's *irrepressible spirit* that spurs the search for alternatives in problem solving, despite impossibility and repeated failure.

2.3.6 Summary

This review of the history, theory and practice of clowning has focussed on the emerging archive of literature that theorises clowning. Clown theory emerges as an approach that disrupts power, authority, and rules; discovers the world with naivety and stupidity; and accepts inevitable failure and vulnerable sharing via the flop that leads to play and pleasure in the here and now. These concepts appear to enact a relational presence that is empowering and can lead to a new awareness of self and the social world. While much of the literature reviewed has considered clowning in the context of the theatrical world, questions emerge as to the plausibility of such theories being applied in the real world by social workers. Failure

is a dominant discourse in both clowning and the child protection field: system failure, parents fail to protect their children, young people fail-to-thrive and, at least according to Mayea (2020), social work as a discipline has failed to achieve its vision. Clowns also fail and in fact failure is the bedrock of much of clown practice. The experience of failure is perhaps the most compelling correlation between the child protection field, social work discipline and clown practice. Social work that begins from a place of failure, embodied, and accepted, may present opportunities for more ethical and empowering practice. The emerging correlations between clown theory and social work theory contextualised to the child protection field are considered through creative practice.

CHAPTER 3: MEADOW MEANDERING METHODOLOGY

3.1 Practice as research

The research aims to explore the question: *To what extent is there a correlation between a) clowning, b) social work and c) the child protection field and what are the possibilities for direct practice?* The research adopts Kershaw's definition of Practice as Research (PaR) as 'a method and methodology in search of results across disciplines: a collection of transdisciplinary research "tools"' (Kershaw, 2009, p. 5). Clown practice, including *training, workshops, devising* and *performing* are presented as 'practical experiments' that can cross disciplinary boundaries; in this case, the social work discipline, child protection field and clowning practice (Heron and Kershaw, 2018, On 'meadow meanders' and transdisciplinarity section).

PaR is an approach located within what Haseman (2007, p. 150) defines as a third category of research; that is the performative research paradigm. In this paradigm, it is the symbolic data drawn from the creative practice that is discovered to find alternative or new knowledge. According to Haseman (2007, p. 150) creative practice research '…not only expresses the research, but in that expression becomes the research itself'. Nelson (2013, p.9; 26) explains that in PaR the arts practice, (in this case clowning) is the method of inquiry and is submitted as evidence of research inquiry and new insights. Borgdorff (2012, p. 49) argues that the

knowledge that emerges and is manifested in art practice is as *knowing-how*: practical and sensory knowledge, ambiguous as it is both cognitive and non-conceptual, rational and non-discursive. Smith and Dean (2009, p. 5) add:

> Firstly…the creative work acts as a form of research and generates detectable research outputs; secondly, to suggest that creative practice – the training and specialized knowledge that creative practitioners have and the process they engage in when they are making art – can lead to specialised research insights which can be generalised and written up as research.

Haseman (2010, p. 147) asserts the primacy of practice and insists that practitioner-researchers '…do not merely "think" their way through or out of a problem, but rather they apply 'practice' to a resolution'. The creative practice of clowning has been applied as a different way of thinking about problems and solutions, while being in relationship with an audience. The very practice of vulnerably sharing thinking a clown does in problem-solving with an audience, revealing that *I don't not know*, has been core to this research. This quite literal standing in front of an audience in a state of confusion, accepting that I do not understand has spurred reflection on social work and child protection practice. Saner (2020, p. 150) adds that clown practice can *shift perspective*, as *clown logic* is a method for *looking for other ways.* Tobias (2007, p. 37) argues that the clown is not only a comic figure but rather clown performance can be *reflective* '…designed to

stimulate meaningful contemplation'. Mele (2021, p. 28) agrees, asserting that the new clown considers the world around him imbued with greed and separation and decides to abandon the old ideas of more intellectual comedy, for a simple and direct humour, immediate and human, which induces reflection.

My reflection as a clown has shifted my perspective on how to relationally engage and respond to parents and children involved in the child protection system. Clown practice has formed a relational intuition, a different type of knowing how that has been developed by thinking through clown practice. In PaR Kershaw and Nicholson (2011, p. 2) discuss the reconceptualistion of research methods for theatre and performance studies, legitimising embodiment and intuition as ways of knowing. In PaR[2] practitioner-researchers must discover an approach for articulating their thinking-through-practice (Mackey, 2016, p. 481). PaR is a *way of thinking* that produces a distinct intuitive-based kind of knowing that emerges from the practical doing that is the handling of materials. The materials handled by my clowning are not tangible; they are presence, space and connection with an audience. Over time I began to see the audience in the same way I would view the service user.

PaR also affirms subjective knowledge production as the researcher is both the subject of the inquiry and the author of ideas (Mackey, 2016, p.

[2] PaR is an interchangeable term with Practice-led Research.

481). Borgdorff (2012, pp. 38 – 39) explains that PaR does not separate subject and object; there is no distance between the researcher and the practice. Arts practice is therefore central to research methods, and findings in arts practice are immersed with the researcher's own experience. Borgdorff (2012, p. 41) explains that the term 'object' in PaR refers to the work of art created by the artist-researcher; in theatre it might be the performance, the play or a character. The term 'process' refers to the making of art; for example, creating, rehearsing, writing, drawing, experimenting and so on. In this research the *process* of *clowning* has included training, devising, writing, performing and drawing. The *objects* created in this project have included workshop exercises, clown shows, and visual art. Both the *process* and *objects* have contributed to new-understanding about social work in the child protection field and are evidence of thinking through the feeling of being *stuck*, discussed above (Chapter 2.1.7 – 2.1.11). Munro, Murray and Taylor (2020, p. 83) assert the researchers' own vulnerability in terms of exposing themselves through their practice is critical to a distinct kind of knowing (Bolt, 2007, p. 27).

Borgdorff (2012, p. 49; 71) explains that arts-practice is inherently a reflective practice highlighting that 'art is thought, not theory'. Smith and Dean (2009, p. 23) describe PaR as a process-driven method that has neither a clear starting point nor an end point. Campbell and Farrier (2015, p. 84) discuss queer approaches in PaR that privilege muddled and messy ways of knowing. 'Projects are structured by keeping processes messy, personal and liquid precisely to resist the normative impulse for cleanliness

brought about by disciplining knowledge' (Campbell and Farrier, 2015, p. 84). The methods that stem from messiness value low forms of knowledge, or what the authors refer to as quotidian that is every day or commonplace. In particular, the authors highlight *the politics and aesthetics of failure* as a method that emanates *in service of 'messiness'* (Campbell and Farrier, 2015, p. 84). This project has been messy, my question has shifted persistently throughout; clown practice would spur a re-think about my question and project.

As discussed, *failure i*s a compelling correlation between the child protection field, social work discipline and clown practice (Chapter 2.3). Continuing with failure as a dominant discourse, the concept stands as the main theatrical concept informing the PaR paradigm of this project. Bailes refers to a *poetics of failure* in PaR where artists can dwell in an *in-between state*, failure in this sense is '…a predicament that is generative, vital, and always *always* dubious…a poetics of failure is simply the distinctive framing of this space, between what is unintelligible and what wants to be understood'. In performance she argues that failure offers the possibility to '…illuminate rather than fill in some of the gaps… to make evident even more gaps, holes, fissures, and elisions' (Bailes, 2010, p. 200). Failure, she continues is not only an evaluation of an outcome but a component of the *existential condition* that makes creative and artistic production possible. She explains failure further as a *mode of activity* that can produce unanticipated outcomes:

> One of its most radical properties is that it operates through a principle of difference rather than sameness. A failed occurrence signals the unpredictable outcome of events where a successful instance might, by comparison, be considered exclusive, prohibitive, and militated by mainstream values. A prescriptive definition of success appeals to conservative ideology and the normative ambitions that consolidate its ideals, whilst the altogether messier undisciplined tactics that failure permits contribute to an anti-conformist ideology, one that seeks to redefine and loosen the boundaries that determine lived experience and representations that chase after it (Bailes, 2010, p. 2).

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam (2011) aims to produce, identify and enact alternative modes of knowledge production associated with queer modes of being (Halberstam, 2011). Halberstam posits that, in a 'basic desire to live life otherwise', failure maps onto queer knowledge in useful ways. Importantly, Halberstam does not argue for simply re-evaluating the way success and failure are conventionally upheld – through a heteronormative, capitalist society. Instead, the book 'dismantles the logics of success and failure which we currently live' (Halberstam, 2011). In other words, Halberstam is embracing failure as a site of opportunity that interrupts hegemonic ways of being and knowledge production (Brown, 2014). The success-driven model of being in and creating meaning exists in the heteronormative and capitalist system that looks to consumption and reproduction (Peterson, 2016, p. 157).

In my experience the families that practitioners encounter in child protection practice are contrary to the values of heteronormativity. Often large families of four or five children live with a single mother, multiple fathers and at times numerous stepsiblings. Further, children who are removed, separated at times from both parents and siblings, form bonds with foster carers, residential care workers and other foster children. These families are essentially *queer* in that their experience of family differs from normative constructions.

Halberstam (2011) aims to 'lose the idealism of hope in order to gain wisdom and a new spongy relationship to life, culture, knowledge, and pleasure'. Peterson (2016, p. 157) emphasises that Halberstam is not suggesting greater or more competition; rather within failure exists alternative possibilities within the system. Alternatives that suggest 'losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world' (Halberstam, 2011, Low theory section). Since they have experienced exclusion under hegemonic power, queer identities are experienced in existing on the outside of the success/failure system (Peterson, 2016, p. 157).

As a juxtaposition failure works, while it signifies a disruption in a goal or task it also exposes an alternative '…way of doing or making ' (Bailes, 2010, p. 2). The wrongdoing or failed intention creates an opening into other modes of doing and being '… that counter the authority of a singular

or "correct" outcome'. Failure can be understood as generating and producing new knowledges of how to approach problems or tasks (Bailes, 2010, pp. 2 - 3).

The disciplinary boundaries between social work, child protection and clowning have been blurred in this project. The scope of the research question has been unsure if its inquiry is aiming to discover a new approach in social work, a creative outcome in clowning, or a social critique of child protection work, or all three combined. This research therefore is located in the transdisciplinary domain. Overend (2021, p. 5) discusses artistic practice and research across fields that aim to be transdisciplinary, where knowledge is not limited to disciplinary parts but '…rather emerges through a radical openness to their convergence'. Borders between fields and disciplines can be either fixed or blurred; that is, open or closed. Artistic practice that aims for more openness involves what Overend (2021, p. 5) refers to as a *process of unlearning* and an *embrace of not knowing* (discussed further below).

Multidisciplinary refers to various disciplines working together in a process, while keeping their boundaries intact. Interdisciplinarity involves more exchange between disciplinary ways-of-knowing. Transdisciplinary, is described by Heron and Kershaw (2018, On 'meadow meanders' and transdisciplinarity section) as an *awareness of un-knowledge* that cannot be defined. While ways-of-knowing in multi- and interdisciplinarity spaces

are learnt within clearly defined boundaries, transdisciplinary practice elicits *unlearning.*

This PaR project employs clown practice to explore a divergent way-of-thinking about child protection social work. The correlations between clowning and social work are explored with a sense of unknowing about the possible application to real-world practice in child protection. At the commencement of this research, I did not know how clowning might correlate to social work, or social work correlates to clowning, nor how either offer an alternative in the field of child protection work. All I had was a hunch, a sense that clown practice *may* produce unexpected and alternative knowledge for social work. However, I was working in a space that was unknown, experimental, while simultaneously recognising my own failures as a social worker. The concept of *failure* seemed to appear everywhere, correlating with both clowning and social work; hence I began to navigate towards *failure* as a PaR methodological approach.

3.2 Failure as a PaR methodological approach

In PaR knowledge production works with both *failure* and *unknowing* to generate new knowledge. Clown practice is a site whereby exploration of the unknown, with a willingness to fail, is encouraged and can lead to new discoveries about people, the world and problems. Heron and Kershaw (2018, On 'meadow meanders' and transdisciplinarity section) consider the possibilities for approaching practice from a position of being 'undisciplined'

in the engagement between *disciplinary academics and the non-disciplinary artists.* The position of being 'undisciplined' is helpful in this project as I move between social work and clowning in searching for alternative ways of knowing and doing child protection work. Chapter 2.1 discussed social work theory as a contested site, rife with ambiguity in its pursuit for knowledge about how to achieve individual and social change. These ambiguities and tensions were discussed as contributing to my own sense of *stuckness* in child protection work. *Stuckness* has loomed as a result of seeking certainty in a climate of uncertainty. In response to these uncertainties, I aim to resist scientific forms of knowledge that dominate the social work discipline and child protection. Instead, this research seeks to produce alternative knowledge through non-disciplinary power via a process of unlearning (Halberstam, 2011, Forgetting section). Two conceptualisations contribute to this process of *unlearning: Wilful Ignorance* and *Queer Failure.*

3.2.1 Wilful ignorance

Wilful ignorance impresses upon the researchers' perception of the social world, how they understand and relate to people. Art as thought is described as postponing theory, explained as the rerouting of '…judgments, opinions, and conclusions, and even to delay or suspend them indefinitely' (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 71). Postponing theory is a way to delay, pause and suspend thinking and knowing, which he explains as a type of modesty.

Significantly, the enacting of modesty via wilful ignorance maps neatly onto Lecoq's assertion that humility is cultivated from silence (see Chapter 2.2.8).

Ignorance in PaR is modest in the sense that it does not aim for certainty in knowledge production in comparison to the aims of evidence-based research. Consequently, PaR does not lead to theory building or knowledge production, but not-knowing and not-yet-knowing, meaning it is an unfinished reflection (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 173). The findings from this research propose a model of Clown-Based Social Work for work in the child protection field. However, this is an unfinished reflection, it is not yet known how this model might be performed in the professional context as it has not yet been practiced with children and families. Wilful ignorance relates to the concept that PaR is not aimed at knowing that or knowing how but instead produces not-knowing; to not know or not yet know creates a space for unthought and reflection '…that all things could be different…' (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 71; 124).

Wilful ignorance is the paradoxical method of '…knowingly tricking oneself out of pursuing the knowledge…' the research is aiming to find. Borgdorff (2012, p. 164) explains not-knowing in relation to the PaR process, highlighting that the researcher does not know how to determine the limits or boundaries of the space where discoveries may be found. He writes that PaR '…often resembles an uncertain quest in which the questions or topics only materialise during the journey, and may often change as well'

(Borgdorff, 2012, p. 164). Ledger, et. al. (2022, p. 38) further explore the possibilities of a rudderless ship '…to learn to relinquish control over knowledge, to allow ourselves to get lost, to be unruly and learn anew how to be a critical "re-searcher"'. Campbell and Farrier (2015, p. 86) argue that PaR is enacted through 'a messy mode of practice, where the blurring of boundaries is productive'. While messiness resists normative methods of knowledge production, it does not imply methodlessness (Campbell and Farrier, 2015, p. 86). Failure is described as a state of deliberate and wilful ignorance, which leads to the possibilities of engaging in Halberstam's (2011) notion of being 'undisciplined'. Halberstam's conceptualisation of Queer Failure will be presented as offering tactics for discovering new knowledge regarding child protection practice based on the emerging correlations between social work theory and clown theory.

3.2.2 Queer failure

Halberstam (2011) offers different categories of knowledge – three *concepts of Queer Failure* that enact a method for unlearning and producing alternative, undisciplined and subjugated knowledge: a) resist mastery, b) privilege stupidity and c) suspect memorisation. In *resisting mastery,* Halberstam insists on critiquing global theories, dominant discourses and approved methods through resistance. In the dominant discourse mastery is the path to knowledge, success and profit. Failure, however, is a refusal – a denial of mastery that can produce '…a counterhegemonic discourse of

losing' (Halberstam, 2011, Undisciplined section). Resistance is enacted through failure and stupidity both recognised as counterintuitive mode of knowing. Failure is a refusal of mastery and stupidity refers to the limits of global theories. Social Work Theory, discussed in Chapter 2, aims for an explanation for causality, method and technique when social workers engage with people and their circumstances (Connolly, Harms, & Maidment, 2017, p. 4). In describing the cause of the problem, the theory proposes a method for practice that offers specific skills and techniques for the social worker to enact in alliance with the theoretical view of choice (Connolly, Harms, & Maidment, 2017, p. 4). Social work theories aim to understand a person's social circumstance, an explanation of the problems, and the means for change (Fook, 2002, p. 68; Gray and Webb, 2013, p. 2; Connolly, Harms, & Maidment, 2017, p. 4; Langer and Lietz, 2014, p. 8; Trevithick, 2008, p. 1214; Payne, 2021, p. 44). It was further argued that social work theory is a contested site, rife with ambiguity in its pursuit for knowledge about how to achieve individual and social change.

In accordance with resisting mastery, this research aims to resist grand explanations of human behaviour or explain a means for change. My own clown practice is a further example of resisting mastery, I have not mastered the art of clown, quite the opposite. I have frequently *failed and have* been asked to sit down, get off the stage and have struggled to both understand and do. Pierre Byland (2019) criticised that *I looked like someone who wanted to make love but did not know how.* However, this *failure,* has opened new possibilities to consider the benefits of clown-

thinking for everyday engagement rather than achieving proficiency as a performer or actor. In *resisting mastery* Halberstam (2011) argues that stupidity (the failure of intelligence) '…opens up other spaces of knowing'; silliness can lead to alternative ways of being, knowledge and forms of action.

The second thesis for failure links closely with *resisting mastery* by featuring the naive and nonsensical concept to *privilege stupidity* (Halberstam, 2011, Undisciplined section). For their argument Halberstam (2011) draws on Avital Ronell (2002) who privileges stupidity as a productive category or a serious form of unknowing. The concepts of stupidity, naivety, nonsense and ignorance are privileged as they lead to alternative practices for producing knowledge (Ronell, 2002, p. 3). Resistance through failure, renegotiates the power-struggle by applying stupidity, presented as a counterintuitive mode of knowing. For example, research requires the researcher to have an unknowing position towards the other, otherwise obstructing learning new knowledge beyond the measured path of the methodology (Halberstam, 2011, Undisciplined section). This methodological approach is discussed as being a more playful way of thinking through making and as discovery-led knowledge in arts-based research (Munro, et al., 2020, p. 86; 97). Hence, PaR is discovery-led (in contrast to hypothesis-led) whereby the artist-researcher searches via intuition and hunches that result in stumbling onto unexpected questions and discoveries (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 164).

Heron and Kershaw, 2018, On 'meadow meanders' and transdisciplinarity section) assert that an explorer does not know what they are exploring until they have explored (Bateson, 2000). Throughout this research process I have privileged my sense of not-knowing, allowing myself to explore and discover without exactly knowing what I was doing or why. I remained in the position of the *not-yet known* regarding the transdisciplinary findings I was making discoveries of the correlations between clowning, social work, and child protection practice**.** Remaining in the unknown, I circled these concepts, principles, and practices until I discovered a model for child protection work.

Halberstam's third thesis for unearthing subjugated and alternative knowledge is to Suspect Memorialisation (Halberstam, 2011, Undisciplined section). Memory is observed as a "ritual of power" because the dominant discourse can select memory and privilege histories of success and triumph. In this mode of failure '…forgetting becomes a way of resisting the heroic and grand logics of recall and unleashes new forms of memory that relate more to spectrality than to hard evidence, to lost genealogies than to inheritance, to erasure than to inscription' (Halberstam, 2011, Undisciplined section). Forgetfulness has functioned during this research in a few surprisingly helpful yet counterintuitive ways. First, during clown practice, I have often forgotten that I am a researcher-artist; the clown is wilfully ignorant and empties himself of knowledge and mastery all to find pleasure in the game. Heron and Kershaw, highlight the importance of forgetting so the researcher can engage in unpredictable meandering

(Heron and Kershaw, 2018, On 'meadow meanders' and transdisciplinarity section). This has meant that I have been able to remain open to many different possibilities for exploration and learn to discover new meaning of objects and experiences rather than describe them as a social worker or child protection practitioner. Over time as I discovered clown practice and found principles for performing clown-theory, I was able to reapproach social work and find it *anew,* exploring new possibilities for practice.

Dave Peterson (2016, pp. 154-156) in *Failure through the Flop and Playful Engagements of Authority in 500 Clown Macbeth* studies the New-Clown pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq and Philippe Gaulier to understand the Clown-Flop as embodied theory discussed in Chapter 2.2.9. Peterson (2016, pp. 154-156) argues that the Clown-Flop finds social significance as an embodiment of Jack Halberstam's three theses of Queer Failure as a tool to find alternative ways of knowing and doing. Peterson (2016) draws on Halberstam's (2011) conceptualisation of *queer failure* as an arts-practice methodology to chart possible alternatives to conventionally defined success narratives represented in 500 Clown Theatre's play *500 Clown Macbeth*. The author argues that the Clown-Flop (discussed in Chapter 2) in *500 Clown Macbeth* enacts Halberstam's conceptualisation of failure to perform Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and discovers alternative knowledge to '…acting practice, Shakespeare's canonicity, and…monarchal power' (Peterson, 2016, p. 154).

Using failure as a concept central to the PaR methodology, this research enacts the Clown-Flop as understood in the pedagogical methods of failure, play, pleasure, vulnerability and misfitness (as discussed in Chapter 2) as an embodied theory of failure. Hence the clown practice I undertake as methods, discussed below, pivot on the assertion that the clown embodies these three conceptualisations of failure in practice. To realise this aim, I have drawn on the research method design of Heron and Kershaw (2018, On 'meadow meanders' and transdisciplinarity section) called *Meadow Meandering,* this will now be discussed.

3.3 Meadow meandering as method

Heron and Kershaw's (2018, On 'meadow meanders' and transdisciplinarity section) *Meadow Meanderings* is a method of PaR whereby the aimless meandering is a form of playfulness between knowing and *wilful ignoranc*e that might produce alternative forms of knowledge. The notion of *movement* is presented as a method for shifting between thinking and not-thinking, which results in a greater latitude to '…engage with whatever is around you, which you can do from many kinds of angles than those that exist in normative, everyday situations where we're conventionally imbued by "knowledge", even constructed from knowledge' (Heron and Kershaw, 2018, On 'meadow meanders' and transdisciplinarity section). Campbell and Farrier (2015, p. 83) support this position referring to the *methodological* and *philosophical impulses* in PaR that give scope for

methods '…inherently bound up with the researcher as an individual and the materiality of lived experience within research'. These impulses are discussed by Mackey (2016, p. 480) as *hunches* in PaR and are the core method for investigating and experimenting.

Heron and Kershaw (2018, On 'meadow meanders' and transdisciplinarity section) use the analogy of a *Meadow Meander* as a path, marked with grid-posts that represent the world. *Meanderers* enter the path with a problem to solve; however, there is a gap in experience and understanding that constitutes a lack of knowledge about how to move forward. Therefore, the authors argue that the path involves *becoming* by means of purposefully *abandoning knowledge*. *Thinking* is compared to an embodied experience whereby the researcher encounters something that is undefinable and inaccessible, this according to the authors is an approach towards transdisciplinary knowledge (Heron and Kershaw, 2018, On 'meadow meanders' and transdisciplinarity section). Heron and Kershaw, (2018, On 'meadow meanders' and transdisciplinarity section) explain that the path becomes a *playground*:

> The knowledge that you've got becomes a kind of free-for-all playground because you can shift your attention from one thing to another to anything that's around you while you're walking. But you can also simply forget about all that and just immerse yourself and enjoy the walking and the richness of the environment that you are

a part of for its own sake. I am suggesting that is a transdisciplinary 'space' (or at least a quasi-transdisciplinary space.

This PaR project meanders through reading, training, rehearsing, devising, performing, drawing and writing. The collecting of data from these varying sites of creative practice has included multi-methods of performative research. This project has drawn on the accepted methods, techniques, skills and practices of clowning that have acted as distinct grid-posts (Gray 1996, p. 3; Haseman, 2007, p. 148). The clown practices I employed are Grid-Post (A): Clown Training and Workshops; Grid Post (B): Theatre Laboratory as Experimentation; Grid-Post (C): Clown Devising and Performing; Grid-Post (D): Clown Journaling and Drawing.

3.3.1 Grid-Post (A): Clown training and workshops

Pitches, et. al. consider the development of what they refer to as the *workshop industry* as training laboratories where participants learn *practitioner knowledges* where teachers instruct their practice methods. The authors argue that performer training can be understood as a method in PaR that offers a range of possibilities for enquiry (Pitches, et. al., 2011, pp. 137 - 138). The knowledge generated in the training laboratory occurs through the practitioners' creative practice both *looking in* as a researcher and *immersed* in the training as a student. Pitches, et. al. (2011, p. 138) explain further that the researcher moves between separation and

immersion as they cultivate knowledge through practice in the theatre laboratory.

3.3.2 Grid-Post (B): Theatre laboratory as experimentation

Ledger, et. al. (2022, p. 37) asserts that the theatre laboratory is not only a place to research and practice physical actor training but a space for critical reflection, whereby thinking is informed by the doing of practice and practice further informs thinking. Ledger, et. al. (2022, p. 38) explains further, referring to the researcher as a fool:

> Importantly, we, the 'fools', seek the gaps in our knowledge and the continued need for meaningful, collegial and ethical relationships with artists, the subjects of our critical inquiries. Just as many artists wish to be more engaged in critically considering and articulating their practice, we seek means to be more creatively playful in our writing, rejecting the conventional strictures of academic practice; as such we are cultivating a different conception of training and laboratory space: a space that is informed and rigorous, whilst allowing for a poetic sensibility.

Pitches, et. al. (2011, pp. 138 - 139) explain that the concept of the theatre laboratory emerged in the early 1900s with Stanislavsky's various Theatre Studios. Lecoq's developments in the 1950s (discussed in Chapter 2) are also considered theatre laboratory experiments (Pitches, et. al. p. 201). I have asserted the primacy of clown practice in the form of training,

workshops, devising and performing as a PaR methodology to uncover research findings. The aim of this practice was to reflect on how I might be able to apply clown practice to future social work with children and families in the child protection context. Pitches, et. al. explain further:

> This cross section allows an introductory consideration of the varying modes of transmission evident in laboratory research and spans the range of training functions: from skills-development focused on a very particular theatrical aesthetic through personal (and interpersonal) development and finally to models of interactive pedagogy (Pitches, et. al., 2011, pp. 138 – 139).

Intuition and improvisation need to be given space in laboratory practice in order to allow experiments to take place (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 190). Drawing on the exercises I participated in during the clown workshops outlined above, I repeated, experimented, altered, developed and created new exercises in the Theatre Rehearsal Laboratory. I invited postgraduate and undergraduate University of Southern Queensland (USQ) theatre students to participate and play with different exercises to help spur my reflection. These exercises and what I found through this process will be discussed further in the next chapter.

3.3.3 Grid-Post (C): Clown devising and performing

Closely linked with clown training is clown devising; in-clown courses typically consist of the devising and performing of new work. Munro,

Murray and Taylor (2020, p. 83) explain that practice-based researchers *do-stuff* and *make-things* as a way of thinking, highlighting that *workshops* are valuable endeavours to help facilitate creating. The developing of practice is not sequential in the sense that a student moves from training to devising but rather devising clown material is a part of learning how to *think-wrong.* Furthermore, clown teachers often emphasize the importance of performing in clown training (King, 2016).

In Davison's Clown Devising method (2015, p. 3) he proposes how to compose, devise and create material for clown performance and theatre shows. In particular, he has developed a system of creating what clowns do, aligned with the key aims of Clown Training, commencing with creating actions based on wrongness. Put simply, 'clowns do the wrong thing, hear wrong, understand wrong, act wrong, behave wrongly, get the wrong result, look wrong…think wrong'. Wrongness, according to Davison (2015, p. 99) occurs in several spheres of human activity: the social, the relational, the economic, the anatomical, the linguistic or the aesthetic.

We could divide just about any human activity and existence into right and wrong: *clowns live on the wrong side of the binary*. Davison (2015) argues that acts of failure and wrongness constitute actions that start to generate clown material. He offers what he calls an Encyclopedia of Wrongness which holds a series of exercises aimed at breaking down the categorisations of wrongness. Davison's (2015) method then moves from general categorisations of failure to a system of performers writing down

personalised skills/qualities. These encyclopaedia methods are used to create plays and shows by considering how sequences could follow each other; how one scene might lead to another to form an *act*. This process of clown devising and performing is explained further by Gene (2021, p. 56):

> The scene can be extended for as long as required, but its structure will always be the same: the clown tries unsuccessfully to solve a problem that he himself has caused, which in turn precipitates another even worse problem…It is not the fall that makes us laugh; rather it is the humanity that the actor is able to express in the face of failure that will elicit the desire response. The key is not in the joke or the gag, but in the contradictory relationship the clown has with it.

The clown practice that I have devised and performed throughout this project does not offer accomplished examples of clowning. I have come to this project as a social worker not as a highly trained or skilled clown. Nevertheless, I have this process of encountering problems and finding a way to deliberately fail, to make the problem worse, which is useful for critical inquiry. This has served to help me understand clowning and to open further the gaps in my understanding of child protection work and to offer new insights as to how to approach social work**.**

3.3.4 Grid-Post (D): Clown journaling and drawing

Along with drawing in my journal, recording and writing were significant to my PaR process. I recorded my accounts of clowning in various contexts, anticipating a future event of clowning in the child protection context. The practice of clowning itself and the working of my own clown in the narrative were examples of experiences and happenings. Significantly, clowning practice has been expressed in drawing as an exploration of an experience, concept, or exercise. Later some of these images would be used as the basis for devising clown material.

Roberts and Riley (2014, p. 292) have found that visual methods in PaR, such as drawing, have a '…unique…ability to produce experiential knowledge that can be shared through visual media but not easily articulated through language'. This is the process I developed, often after a workshop or exercise, when I had a hunch that an experience meant something, but I could not articulate the finding clearly. Through drawing I was not only able to capture the concept but the feeling or sense that was inexplainable through words. Jellema, Annemans, and Heylighen (2022, p. 1) propose that drawing prompts a *sensory engagement* with the social phenomena encountered in research. Therefore, drawing and drawings assist the researcher to arrange and re-arrange '…concepts when formulating conclusions'. In my journal, I would draw ideas stemming from concepts and think-through the idea, often anticipating future social work practice with children and families. The drawings became what Jellema,

Annemans, and Heylighen (2022, p. 8) refer to as *reference points* or *touchstones* to amplify insights and findings during the analysis.

3.4 Summary

The methodology employs Practice as Research (PaR), which asserts the primacy of art practice or performative research, rather than a quantitative or qualitative approach. Arts practice is reflective; 'art is thought, not theory'. The disciplinary boundaries between social work, child protection and clowning are blurred, which means that methodology is located in the transdisciplinary domain. This PaR project explores a different way of thinking about child protection practice, with the acknowledgement of 'not knowing' completely whether the delivery of an alternative, clown logic, will work in practice.

Therefore, the methodology turns to Queer Failure and concepts such as wilful ignorance, resisting mastery, privileging stupidity and suspecting memorisation. The methods assume the PaR technique of Meadow Meanderings, with Grid-Posts for guidance: Clown Training and Workshops; Theatre Laboratory as Experimentation; Clown Devising and Performing; Clown Journaling and Drawing. Audio-visual material provides practical exemplars of my fieldwork and will now be discussed.

CHAPTER 4: CLOWNING PRACTICE INSIGHTS

4.1 Meadow meanderings

This research has 'meandered' through four Grid-Posts: (A): Clown Training and Workshops, (B) Clown Devising and Performing, (C) Clown Journaling and Drawing and (D) Theatre Laboratory as Experimentation. I have moved in and out of these spaces, blurred disciplinary boundaries and remained open to the unexpected. These four sites of clown practice have generated data and insights into clown theory and practice. I have remained in a state of *not-knowing*, while collecting data on clowning through arts-practice, reflecting on my experiences as a social worker with families, and anticipating a future event where I might bring clown practice into the child protection field.

This chapter will firstly outline *processes* and the *objects* created in this research, considering the four Grid-Posts and the creative output generated from each activity. My creative practice has consisted of learning and experimenting with various clowning principles that enact an alternative way to approach problems. The pedagogical processes that enact certain clown-states of being are emphasised as presented as unique to clown-practice. Secondly, this chapter will highlight the key practice principles that I found in clown practice that might cross disciplinary boundaries and inform social work. The data generated from the experimentations I undertook in the Theatre Laboratory regarding how clown principles might be applied to the child protection field are presented.

4.1.1 Grid-Post (A): Clown training and workshops

When I commenced this research, I knew I had to return to clown training in order to refresh and enhance my creative practice. It had been more than 10 years since I had engaged in any formal clown training or practice. So from 2016 to 2018, I participated in weekly Clown Training led by University of Southern Queensland Theatre Lecturer Scott Alderdice in order to develop my creative practice of clowning. I attended further training with international clown experts Pierre Byland (two-week course Homo Stupidens), Eric De Bont (one week course), Anna Yen (one week course), Peta Lily (12 x 3-hour sessions), Vivian Gladwell (10 x 2 hour sessions) and Jon Davison (10 x 2 hour sessions) (a full list of the workshops I attended can be found here: Clown Training Courses Teachers, who in their own way have been informed and influenced by Lecoq's *the pedagogy of the "new clown"* and the search for one's clown.

FIGURE 2: TRAINING WITH PETA LILY, DARK CLOWN LEVEL ONE TRAINING, 2020, ONLINE

Clown Training often involved a series of sequential games and exercises to train the student to awaken the pleasure of playfulness and break down rule-bound behaviour to replace it with an embodied acceptance of failure and curiosity with the unknown. Scott Alderdice referred to failing as *being in the shit* and many exercises were aimed at putting the class in a situation where they would make a mistake. *Being in the shit was* where the student would be standing in front of the class desperately trying to find a way to be funny and interesting.; standing in-front of an audience and not-knowing what to do but desperately trying is a furnace of failure. It *recalls* Lecoq's discoveries in clowning discussed in 2.2.5, whereby it was not until the students share their weaknesses, the distinctive movement, idiosyncrasies, and traits of the actor themselves – the person that the audience laugh (Mele, 2021, pp. 4 - 5).

This was a search for my own clown, my own vulnerabilities and to find the willingness to share these with the audience. Significantly, I found that I was stupid. I wanted so desperately to be a smart, witty, and funny clown. This correlated with social work. I also wanted to be an intelligent, insightful, and helpful social worker. Scott's class stripped away the ego and the layers that I had built-up to convey confidence and assuredness. *Fake it till you make it* is a common term I heard in social work practice. When I was promoted as a team leader, my manager mentored me in presenting myself in way that exaggerated skills and masked weaknesses. The stripping back, *being in the shit*, was the discovery of the falseness of professionalism in the child protection sector and my own deception that I

really knew what I was doing. Once I accepted my own stupidity, my uncertainty and lack of knowledge and vulnerability and shared this with the audience, I felt more human. I was more prepared to think about a different way for working with families and children.

I have adopted, experimented with and repeated many exercises discussed in order to search for my clown, to develop practice and experiment – these are discussed below in Chapter 4.2. However, a full list of exercises I have experimented with can be found here: Clown Exercises.docx. I have found that in clown workshops, teachers, mentors and lecturers used terms that I would often hear in social work and child protection practice. In particular: *connection, relationship, curiosity, empathy, playfulness, problem-solving* and *solution-finding*. The parallel use of these terms prompted my curiosity as they are indicators for thinking and theory that contribute to clown and social work practice. However, do both disciplines share the same meaning of these terms? Are these concepts the same or different for social workers and clowns? Could understanding from either perspective shift or influence the practice of the other? In response to these questions, I believe there are two common tasks for both clowns and social workers: *building relationships* and *encountering problems.*

Firstly, in relationship building, the audience is a constant for the clown. The teachers were persistent about the need for the clowns to look out toward the audience and to share their eyes - "we love to see the clown

think", instructed Anna Yen (2019). Likewise, the service user is paramount for the social worker and so both clown and social work are relational practices. I suspect (although I do not yet know) that the service user would love to see the social worker *think*. One of the most critical discoveries I made was that the clown does not try to be funny, but instead the clown aims to create/build/form a relationship with the audience. The student can be distracted from authentic connection by trying to be funny or trying too hard to *show* the audience their schtick ("no pantomime", Pierre Byland (2019) would correct students).

So too the social worker can be *relationally inauthentic* by either trying too hard to help and be important or mechanically going through bureaucratic tasks. Gaulier (2007, pp. 187 - 188) indicates this same criticism of bureaucracy and how it corrupts relational engagement for the clown:

> There are people who speak so abruptly it was as if they were farting. In French we call them dry-farts. Their lips part a fraction, allowing a little string of words to slip out of their mouth. Then, like an anus which has just swallowed a glycerin-coated suppository, their lips close up again. The dry-fart has let off an idea…Too many desperate cases (in police departments, postal services and all the bureaucracy that deals with cash) are non-stop dry-farters.

There is no question that social workers and child protection workers can sound like 'dry-farts'; *I know I have*, and it certainly explains much more

clearly my sense of *stuckness* in practice. Secondly, problems are also a constant for clowns and social workers (discussed in Chapter 2); hence the importance of problem-solving and finding solutions. The more resistance for a problem to be solved the more controlling, mechanical, and bureaucratic the social workers become; that is, they let out the 'dry-fart'. I have also found in practice that blame will be shifted onto the parent or child, or what might be referred to as a *discourse of blame.* The practitioner, the system and any socio-political understanding for the problems will be disregarded and responsibility placed onto the service user. In contrast, when clowns encounter resistant and persistent problems that become unsolvable – they accept the catastrophe. Pierre Byland (2019) instructed *accept, accept, accept;* the clown accepts the catastrophe and shares his vulnerability with the audience.

FIGURE 3: WORKSHOP WITH PIERRE BYLAND, HOMO STUPIDENS, 2019, CAVIGILIANO, SWITZERLAND

This process became an important method as I learnt how to write clown shows. However, I did not understand the approach until attending Pierre

Byland's (2019) training. Byland (2019) introduced two possible methods for devising clown material: the *catastrophe* and the *distraction.* In the *catastrophe* routine, the students had to plan an event to perform for the public in the piazza. Pierre insisted that it must make sense to be performing this event in the context of the space. It had to be something *real:* A concert. A party. A wedding. However, the clown causes a major Fiasco, something has to happen that means the event cannot continue. In the *Disruption* routine, again with the same premise the students had to plan an event to perform for the public in the piazza. However, the clown disrupts this event on three occasions, so much so that it cannot go on. It is a Fiasco. A Catastrophe. Pierre always emphasised: *Keep it simple*. Real.

One of the key pedagogical tools to devising that Pierre insisted, was that the student should plan and develop the event perfectly and perform as it is supposed to occur. Once performed as intended, the student could work back through all the possible places, where things go wrong, writing a list. The trio of students I worked with developed an idea around a concert. The catastrophe was our star singer *pees her pants* midway through the performance. We the musicians leave, as it is a disaster, and the show cannot continue (See Video: The Concert).

My clown practice was developed further in training with Eric De Bont in Portugal in late 2019. Bont's (2019) training was called *clown and human tragedy*. Bont's (2019) unique approach in this course is that it is possible that in every human tragedy there can be a clown performance. The clown

explores his own personal tragedy as a story, according to Bont (2019), when the clown tells his tragedy he '…puts a mirror in front of us; uncovering the reality that we are really laughing and crying about our own tragedies'.

FIGURE 4: CONVERSATION WITH ERIC DE BONT, THE CLOWN AND HUMAN TRAGEDY, 2019, ALJEZUR, PORTUGAL.

Bont's (2019) approach to clown storytelling has a simple structure: a) The clown has an objective. b) The clown encounters a problem. c) The clown finds a solution. A clown solution, according to Bont (2019) is an extraordinary, unique and completely original idea. During this training I devised and performed two stories: *The Egg* and *The Clown Waits for Hope.* These will be discussed further in the sections that follow, in particular: *The clown is a problem-solver with an en-vital spirit*.

4.1.2 Grid-Post (B): Theatre laboratory as experimentation

The Theatre Laboratory was located in the theatre rehearsal rooms on Toowoomba UniSQ campus. It was here that I was able to experiment and test ideas gathered from workshops, performance, and drawing. I would bring exercises from workshops and repeat them. At first, I tried them myself and then I taught other students. I changed the exercises, tried different approaches and repeated them over and over again. Initially this began as a weekly experiment with one or two students from Scott Alderdice's class and we focussed on one exercise – *stand up and do something.* Quite literally, each participant would enter from behind a flat and *do something.* If it was boring, we would cruelly boo them off. The more I played with this exercise, the more I understood that it was about engagement and connection. If you make eye contact, smile, listen to what the audience is doing or saying the longer you can stay on stage, without doing very much.

I have repeatedly come back to the exercise *Carton* (explained below in 4.2.2), which was the first exercise I encountered with Scott Alderdice. The game can become meditative but also revealing of particular states of the person underneath the clown: *hope* and *failure.* The participation and observation of this exercise and oscillation between these two states is the location where I have engaged in thought, thinking through my questions and searching for ideas. The more I practised *carton* and reflected on these states the more I found and realised that these two states are at the core of child protection work (Discussed further in Chapter 4.2.2).

FIGURE 5: HOPE IN THE CARTON EXERCISE, CLOWN EXPERIMENTATION IN THE THEATRE LABORATORY, 2022, UNISQ THEATRE REHEARSAL ROOM, TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

Pitches, et. al. (2011, p. 138) explain that researchers in the field of theatre studies move between separation and immersion as they cultivate knowledge through practice in the theatre laboratory. My meandering through various clown exercises and experiments resulted in an immersive experience of clowning and reflection (Heron and Kershaw, 2018, On 'meadow meanders' and transdisciplinarity section). It has been as Heron and Kershaw (2018, On 'meadow meanders' and transdisciplinarity section) describe '…a kind of free-for-all playground because you can shift your attention from one thing to another to anything that is around you while you're walking'.

The more I explored and repeated clown exercises in this space the more I was able to meander between clowning and social work, reflecting on what the correlations between these two practices might mean. Over time, I began to experiment with the clown's encounter and response to

impossible tasks and inevitable failure. I invited a group of trained clowns to participate in a workshop where I facilitated the clown pedagogy, outlined in Chapter 4. I encouraged hopefulness, failing and playfulness in exercises such as Carton, Grandma's Footsteps and Engaging the Audience. The findings from these experiments will be discussed below in Chapter 4.3; however, see video of some examples: Theatre Laboratory as Experimentation

4.1.3 Grid-Post (C): Clown devising and performing

In 2016, as part of this study, I was successful in attaining a Regional Arts Development grant ($10,000) to collaborate with Brisbane-based clown teacher and director Andrew Cory to devise a clown show for children in the Child Protection System. *The Dream of Bricks* took two weeks of intensive rehearsal and writing to be ready for a July 2017 performance at the UniSQ Arts Theatre.

FIGURE 6: DAVID STEGGALL & BRIANNA SMITH, THE DREAMS OF BRICKS, 2017, UNISQ ARTS THEATRE, TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

(See video: Dreams of Bricks Show 1 and 2).

The conceptual idea for the show was a reimagining of the social work practice tool for child safety officers to use with children, called the *Three Houses Tool*. This tool aims to involve children and young people in child protection assessment and planning and was adopted through drawing three houses: *house of good things, house of worries and house of dreams* (Weld & Parker, 2014). The process of devising with Andrew was getting up on the floor and improvising through what Andrew would call 'clown logic' to develop the story. As we improvised, Andrew provided direction and scribbled *beats* down on post-it-notes to keep track of the sequences. I followed much of Andrew's lead in *Dreams of Bricks* with how to go about devising clown material. However, it was important as my practice developed to learn to write my own material. I found it difficult to turn off

my brain which wanted to be clever and make things much more complicated than they needed to be. This was a process of undoing my ego, which desires to be clever and right. Clown devising and performing continually brought me back to vulnerability and stupidity.

When I came back to Australia from the workshops with Pierre Byland in Switzerland and Eric De Bont in Portugal, I started *You Me Three Theatre Company* with UniSQ acting graduates, Ashlynn Parigi and Wren Condren. We spent a week going over the exercises I had learnt and working through the pedagogical exercises before turning to devising our own clown routines and plays. Ashlynn, Wren and I met weekly in UniSQ's A Block Theatre rehearsal room from August 2020 – July 2021. The ideas for the plays come from the clowns using games like Carton and Grandma's Footsteps and clown-based improvising between Ashlynn, Wren and I. The process was collaborative. Devising clown material started with an idea from a visual image or metaphors that I had drawn in my journal.

The visual ideas would grow into a story based on either Byland's (2019) process of either the catastrophe or distraction. Ashlynn, Wren and I then worked in the rehearsal room and wrote the beats for the basic structure of the play. A series of Clown Play Scripts I have written with the help of Ashlynn and Wren improvising on the floor can be viewed here Clown Play Scripts. These scripts have been experiments in clown devising and clown thinking, with two of them publicly performed so far. We wrote *Stuck* and *Aria* for the Empire Theatre 23 – 26th of September 2020 as part of the

Thrive on Arts Festival. Little Red Riding Hood was written and performed in the Toowoomba City Civic green after support of a $5000 Cultural Arts Grant from Toowoomba City Council. *Clown Conference* was written and performed at The Fourth Annual Toowoomba Child Protection Symposium, 2019, Toowoomba, Australia.

FIGURE 7: DAVID STEGGALL, STUCK, 2020, THRIVE ON ARTS FESTIVAL, EMPIRE THEATRE, TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA.

(See Video: Stuck)

FIGURE 8: WREN CONDREN, ASHLYNN PARIGI & DAVID STEGGALL, ARIA, 2020, THRIVE ON ARTS FESTIVAL, EMPIRE THEATRE, TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA.

(See Video: Aria)

FIGURE 9: WREN CONDREN, ASHLYNN PARIGI & DAVID STEGGALL, LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD, 2021, CIVIC GREEN, TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

See Video: Little Red Riding Hood[3]

[3] Note – a very windy day contributed to poor sound quality.

FIGURE 10: WREN CONDREN, ASHLYNN PARIGI & DAVID STEGGALL, CLOWN CONFERENCE, THE FOURTH ANNUAL TOOWOOMBA CHILD PROTECTION SYMPOSIUM, 2019, TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

See Video: Clown Conference

My Meadow Meandering kept drawing me towards creating and performing work, thinking I was working toward creating a final clown show that would *demonstrate* some variation of clowning in child protection as applied theatre. However, my impulse drew me away from that space to what I felt was a more interesting exploration of clowning that could inform direct social work practice in the home visit. Clowning at its simplest is a way of being with people in an impossible situation. I recognised that is what I had struggled with the most in child protection work. I did not know how to be with a parent or child in what really seems to be an impossible situation – a *catastrophe.* Clown devising and performing have helped me to discover and explore ways of being in relationship with an audience while disaster and catastrophe where occurring. Overtime I realised that these clown principle for remaining relationally engaged and carrying on despite a catastrophe might operate as a transdisciplinary practice. I began to

reflect on the clown principles in performance that allowed the clown to carry on, despite inevitable failure, this is discussed further below in Chapter 4.2.

4.1.4 Grid-Post (D): Clown journaling and drawing

At the end of the day of a workshop or rehearsal I wrote in my journal the events of the day. After a while I found that I began to write from my clown-state. The writing became interactive and unpredictable. In particular, as I wrote down the exercises, I imagined myself as the teacher and as the student and at times varied the exercises. As I wrote, I found I would get lost in a memory from child protection practice. Similar to the teacher/student dynamic of the exercises, I wrote from the position of both supervisor and social worker. These were imaginary dialogues based on my experiences and feelings as a social worker in child protection practice. Both sites of writing teacher/student and supervisor/social worker were a clown-based expression of the Whiteface (teacher/supervisor) and Auguste (student/social worker). This dynamic spurred reflection, even if it also often took me off-road to unexpected places.

FIGURE 11: DAVID STEGGALL, HOPE, INK DRAWING, 297MM X 420MM, 2018

I began to draw figures, scenarios and cartoons that represented a feeling or a hunch from an exercise that I could not yet articulate. I found the drawing would help me to record the hunch and reflect on it over time. The more I practised drawing, a sense that this process was important to my clown practice grew. Clowning is visual, it relies on stillness and silence rather than words. In my journal, I would draw a figure looking out, sometimes falling or naked and vulnerable. The set of drawings that will be discussed in the next chapter can be found here: Drawing from Journal

4.2 Practice principles

I have found that clown theory contains in practice an interconnected set of relational principles that offers an alternative way of being with an audience. The Clown engages people (i.e. audience) in the theatre (social context), the social worker similarly engages with people (i.e. the service user) in the social context of the home visit. If the practice principles

clowns use to engage their audience were applied by social workers and their engagement with service users – what would happen? This question is located in the *not-yet-known*; however, as I have meandered and clowned through the various Grid-Posts and created new work, I have discovered five principles of clown practice that correlate with social work: engagement, failure, stupidity, playfulness and problem-solving. These principles offer interesting possibilities for child protection practice. Their significance to my own clown practice will be discussed before outlining their possible application to social work.

I have found several principles for clown practice:

1. The clown engages with the world: *The Clown does not aim to make* people *laugh*; *the clown aims to connect*.
2. The clown fails: *The clown is the one who will always stuff-up his turn*.
3. The clown is stupid: *The clown wants to understand but never will*.
4. The clown finds the game: *The clown discovers pleasure in the game and wants the play to continue*.
5. The clown is a problem solver with an en-vital spirit: *The clown will not give-up.*

Each principle will be discussed in relation to the clown exercises delivered in workshops (acknowledging the clown teacher/director who facilitated the exercise) and how it has emerged in performance and how I experiment with exercise and principle. I have offered my version of the

exercise, noted in my journal as a playscript between teacher and student. This is not often an accurate reflection of how the teacher intended the exercise but how I have interpreted and experimented with the activity.

4.2.1 The clown engages with the world

The clown engages with the world, he does not aim to make people laugh; the clown aims to connect. The way the clown engages is informed by his awareness of the world as a site of failure and the access the public have to the clown's stupidity and naivety. By letting go of the desire to make people laugh, the clown's primary aim is to engage the audience, to connect. Lecoq (2000, p. 154) emphasises the importance of connection as the clown discovers the audience as one who reveals their unmasked failure:

> Gradually we remove the disguise so as to reach the clown with the addition of the red nose, which is used in the exercise called 'Discovering the Audience': Someone comes on stage and discovers the audience. This exercise obliges the actor to enter directly into the clown dimension. The great difficulty consists in finding this dimension from the start, genuinely playing himself, and not 'playing the clown'. If he starts to make a performance out of his own personal silly side, the actor is lost. You cannot play at being a clown; you are one...Unlike theatre characters, the contact the clown has with his

public is immediate, he comes to life by playing with the people who are looking at him.

FIGURE 12: DAVID STEGGALL, ENGAGING THE AUDIENCE, (FROM THE PLAY 'THE DREAMS OF BRICKS'), 2017, UNISQ ARTS THEATRE, TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

I found that entering the space and looking out at the audience or to another person, from a position of failure, renegotiated the rules around power. When you are the one who has failed and you have shared this with the audience, then they feel a sense of empowerment. An exercise that I returned to frequently in the Theatre Laboratory was to just enter the space, stand/sit, clock the audience and look at each audience member and leave. The moment when you look and offer nothing but presence, letting go of the imperative to be clever or funny, is very difficult.

FIGURE 13: DAVID STEGGALL, ENGAGEMENT & INEVITABILITY, INK DRAWING, 297MM X 420MM, 2018

Removing the ego by entering the space with nothing to offer felt vulnerable; however, it also elicited empathy in the audience. When I was vulnerable the audience seemed to understand that I was not there to manipulate. However, it would shift if I let the ego back in, if I tried to be funny or clever, they quickly disliked my performance. The connection that was formed with an audience when I was open to my own vulnerability, where they accepted that I had nothing to offer established a unique connection that I became curious about. Peta Lily's exercise called *Cast the Net* explored this further:

Cast the Net (Peta Lily)

Teacher: Imagine yourself as a fisherman casting a large net into the sea to catch as many fish as possible. They pick up two corners with each hand and throw it out as wide and far as they can. Mime this

action. Become familiar with it and visualize catching fish (*The students practice the motion*). Now walk around the room; when you pass another student stop. Take turns, cast your net and imagine you are catching their attention by your action and speak to them about anything; however, keep their attention. Swap. (*The students attempt the exercise).* Stand in a circle. One by one cast your net with your face and eyes. Capture the attention of the group and talk about "dirt" or "grass" or "grey" anything simple and boring by keep our attention.

When doing this exercise, time slowed down, I was attentive and there was more opportunity to listen to and receive the audience. This opportunity created more space to connect, and I felt more attuned to the reactions of the audience. Peta emphasised the need to keep checking back in to how your audience is responding. Are they bored? Are they laughing? Are they frightened? If we look and engage, we can adjust what we are doing. In this context, the clown is a great empathiser, his position of failure causes him to acknowledge his flop and try again. Two more exercises I learnt from Andrew Cory assists with the dynamic of connecting and responding: Follow the Hand and Touch Tango.

Exercise: Follow the Hand (Boal exercise, used in multiple clown workshops)

Teacher: Pairs. Stand arm's-length from each other. Student (A) put one arm straight with your hand up, showing your palm. Student (B) puts your head 1cm from your partner's palm and

follow their hand. Student (A) can move anywhere, up/down, left/right – anywhere in the room. Student (B) you follow. Play! (Teacher claps).

Exercise: Touch Tango (Andrew Cory)

Teacher: In Pairs. Student (A) and Student (B) stand arm's length apart from each other. Student (B) is blindfolded. Student (A) with your index finger, touch a part of your partner's body – be respectful! It might be the knee, or the arm or the foot. Student (B) moves the part of the body that has been touched in some way. The touch tango continues with a different part of the body and the pair dance around the room.

Practising both of these exercises showed me that they help me discover the importance of attunement; everything I do has an impact and everything my partner does has an impact on me. It is much better to listen than to speak. This is as true to the silent clown as it is to the social worker. Scott Alderdice used exercises that focus on the mechanics of looking. I have called these exercises Eyes in/Eyes Out and Clocking, with the emphasis on looking, not only at the audience, but at your partner or the environment you are in.

Eyes in/Eyes Out and Clocking (Scott Alderdice/Peta Lily)

Teacher: In pairs stand side by side arms 1cm from each other. Clock each other.

Student: What do you mean by clock?

Teacher: Look at each other (pause). When you clock, you use your neck and head to look, not just your eyes.

Student: Ok.

Teacher: Clock each other for *one-beat.* Clock the public for *one-beat.*

(The students repeat the exercise a few times).

Teacher: Now a variation. Stay in your pair. When you look out count. Only the student looking out counts, however, keep counting upwards. Let's demonstrate with a pair:

Student (A): (A looks out/B looks in) One!

Student (B): (B looks out/A looks in) Two!

Student (A): (A looks out/B looks in) Three!

Student (B): (B looks out/A looks in) Four!

Teacher: And so on. When you fail, for example get the number wrong, hesitate or pause for too long, be honest with your failure and express it to the audience. The student who did not fail, be honest with your emotion towards your partner. As a team you

have failed and it is your partner's fault. *(The students repeat the exercise a few times).*

Teacher: Now a variation. Everybody, please sit. Two get up and play. When you fail you sit, the next student takes your place. The last to remain is the winner.

Scott emphasised *Eyes in Eyes out* as a technique throughout a variety of exercises in training when working with pairs. In order to practise this more, I used it as an exercise itself. The practice of this process helps with the muscle memory of looking; it is easy to be distracted, to be self-absorbed and to look away.

4.2.2 The clown fails

The clown fails, he is the one who will always stuff-up his turn. Lecoq (2000, p. 150) explains his research into clowning and what the *Stand up and Be Funny* exercise helped him to understand. The formational improvisation exercises in Byland's (2019) pedagogy begins with students' personal encounters with the *fiasco.* One of Byland's (2019) first exercises for the class included Lecoq's infamous exercise discussed in chapter 2.2.7, which, I have termed *Stand up and Be Funny.*

Exercise: Stand up and Be Funny (Pierre Byland/Jacques Lecoq)

Teacher: One at a time, enter through the door and be funny.

I was aware of the pedagogical entrapment of this exercise that results in the paradoxical: trying to be funny is awful but when you share openly about your failure, you are hilarious. One of the lessons of this exercise is that your desire to be accepted by the group and to be funny is exposed. The ego is terrible to watch; as an observer you can see students looking away as a student *flops* on stage.

Despite knowing the purpose of this exercise when entering it, I discovered that I still desired to please the teacher and make the students laugh. As soon as I got up, I wanted to be funny, tried to be funny (including an attempt at a pratfall!) and wasn't. This exercise, rooted in the common aim of clown training to learn how to captivate an audience and make them laugh, reminded me of social work practice. The attempts to help service users can be diminished by the ego; that is, the social worker's desire to be the clever one who *solves the problem.*

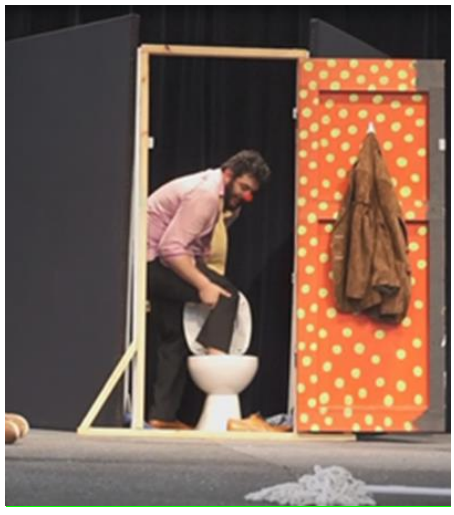

FIGURE 14: DAVID STEGGALL, FAILING (FROM THE PLAY 'STUCK'), 2020, THRIVE ON ARTS FESTIVAL, EMPIRE THEATRE, TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

The pedagogical importance of this exercise is not during the exercise itself, but during the honest conversation between participants afterwards, each explaining what happened and how they failed to be funny. This is helpful throughout clown training because when we stuff up and make a mistake we invite the mistake-maker to explain how they failed. In the Theatre Laboratory, I practiced and experimented with the Carton exercise:

Exercise: Carton (Scott Alderdice)

> **Teacher**: Stand in a circle. I am giving you a carton (the carton is a milk-carton that has been turned into a rectangular shape). The carton is very important. You must keep the carton in the air. Do not let the Carton fall. Remember you want the carton. (*The teacher gives one of the students the carton. The student attempts to take the carton but the teacher keeps a hold – a moment of push-pull*). Focus.
>
> **Student:** But I *want* the Carton.
>
> **Teacher**: (*Glaring at the student*). No. *Focus.* Look each student in the eye. (*The student pauses and looks around the circle and makes eye contact with each of their peer*s).
>
> **Teacher:** Do you have the Carton? (*No response – teacher glares at the student and waits*).
>
> **Student:** Oh me (*looking at the teacher*) sorry – um – yes.
>
> **Teacher:** Tell them.

Student: Who?

Teacher: *(Glares at the student)*

Student: (*To the teacher*) Oh – sorry. (*To the class, casually*). I have the carton. (*The student motions to throw the carton in the air, the teacher reaches out a hand to stop them*).

Teacher: Do you have the carton?

Student: Yes.

Teacher: Then tell them.

Student: (*rushed and frustrated*) I have the carton.

Teacher: No, you don't.

Student: (*Confused and frustrated*) Yes, I do!

Teacher: Good. Tell them.

Student: (*Keeps their energy and is about to speak when the Teacher stops them again*) I ha-

Teacher: Focus – look at them – are they ready?

Student: (Looks around the circle and makes eye-contact with the other students). I have the carton! (*The student throws the carton in the air and the students attempt to hit it with their open palm to keep the object in the air*).

Teacher: Count! (*The students start counting their hits – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 and the Carton falls, the group sighs. The carton is left on the floor*). You want the Carton! (*The students scramble and compete to grab the object. A new student wins the scramble*).

Student: I have the carton! (*The circle reforms and the game begins again, the student looks around the circle in the eyes of their peers*). I have the carton! (*The student throws the carton in the air*).

The group: 1 – 2 – 3 – argh (*The group runs towards the dropped carton until one emerges*).

Student: I have the carton! (*The game starts again and is repeated 7 or 8 times, until the teacher is satisfied that each student has found some focus and pleasure in the game. The group sits*).

Teacher: Where is your clown in this game? The clown is in your desire and pleasure to hit the carton – to keep it in the air for as long as possible. You desire to keep the game going. You hope you have a chance to hit the object. You hope that you are the one that gets the carton. If you don't desire this, you are not letting your clown-in. This is the hopeful side of clown – the desire and pleasure of continuing. It is in your eyes, when the holder is just about to throw the carton in the air. There is also the failure you inevitably face. The carton falls. You fail. You stuff-up your turn. Are you the one responsible for the groups' failure? Did you get to 99 hits and then you drop it? Are you the idiot? Your clown is also in your failure. In

> the honesty of your fear that you do not want to be the one that mucks up and in the admission that you have faulted. Show us both positions: your hope and your failure.

Scott Alderdice introduced the Carton exercise at the beginning of every class. He gave little instruction with this exercise, but after class he would offer a reflection on the exercise. Scott asked the question: *Where is your clown during the Carton exercise?* This question stayed with me through the ongoing practice of the exercise. I realized that my clown was in the state of *hopefulness* to keep the carton in the air with the inevitable *failure* of it falling to the ground. In these moments of the exercise either a genuine sense of *hopefulness* or of *failure* washed over the students' faces. I noticed too that I was responding with a sense of either genuine hope or failure. Neither hope nor failure was masked, it was authentic. I began to draw on a practice introduced in Davison's (2015) text of repeating moments of genuine failure. When in an exercise a student enacts failure, he asked them to pause and repeat the moment of failure again. I began to do this in my own practice of the exercise, repeating the embodied reaction of failure after the carton fell. Practising failure and working towards the body remembering *how it fails.*

The intention of the clown is linked to his hopeful anticipation that increases the sense and expression of failure when he inevitably fails. In this exercise the hopefulness drives the action, hitting the carton in the air and trying to keep it going. The verbal and physical outburst from players

when they fail is a release of the tension from the collective worry from the group. By including a variation to the game (*instructing there are 100 kittens in the carton and every time you drop it one dies*) I increase the stakes, which in turn electrifies the hope and failure on the faces and in the bodies of the students.

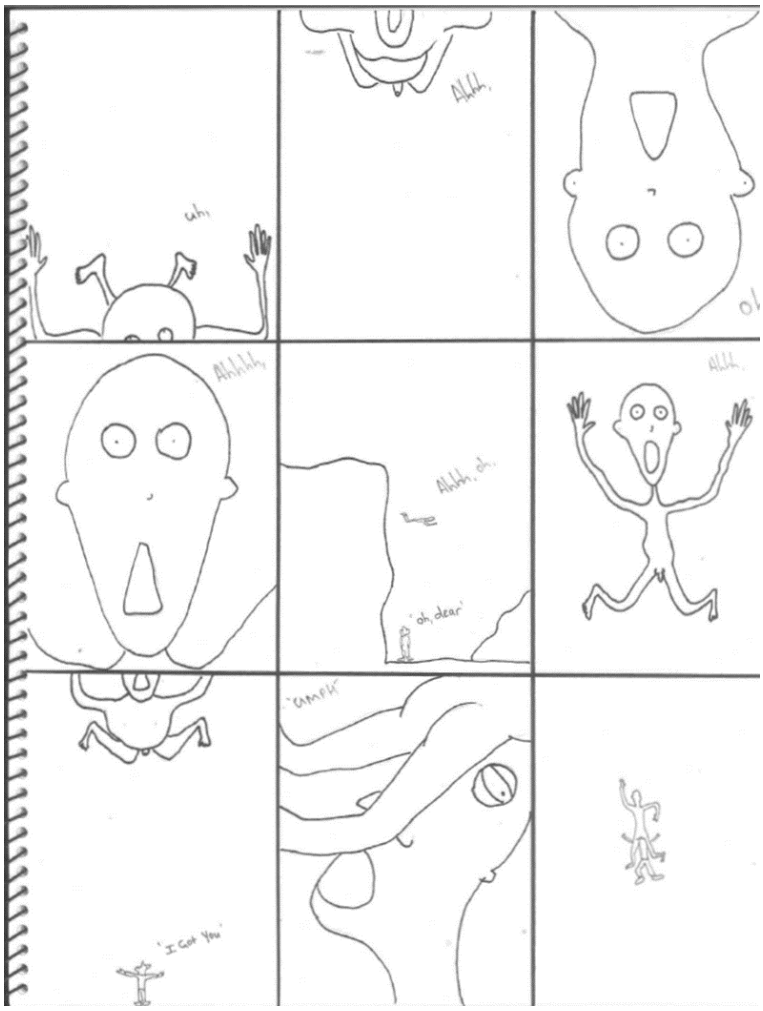

FIGURE 15: DAVID STEGGALL, THAT WHICH HAPPENS BETWEEN HOPE AND FAILURE, INK DRAWING, 297MM X 420MM, 2022

I came back to this interplay between hope and failure while attending Eric De Bont's training on Clown and Human Tragedy. In the clown routine I wrote and performed called *The Clown Waits for Hope*, I performed these same movements between hope and failure. The *beats* for this piece are as follows:

> The clown wakes up. Looks to the audience (failure). The clown puts noose around his neck and looks up at the roof, contemplating hanging himself from the railing. He looks back to the audience (hopefulness). He puts the noose down and picks up his sign that reads "waiting for hope". He looks to the audience (Hope). The clown waits, attention out, looking, anticipating – nothing (failure). The clown hears a noise (hope). Nothing (Failure). The clown responds to anything from the audience, anything that gives him a sense of hope that is then unfulfilled (failure). The clown stands up (failure). He puts his sign down. Looks to the audience (hope), looks back to the railing (failure). He does this movement three times. He takes his noose off (hope). Goes back to bed. END.

4.2.3 The clown is stupid

"The clown is stupid, he wants to understand but never will", instructed Pierre Byland (2019). Byland (2019) coins the term 'stupidens' stemming from the word 'stupefied'; that is, the inability to think but to be astonished (Discussed further in Chapter 2.2.11). The '5000 People/10,000 Eyes' (my

title) exercise is based on my notes from Pierre Byland's *Homo Stupidens* workshop in 2019.

Exercise: 5000 people/10,000 Eyes (Pierre Byland)

> **Teacher:** Please sit and face the stage. Upstage centre is a door. Through the door is life and death. Everything that enters and exits moves through the door. Hope tries and fails. Solo you will enter. The public will either clap or boo as you enter. You have just come home from work. Big busy day. You were very important. You dressed important. You fixed important problems. You were popular with your colleagues. When you leave to go home, your boss says to you: "Today you did very good things, we love you, well done". You drive home. You arrive to your successful house, in a nice suburb, long driveway, beautiful garden and pathway. You come to your doorstep and your big door. You take out your keys and unlock your door. You enter on stage through the door. When you enter your home you notice there are 5000 people/10, 000 eyes watching you. You go to the kitchen 5000 people, the living room, 5000 people, the bathroom 5000 people. Why are they here in your house? Who invited them? You are stupefied.

Pierre used one door set upstage in the workshop performing space with a small square window cut out the middle. The exercise was difficult and was a process of discovering what the teacher was looking for in this exercise. I would enter and when Pierre gave the direction, *look, 10 thousand eyes*

are watching you, I tended to go big with emotion "Argh!" or innocent wonder "Wow!" or confident "Hi!". According to Pierre, I had this wrong. He would say 'the fiasco is bigger than fear and emotion'. He referred to Buster Keaton '*In 27 movies Buster Keaton did not smile' – he had poker face'.* The fiasco, the shock and confusion is a poker-face, like Buster Keaton, the student should not laugh. Pierre referred to the actor being *stupefied* by the fiasco of having 5000 people in their home. The fiasco renders the actor stupid. This stupefaction enacts a confusion and inner questioning; the clown asks: W*hy are they here in your house? Who invited them?* Pierre instructed, 'the clown wants to understand but never will'. To be stupefied is to *want to understand* but you can't; therefore, according to Pierre the person who does not understand does *nothing.* The clown is always between concentration and movement. 'We love to see the clown think' taught Anna Yen (2019) in her workshop. The naïve and stupid mind, willing to share vulnerability, is attentive and present to each moment because it is ready for anything that might help understanding.

FIGURE 16: DAVID STEGGALL, STUPIDITY AND DISCOVERY, (FROM THE PLAY 'THE DREAMS OF BRICKS'), 2017, UNISQ ARTS THEATRE, 2017, TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

For the *homo stupidens* every step or moment is a new possibility to understand, they can restart and step beyond themselves to perceive reality as it is (Mele, 2021, p. 9 – 10). The clown is frozen because he must think. But the clown reveals the possibility to not understand, showing stupidity. Pierre observes, 'when you are stupid, you are stupid'.

Behind the door, waiting to enter, I was reminded of standing at the front door of a home visit. The *5000 people/10,000 Eyes exercise* enacts the disorientation experienced by social workers in home visits, while practicing connection and discovery. When I enter, I pause as I open the door, aware of the 5000 people, the stupefaction is a form of disorientation that renders me frozen. I am stupefied by the fiasco at the moment they open the door, their head and upper body only just through the door. Davison (2015, p. 15) supposes the benefits of confusion, of not-knowing in clown logic is a path of discovery as opposed to the path directed by modernity discussed in Chapters One and Two. Modernity aims for a clear and certain path to knowledge, when there is confusion, we do not know what has happened, what is happening or what is going to happen – not-knowing is stupidity (Davison, 2015, p. 15).

Returning to the *5000 People/10,000 Eyes* Exercise, when the actor is aware of the public they are confused, stupefied and astonished. Astonishment is an important state as it motivates the curiosity of the clown to explore and discover the space. Below is a video of training with Gerado

Mele, working this exercise and state of astonishment (See Video: Astonishment).

The goal in searching for one's own clown is the discovery of the state of *homo stupidens*; that is, the person's original sense of stupidity and the capacity for amazement without the fear of damage to reputation or social position. From this state everything is new, it is a surprise because you do not understand anything that is emphasized as a zero point – the base of the pedagogy.

For Mele (2021, p. 9 – 10) the pedagogy of *homo stupidens* frees the expressive abilities of man, which opens alternative ways of knowing and being. The clown who is stupid and naïve is incapable of manipulative tactics that aim to advance his own cause (Mele, 2021, p. 10 – 11). His ambition is not in defence of his own ego but rather to connect, discover and understand, even though he never will. Therefore, the clown does not stay frozen, he moves and anything in the space – an object, a noise, an audience member – may catch his attention and activate his sense of curiosity without losing his astonishment. The chair can be an object for discovery – see video: Discovering the Chair

The clown resists mastering and classifying knowledge. This resistance to classification occurs because they are too stupid to understand the rules, therefore any object can be operated in an infinite number of possible ways for an infinite number of reasons. However, as Mele instructs in his feedback on my improvisation above, there is still logic. It was not logical

for me to sit on the chair sideways. The clown who discovers the space and the objects within it correlates with the social worker performing the home visit exploring the safety of a home. However, whereas the social worker *assesses* with power and knowledge, the clown *discovers* with stupidity and astonishment. Their stupidity does not render clowns immobile but opens them to seeing the impossibility of the task. Laanela and Sacks (2015, p. 19) highlight that stupidity serves to slow clowns down so that they react to every moment – anything and everything that happens. Eric de Bont (2019) would count the beats – *Pausa, Pausa, Pausa* – as students practised the exercise and faced a challenge. Clowns show the audience they are thinking and thinking reveals itself to be a vulnerable act. Laanela and Sacks (2015, p. 19) further pinpoints the *Pausa, Pausa, Pausa* as the prolonged moment between action and reaction, '…the more naïve your clown is, the longer the moment between someone stepping on your foot and you realising it'.

This moment based on de Bont's (2019) teaching I will refer to as *the pausa*, the mechanism by which the clown can discover the world. The stupid clown, aware of their naivety, starts from this position of *confusion* that drives him into action, a dynamic hope that they will find something or some way to be in the world (Laanela and Sacks, 2015, p. 20). Mele (2021, p. 9 – 10) asserts that *homo stupidens* explores uncertainty, accepting daily to grow by living the experience, leaving the known and comfortable path of habit. *The pausa* then is an energised moment between the cyclic energy explored in the *Carton* exercise between hope and

failure/failure and hope/hope and failure. I became curious thinking about the transdisciplinary possibility – could a social worker clown in their direct practice with children and families?

A genuine sense of astonishment is not an easy state to find or to perform, exaggerated wonder is awful to watch and even more terrible to pretend. The *'Wow!'* Exercise helps to further develop the state of astonishment.

'Wow!' Exercise (Andrew Cory)

> **Teacher:** (*The students are sitting in front of the stage and the flat/door is upstage/centre stage*). One at a time enter. You have just seen a spectacular event, unbelievable, it could be aliens landing, a murder, a flying cat, whatever it is it must be incredible. You enter running to tell us, the public, what you have seen. However, all you can say is *Wow.* You must convince us that this is a spectacular thing you have seen. Your energy, presence and emotion must be full of *wow.* The same energy as Yippee; however, there is no build-up of energy. Go.

Andrew Cory taught that the clown is in a permanent state of *Wow* – everything is new. My first attempt at this exercise was aggressive – yelling and screaming – tension in my arms and legs – clenched fists. I was assuming fear and trying far too hard to *show* the emotion. Gaulier (2007, p. 200) writes:

> In the theatre, feelings get in the way of things. They are tiresome. You enjoy pretending, not being…Should the actor enjoy planting emotions, surprises, troubles, shocks and astonishments in the audience's hearts, all the while not feeling anything, but rather pretending with every fibre of their body?

Another student entered, the *wow* behind her eyes, still and deliberate with her movement. The *wow* was whispered. The energy was the energy of astonishment, her partner was the audience, and she was playful, while full of awe. I revisited the *Wow* moment in 'Dreams of Bricks' – both Bree and I enacted the exercise in the final act of the play. This time, my performance of *Wow* lacked in spontaneity and genuine surprise. It was impacted by a mechanical issue trying to untie the Balloon; however, I was again forcing emotion, in this instance excitement and joy (*See Video: Wow*).

Coming back to the pedagogy of *Homo Stupidens* and the sense of astonishment, I was confused about the *fiasco* and struggled to complete an exercise set up by Byland (2019). I had been interpreting Pierre's teaching of Poker-face, as discussed above in the 5000 people/10,000 eyes exercises as a permanent state of astonishment – confused. During the pie-face exercise, I kept misunderstanding the scene and was asked to leave the stage: 'another actor please…'

Exercise: The Cream-Pie

> **Teacher:** Three actors. One behind the door. Two Upstage. Student A is given a paper plate with whipped cream.

Student A: Do you like cream pie?

Student B: Yes.

Student A: Do you love cream pie?

Student B: Yes.

Student A: Is cream pie your favourite?

Student B: Yes.

Student A slams the cream pie in Student B's face.

Teacher: Stupid B is in in confusion-poker face and bursts out laughing.

When I did this exercise, I was Student (B) and did not become excited or start laughing – I did not find a state of Wow. I remained *frozen* – trying to enact astonishment. I did not understand how to show pleasure and emotion. I had to sit down, and another actor took my place and the scene continued. Student (B) laughs at this trick that has been played on them and calls out to a friend – waiting behind the door – Student (C). Student (B) attempts to perform the same trick that was done to him but gets it wrong and again ends up with pie on his face. The movement from astonishment to action, emotion and pleasure I found confusing and difficult, yet important to a possible theoretical understanding of clowning.

FIGURE 17: DAVID STEGGALL, I DON'T KNOW, INK DRAWING, 297MM X 420MM, 2019

Clown training aims to recover naivety and to find a freedom to show that we do not understand free from the judgements enforced by modern cultural expectations. Naivety and confusion are difficult to enact, with genuineness. Oftentimes my attempts have had a harsh edge to them that has been off-putting for an audience. Peta Lily's Dark Clown workshop and the *I Don't Know* exercise helped me to discover the naivety and genuine stupidity so important to the state of astonishment.

Exercise: I Don't Know (Peta Lily)

> **Teacher**: (The space is filled with scattered everyday items – a chair, book, bag and so on). Walk around the room and fill your thoughts with an inner monologue: *"I don't know, I don't know, I don't know".* Approach the scattered items, the walls, each other with the same inner monologue. Allow both the vulnerability of the emotion and physical impulse to emerge from the dialogue.

(*The students move around the room exploring the space and the items*).

Teacher: Now a variation. Across the room you notice an item, you recognise it, it is the thing you have been looking for and you need it. Walk purposely. When you arrive at this thing – this item is not what you thought it was. Pause, Confusion. Begin your inner monologue: "I don't understand, I don't understand, I don't understand". Look at the item. Look back where you came from. Look out to the distance. Look back at the item. Pause, Pause, Pause. Think: "I don't understand, I don't understand, I don't understand". (*The students do the exercise*). Now you see across the room another item – now this is the thing, you had it wrong now you have it right. Remember the hope you hold in your body and face during Carton – embody this anticipation. Move purposely again across the room. However, again when you arrive this is not what you thought it was. Pause. Remember the failure from Carton, how did you physically and emotionally respond when you dropped the carton – repeat it here. Begin your inner monologue: "I don't understand, I don't understand, I don't understand". Look at the item. Look back where you came from. Look out to the distance. Look back at the item. Pause, Pause, Pause. The again you see something else. Repeat: Hope. Purpose. Confusion. Failure. Hope. Purpose. Confusion. Failure and so on.

This exercise comes from Peta Lily's Dark Clown workshop, intended as an exercise to help the actor *get into* the mindset for the red-nose clown – the Auguste. Moving around the room looking at familiar objects and *unlearning* them, dismantling the logic of each item, is like a reversal of human development. As a child, adults pick up objects and instruct the child: *this is a brush* and then the adult demonstrates to the child what a brush does. This process of *know that* and *know how* as discussed in Chapter One becomes the schema for all learning: numbers, words, shapes, people, objects, ideas and theories are all categorized by name and function. Yet in this exercise the students are challenged to approach every object with a question mark: *I don't know what this is,* and *I don't understand what it is for.* Practicing this exercise is as much about forgetting *what you know* as it is about deepening the internal monologue into a mantra.

The clown chips away at these concrete views of the world. While practising this exercise I felt a familiarity with the phrases *I don't know* and *I don't understand.* In the *I don't know exercise* I discovered when I approached an object, with this internal logic of *not-knowing* there was an excitement and optimism of *anything could happen.* During a workshop with Peta, I approached a ball sitting on the table. I explored the *ball* without the pre-knowledge of *the term – the label*. I remember feeling and exploring the possibilities of the ball, wondering what I could possibly do with it before the sudden surprise and astonishment that it could bounce. *Wow.* In this exercise, approaching an object from a position of

not-knowing opens a complete reimagining of what is possible and a genuine *astonishment*. *Homo Stupidens* inspires a dynamic action between failure, confusion, not-knowing, curiosity, astonishment and discovery of alternative knowledge, derived from the immediate experience of the actor.

4.2.4 The clown finds the game

The clown finds the game, he discovers pleasure in the game and wants the play to continue**.** Grandma's Footsteps is used frequently in clown training to develop playfulness and pleasure. The game was used commonly in many of the workshops I attended; in particular Scott Alderdice employed the game during most training sessions. As I experimented with this game, I found it also highlights hope and failure, with an emphasis on increasing playfulness in between. The clowns move toward Grandma, with the same hopeful anticipation when trying to keep the Carton in the air. When they are signalled out for moving, they fail and have to return to the start to *try again.* Between these spaces of trying and failing, playfulness occurs – a silly pose, trickery and laughter.

Grandmother's Footsteps (Scott Alderdice/Anna Yen)

> **Teacher:** One student is Grandma and stands at one end of the room. The rest of the class line up at the other end of the room. Grandma has their back turned to the group. The aim of the game is for a student from the group to tag Grandma on the back without being seen. If Grandma turns the group must be frozen, if they see

a student move then they point the person out and they must go to the back. (The students play, one athletic student, very quickly manoeuvres to the front and tags the Grandma). Stop! Come here. (The teacher motions to the athletic student). Stand here in front of the class. Why did you win?

Student: (smiling) because I was fast.

Teacher: Why did you want to win?

Student: Because that is the game?

Teacher: Are you a champion of this children's game?

Student: I guess so.

Teacher: You won the game.

Student: Yes, I won the game.

Teacher: So you are a champion?

Student: Yes.

Teacher: What is your reward?

Student: I'm Grandma.

Teacher: Ok. (The student takes their spot as Grandma) Turn around and everyone line up. Little variation. (The teacher gets a plastic cup of water and puts on the Student/Grandma's head). If you spill the water, you lose. If you get tagged, you lose. Play! (The teacher claps).

(The students start creeping; Grandma slowly turns around and the students stop and slowly turns back and so on until he is tagged – the game continues a few times).

Teacher: Where is your clown in this game? (Pause). The clown is in your desire to both win and lose. The clown does not only want to win, they also want to play. Keep the game going. There is pleasure in winning and losing. There is a dynamic hope in your eyes when you play, when you focus on the task, when you find pleasure in the task. When you focus only on winning, your eyes loose their humanity. There also beauty in the moment you lose, the moment when your little hope bubble is burst and you know you have failed. This is a moment of humanity. It is a very human thing to do to lose.

I noticed how quickly playfulness was blocked by winning because as soon as a student wins the game ends. This was also a lesson from the Carton exercise, where the aim is to work together to keep the game going by keeping the Carton in the air. In Grandmother's Footsteps, every possibility should be explored before even a step is taken, there is so much fun in looking at Grandma and/or other students, being distracted, talking, yelling, whispering and dancing all before one step toward Grandma is taken. I began finding more pleasure in trying to get other students caught out by Grandma (sneaking up and giving other students a little push when Grandma was looking) rather than trying to win at all. Other variations of the game, such as Anna Yen (2019) instructing students to work in threes,

linking arms and moving together, increases the ludus, the difficulty and therefore prolongs the game and builds paidic release.

Scott also had variations of creeping up on Grandma as a monster, which served further to highlight the importance of getting lost in the game rather than the competition. I noticed the look on students' faces, leading with their noses, curious and genuine. I noticed the energy in my body lifted when playing this game. The anticipation of the goal and the pleasure in trying to achieve it combined not only a state of play but a state of hope. A moving with hope that is not corrupted by a fear of failure but infused with the lightness of pleasure and fun. I was curious about the way the *play state* was activated by games such as Grandma's Footsteps.

FIGURE 18: DAVID STEGGALL, MONSTER CHASE MEAL TIME, INK DRAWING, 148.5MM X 210MM, 2019

The play-state, with its aim to keep the game going, further activates the curiosity of the clown to move from astonishment to discovery. The dynamic action between failure, confusion, not-knowing, curiosity, astonishment and discovery is generated by a sense of playfulness and pleasure to understand the world anew. When I began to run workshops using this game, I started to instruct students to pause, look at each other on the journey to Grandma, and share the pleasure of the game. The variation of this game that I created working with students (putting a cup of water on Grandma's head) was to increase the ludus (the rules) to slow down the competitive drive. Competitiveness is linked to our desire to know and control an outcome, however, when this was restricted the only pleasure that can be attained from the game is through playfulness, which leads to discovery. Students play differently from their own impulses forgetting about the competitive aim to win.

Playfulness can lead to a way of thinking and relating that resist categorising the *other* but instead *discovers*. Davison (2015, p. 19) explains that playfulness in clown training produces an acceptance of non-control and the ability to let go of the *desire to control*. The development of the play-state in clown training, particularly as it relates to two core movements: a*) find the game* and b) *keep the game going* are critical to the type of play clowns engage in. Finding the game relates to finding the ludus, keeping the game going is about the paidic release. In early phases of the training this first movement is assisted by the teacher by drawing on these familiar childhood games. However, as training continues, the

student finding a game when there is not one becomes critical to practice. Laanela and Sacks (2015, p. 40) highlight that 'clown training is based on being able to enter a room and not know what the game is, on discovering the game as it emerges'. The goal of clown training is to develop the practice skill to enter an empty room and arrive at the game from nowhere, allowing it to emerge from a void.

FIGURE 19: DAVID STEGGALL & BRIANNA SMITH, PLAY! (FROM THE PLAY 'THE DREAMS OF BRICKS'), 2017, UNISQ ARTS THEATRE, 2017, TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

Scott Alderdice used a game that I have called *Be A…,* when he would instruct three students into the space standing side-by-side. Scott would call out one object at a time: *Iron*, students had to try to be the object. The purpose of putting three students together was to encourage the students to be interesting and draw the audience's attention. If you were boring, you would look out and the audience would be watching the other performers. The game was always difficult, and I would get blocked by

trying to do a perfect mime of the object and get frustrated. However, over time I realized that the goal is not to perform a perfect *tractor* or *sock,* it is to find the pleasure in the game of discovery and sharing this with the audience. As Gaulier (2007, p. 178) instructs, 'it is better to enjoy pretending, rather than to 'be' water'. Laanela and Sacks (2015, p. 39) further express that 'to clown is to fall in love with the game, with one's body, mind, and emotion'. Failure in the context of loving the game should not lead to the frustration or anger often found in sports but rather a pleasure and is another moment to be explored for all its playful potential.

4.2.5 The clown is a problem-solver with an elan-vital spirit

The clown is a problem-solver with an elan-vital spirit, he will not give-up. The clown holds a stubborn *will to live* that is enacted in his relentless desire to survive (Tobias, 2007, p. 38). The Running in a circle exercise stems from an old circus clown gag described by Carlyon (2016) as a routine that always gets a laugh. Anna Yen adopted the routine into an exercise:

Exercise: Running in a circle (Anna Yen)

> **Teacher:** (The teacher marks four spots with tape on the floor) There is an imaginary circle on the floor. The four spots are marked as if the circle was a clock face. There is an X on 6, 3, 12, and 9. You begin standing on 6. You run around the circle. You make sure you look at the public on 3 and 12. On 9 you trip, do not fall over. Trip and keep running. At 6 you look at where you tripped. 6 and 12

back to the audience. On 9 you trip again. On your third time around. Again on 6 you look at where you tripped, on 3 and 12 you look at the public. This time on 9 you successfully step over the spot and keep running. Look to the public and smile on 6, 3 and 12. On 9 you trip again. Pause on 6 – fiasco. Freeze. Look to the public. Show your failure. You have dropped the carton. One student at a time stand-up. Who is first?

Following Anna's workshop (Yen, 2019) I rehearsed this exercise multiple times, discovering that it unleashes the clown's *en-vital spirit* because despite the problem (i.e. the trip) the clown keeps running. This exercise is a reminder that a solution is only good insomuch as people are willing and able to consistently habituate the *idea* into their life.

FIGURE 20: DAVID STEGGALL, I GOT THIS! INK DRAWING, 148.5MM X 210MM, 2019

Clown-logic as a response to being stuck or as a way out of an impossible situation is explored in clown training. A series of clown exercises aims to put students in an impossible situation for which they must find a solution or a way out. These exercises begin with developing the sense of a clown logic:

Exercise: Clown logic (Andrew Cory)

> **Teacher:** Quick exercise. Solo. One at a time enter. On stage is a chair. Use your clown logic to move the chair from end of the stage to the other.
>
> **Teacher:** Slight variation. Same exercise. Two clowns then Three clowns.

The practice principles of *engagement*, *failure, stupidity, playfulness and solution-finding* all work together to comprise *clown-logic.* All of these *drive* the *action* of the clown to explore, discover and respond to his environment. During the creative development of *Dreams of Bricks*, we had come to a crossroads, we had the idea that the clowns make the heavy bricks light but were unsure about how the clowns might discover this. I explored this in a section from my journal and it was later published in *Australian Art Education* (Steggall, 2018, pp. 307 – 308):

> 'Float!' Andrew Cory, the director of The Dream of Bricks, yelled at Bree and I as we ran out from behind the scenery flat during rehearsals trying to appear all 'airy' on tiptoes and waving our arms. He yelled again. 'Make that brick light, clowns!' I tried to lift the brick

high in the air. 'That was crap! Terrible, worst floating brick I ever seen,' Andrew scolded. We ran back behind the flat and out again.

'Go back!' he yelled before we had even attempted to repeat the movement. 'Again! Awful! Clowns, make that brick float!' 'Argh' I murmured, feeling embarrassed that I could not make the brick float. That, however, was likely the problem. I was trying to make the brick float. My rational 'I' drove me to make it look light, to make it fly, to make it jump, and in reality, this was all too logical an approach. My social work 'I' could intellectualise the metaphor of carrying bags full of bricks as though they were the weight of past experiences, some pained embodied memory or trauma. The cliché is to 'unpack your baggage', but the next step is rarely considered: what do you do with the mess? Pack it back in, get rid of it or deny that it was ever there? This dilemma is what brought me here, to find solutions not in the pedagogy of the social sciences but in the court of the jester.

The problem in *Dreams of Bricks* was that the clown, weighed down, by his heavy bricks desired lightness. During his play with Mildred, he opens his Bag of Hopes and Dreams to reveal a helium balloon floating upward. Feedback from audience members and social workers who attended the performance was that the image of a floating balloon attached to a bag was one the audience found particularly powerful. I sat with Mildred in this contrasting space of heavy and light, sad and happy, hopeless and hopeful.

Here I was, with Bree, our clowns sitting, facing out to the audience, the balloon and the brick in front of us

FIGURE 21: DAVID STEGGALL & BRIANNA SMITH, MY HOPES (FROM THE PLAY 'THE DREAMS OF BRICKS'), 2017, UNISQ ARTS THEATRE, 2017, TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

(See Video: The First Balloon).

The contrast was so reminiscent of the tensions in child protection work. It was the ambiguity of empathy in child protection work which sees you care for a parent's experience and plead on their behalf for the return of their children, while simultaneously being concerned about the safety of their children. It is the tension inherent in a role that requires you to oscillate between rescuing children from abusive parents and recognising the social problem of disadvantage. At that moment the clown sat on this transgressive line, between worlds, the liminal known and unknown and accepted the fiasco.

However, this was not a resolution, the show could not end there. The narrative needed hope. The clowns found it difficult to find a hopeful arc that did not minimize the experience of the bricks, nor remove play. The question for the clowns of how to make bricks light was the same dilemma

that I had faced as a child protection worker. Central to this process is a refusal to pretend; bricks do not go away and if we pack them back in our bags, we are denying them. We are being dishonest. As an image, Andrew, Bree and I knew the bricks needed to stay. The question was this: are they transformed or does the clowns' play adjust in some way to cope with them? I have always struggled with the notion of transformation.

Ultimately, the 'other' that is often sought in a transformation is some construction of 'normal'. We experimented: transforming the bricks into paper planes, opening them up to unveil them as something 'other'. However, it was not honest. The images of the floating balloon and the brick were powerful visual metaphors (Bouissac, 2015). We purchased a large helium balloon so that it lifted the Styrofoam bricks off the ground, an image that allowed the heavy and light to coexist. One dilemma remained. We have our light brick, our future, yet how do the clowns negotiate their journey? Where do they get this massive balloon? How does it become attached to the bricks? Again, these questions mirrored my reflections and angst with child protection practice. We can see a version of 'success' or 'health': just leave your violent partner, get clean, and go to therapy. In child protection practice, we have our 12 step anger management programs, parenting classes and 1 hour x 6 therapy sessions to deal with the bricks.

Andrew, Bree and I wrestled with this question right up until the day before our opening performance, which school groups and representatives

from Child Safety and non-government organisations attended. The problem was we were searching for the 'right' answer, a therapeutic narrative that could "help". Andrew said we needed what he called 'clown-logic'. Stupidity and playfulness were to spur the action and find a solution. When their first attempt to attach the smaller balloon to the brick was unsuccessful, Mildred and I go about building a balloon factory. The pair found a plank of wood, a toilet, toilet paper, an air pump, some confetti and the smelly breath of audience members to activate their factory and reveal this massive balloon from behind the theatre flat (See Video: The Floating Brick

Metaphors are used in clown-solutions and can create a dialogue about a particular issue or concern. De Bont (2019) draws significantly from using a metaphoric language when working with themes of human tragedy. This was the approach with *Dreams of Bricks*, to find a metaphoric language to create dialogue about the heaviness of suffering and the ways in which we might find lightness. Gaulier (p, 172) points to this comforting function of clown, which is not about the clown's humour, but the impact clown can have on creating a playful and humorous language for suffering:

> …every human being is born with a tiny contraption in his body. Smaller than a box of matches, it is like a high-powered washing machine. The programs – wash, spin etc. – turn at 70000 revolutions per second. Shove in your suffering, sorrows and grief. Off we go! After a time (longer or shorter), the contraption hands them back,

> comforted. It has neutralized the poison of the sorrow, though it still preserves its outlines. It even allows you to laugh about it.

I continued to explore metaphoric solutions to clown problems that might be used to create discussion. I integrated these metaphorical solutions using Byland's (2019) dramaturgy discussed above, in both *Stuck* and *Clown Conference.* In *Stuck*, I actually get stuck in a toilet, while the janitor, Ashlynn, ridiculously and playfully builds a Super Flush and flushes me down the toilet. (See Video: The Super Flush) . The metaphor of being stuck and getting flushed is a simple and relatable concept that can create conversation. Similarly, in *Clown Conference*, Ashlynn and Wren are determined to put an end to my 'boring' talk and to perform on the stage – so they creep up and knock me out (See Video The Knockout). The visual image of someone or something being knocked out and removed so you can meet your goals is powerful. Lastly, on a similar theme, in *Red Riding Hood*, Ashlynn eats me so she can play Little Red Riding Hood (See Video Ash Eats David).

I have found the idea of clown solutions as a possible metaphorical language to engage with service users helpful, although I was not sure of its applicability to everyday social work practice with families and children. Part of the issue, which emerged, was that solutions need to be explored rather than prescribed. There is some risk in oversimplifying solutions, however the clown's approach to the world through engagement, failure, stupidity and playfulness could offer a unique approach to problem solving.

Saner (2020, p. 153) argues that clown training can prepare people to take action, with skills that can respond to problems in unexpected ways. The directional reminders from clown teachers during exercises to 'look at us' and 'share with us', while the clown is problem solving demonstrates the importance of engagement. The solution is not the point, it is the journey of problem-solving that is shared at every moment with the audience. Engagement with the audience is the main aim of problem-solving even if it doesn't result in a successful resolution.

FIGURE 22: DAVID STEGGALL, JOY DESPITE PLEASURE, INK DRAWING, 297MM X 420MM, 2019

Failure ensures that the quality of the *engagement* is not characterised by the critical judgement of an expert, but a vulnerable position that understands the task at hand is difficult. The clown teacher's direction to 'show us that you do not understand', 'show you're stupid' and 'we love to see the clown thinking' enacts *failure* and empowers through the low status

of the performer. Eric de Bont's (2019) *pausa, pausa, pausa* as a prod to pause and slow the thinking process of the clown problem solving, allowed the audience the space to enter *into* the problem with the clown.

During clown performance it is often common to hear audience members comment on the clown actions: 'No, don't do that' or 'oh no'. The stupidity of the clown elicits the knowledge of the audience. His *stupidity* positions the clown with a readiness for *playfulness* as problem solving is inverted by finding and playing a game such as Scott's directing '*where's the game?*' and '*keep the game going'*. The pleasure in playing brings *lightness* and *fun* to the process of discovery and problem-solving. While this process might loop, zag, go sideways, backwards, fold-on-top of itself before possible solutions can be explored it serves to slow down the clowns' engagement with the public.

Saner (2020, p. 151) reflecting on clown training with Avner Eisenberg argues that the process of encountering problems and searching for solutions is openly shared with the audience:

> …to clown is to submit to a wholly relational existence in an unpredictable world…Eisenberg works with a participant through the impossible (and imaginary) task of keeping a valuable paper bag dry while putting on a raincoat and opening an umbrella in a downpour. In their first attempt, the performer does a great job of acrobatically indicating how they would achieve this feat. Yet what Eisenberg is after is something much simpler and yet much more challenging: to

> do one thing at a time, always sharing with the audience and keeping the cause or the aim of each action transparent. It doesn't matter if the solutions are ingenious; the aim here is to create a shared space where they occur to the performer at the same time as they occur to the spectators.

The process of sharing, every beat, each action with the audience one step at a time is more important than the solution itself. In De Bont's (2019) to clown storytelling and structure: A) The clown has an objective. B) The clown encounters a problem. C) The clown finds a solution. A clown solution, according to De Bont (2019), is an extraordinary, unique and completely original idea. In the clown routine I wrote and performed called *The Clown Waits for Hope*, the movement between hope and failure was in search of a solution. The oscillation between hope and failure was propelled via *engagement, failure, stupidity* and *playfulness.*

In *The Clown Waits for Hope,* the clown offers no tangible solutions to his suffering other than to *keep going.* However, at the end of the performance the audience wants to hug and comfort me, empowered to act on their own solution to this clown contemplating suicide. This process of engagement, failure, stupidity and playfulness enact a clown-theory that aims to discover rather than to control and within the motion of searching, solutions may emerge.

This clown-theory resists the notion of urgency to solve and instead suspends time to freely discover. Without ever abandoning uncertainty the

clown aims to understand, even though he will never understand, searches without finding and tries to keep the game going through playfulness. All the while, each moment shared, with vulnerability, transparent with hope and failure, the clown connects and engages. His outward gaze creates the space for possible solutions to be enacted by the public; he is persistently empowering, fully present, and ready to accept the catastrophe and leave. If there is no solution, the fiasco, the disaster is too ridiculous, he must accept and go.

That *acceptance* is another shared term used in a therapeutic sense often when working with children and young people who have experienced trauma. Acceptance is often directed at parents, foster carers and teachers, for sitting with the strong emotions experienced by traumatised children. However, I am resisting notions of healing proposed by global theories or grand narratives, as discussed in Chapter 3.1.2. Acceptance for the clown is full of awareness of disaster and his failure that is openly shared with the audience. There is no fixing, no healing, no solution. All the clown can do is go, come back tomorrow and try again.

4.3 Experiments in clowning and social work

In the Theatre Laboratory, I experimented with how the clown encounters and responds to the impossible task and inevitable failure. I invited a group of trained clowns to participate in a workshop where I facilitated the clown pedagogy, as detailed within this Chapter 4. I encouraged hopefulness,

failing and playfulness in exercises such as Carton, Grandma's Footsteps and Engaging the Audience. As the participants played these games, I would clap once to invite them to pause and take note of their bodies (See Video of some examples: Clown Exercises).

In Carton, just before the game is played, the actors are awake with hope and when the Carton falls, they are genuine in their expression and sense of failure. Every time the carton falls and the participants react, I ask them to repeat their response and remember how they responded. Following on from this game, we play Grandma's Footsteps and I ask them to repeat their unique expression of failure from the Carton exercise. In order to slow the actors down and experiment with impossibility, I asked either the Grandma or the participants creeping up on Grandma to balance a cup of water on their heads – if the cup falls they have lost the game.

FIGURE 23: GRANDMA'S FOOTSTEPS, CLOWN EXPERIMENTATION IN THE THEATRE LABORATORY, 2022, UNISQ THEATRE REHEARSAL ROOM, TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

To add to this exploration of hope and failure, I invite the participants to try *I don't know, Wow* and *5000 people/10,000 Eyes.* These exercises help them to move through these states: *hope, wow, stupidity, failure, confusion, playfulness* and back to *hopefulness* to keep moving. To bring these together and play with them further, I explore a couple more exercises *The Lonely Brontosaurus* (Peta Lily), *The Date* and *The Empty Box*.

The Lonely Brontosaurus

> **Teacher**: Find a space in the room. You are a Brontosaurus asleep in a cave. Gradually light from the sun rising enters your cave. Your eyes flutter a little. You wipe some sleep away from your eyes. Rub them a few times to wake up. You blink. Everything is quiet. The quietest you have ever known. Confusion. You slowly emerge from your cave. Overnight a meteorite has wiped out the dinosaurs. Extinct. You do not know this but somehow you have survived. There is nothing in front of you. Confusion. When you are ready, you find a little hope within you. Maybe your family are out there. Maybe your friends. Maybe the Dinosaur Government has a plan to save you. You are going to call out to them. You find your Brontosaurus voice and make a call to the North (the students call out), you call to the south (the students call), to the East and the West (the students call). You wait for a moment with hope. Remember the hope you have to keep the carton in the air. Nothing. No-one. Extinct. You

have failed. You turn around and curl up in your cave. Maybe tomorrow.

The Date.

Teacher: Solo. (On stage is a table and chair, a restaurant or café) Enter through the door and sit. You are meeting your boyfriend/girlfriend. You are going to propose. You are excited. Hopeful. You think about your future. The beautiful wedding. Children. Grandchildren. You wait. Wait. You begin an internal, slow deflation. Failure. Where are they? Look to the public, look to your watch – double take – huh. Where are they? The waiter comes and give you a note. Your partner is not coming. They have run away, left the country. They don't love you. Complete failure. You have dropped the carton.

Empty Box

Teacher: In pairs. *The teacher mimes a pretend box and hands it to each pair.* Inside this box there is anything you want there to be. Take it in turns. With hopefulness, pick something from the box: wow, what is it? (confusion), a duck, wow, play, once it is has it's magic, failure, put it back. With hopefulness pick out something else.

I found in exploring these states with the participants, that when moving between hope, wow, stupidity, failure, confusion, playfulness and back to

hopefulness that their play would be infinite. I had to keep intervening to get the participants to stop; at times, even I had to raise my voice and strongly insist for them to stop. The movement between these states allowed for a persistent and playful willingness to keep going – *the elan vital spirit!* From here I explored how the clown moving through and around these various states discovers and plays with impossible tasks.

4.3.1 Playing with a balloon

I adapted an exercise from Eric De Bont's (2019) Clown and Human Tragedy, whereby Eric encourages more *He, He, Ha, Ha* energy from the student telling their tragedy:

Balloon (Eric De Bont)

> **Teacher**: (On stage is the door and a chair). Choose a song. Can be simple. Take a balloon, enter holding the balloon, make contact, walk down stage, in front of the chair. When your energy is right, start singing the song. Two verses. On the third verse, put the balloon on the chair and sir on the chair, still singing your song. Note your emotional vulnerability and impulses. These are true to your clown.

By sitting on the balloon, an impossible task and inevitable failure are enacted. I explored two exercises with the balloon: *The First Date* and *The*

Game of Not letting the Balloon Burst while sitting on it (See Video: 5.2.1 Playing with a Balloon).

The First Date (Shitting yourself)

Teacher: In pairs. First date. First actor has the balloon and is waiting for their date to arrive (hopeful anticipation). This is their first since they were left alone at the wedding alter 3 years ago. They hope to find love again. Their date arrives and sits down. The first actor begins to tell their date about themselves, as they talk, they stand up, put the balloon on the chair and sit. When the balloon bursts it is as if they have shit themselves. They look at their date (failure). They say they are sorry and leave.

The Game of Not letting the Balloon burst while sitting on it.

Teacher: Solo. Enter holding the balloon. Astonishment when you see the audience. Hope. Notice the chair. Notice the balloon. Notice the audience. When you are ready put the balloon down on the chair and sit. Lift one leg up. Life the other leg up. Lift your arms up. When the balloon bursts you have shit your paints. Look to the audience. Complete failure, catastrophe – leave.

In both these exercises the participants explore the balloon, they play before attempting the task of sitting on it. Their playfulness comes from their state as I have not instructed them to play. Second, their anticipation of the balloon bursting releases further their hopeful anticipation explored in previous exercises. Last, the loud and unpredictable burst of the balloon enacts a more genuine expression of failure that they have made a mistake which they are able to share with the audience.

4.3.2 Playing with text

Exploring the impossible task further, I experimented with how the clowns might engage a person stuck in a difficult emotional and social circumstance. I pulled text from two papers that conducted participatory research with parents subject to child protection intervention, with the aim of listening to their voices (Bouma et. al., 2020; Smithson and Mibson; 2017). The parents' expressions of their experience are an apt example of their encounter with impossibility and failure:

- 'Nobody did anything'.
- 'They don't do anything, and they see that it is not okay'.
- 'You know it, but you don't do anything'.
- 'It's not true'.
- 'But I have no voice, no opinion, nothing'.
- 'I'm in no-man's land'.

- ‘I did the best I could’.
- ‘It still wasn’t enough for them’.
- ‘In the end, I still do not understand’

During this exercise, I placed two chairs on stage, replicating a home visit. The actor playing the parent was not performing clown but sitting in a sad emotional state that slowly builds as they read their text (See Video: 5.2.2 Playing with Text). The clown enters and encounters the parent, they try to help but fail, try again but fail, and then discover the possibilities between hope and failure. The findings from this exercise are consistent with the exercises from above where the clowns find playfulness and a persistent will to keep trying, with the eventuality that I as the facilitator must tell them to stop.

4.3.3 Playing with a scenario

The last experiment I explored with the impossible task and inevitable failure was to have actors perform a script I had written based on a scenario with a family. I based the scenario on my experiences working with families (see appendix for the playscript). The playscript recounts a stressful morning for a complicated family system, struggling with poverty, housing tension and parenting. The scenario ends with a lone mother and her baby sitting on her couch (See Video: Scenario). The clowns are given the instruction that they are social workers employed for child safety to do a safety check. However, they are instructed to engage in the same manner

they have been exploring in the previous exercises that is: hope, confusion, stupidity, playfulness and failure. The clown knocks on the door and enters to engage with the mother.

An interesting discovery from this experiment was the manner in which power shifts: the parent has status over the clown. In the first video Chloe enters and engages with the mother. Her low status is clear from the outset and she goes about interacting and discovering the space in a manner that appears to empower the parent. Significantly, Chloe's silence gives space to observe the parent respond to her baby's crying and to nurse her. It also provides space for the parent to want to talk and Chloe to listen rather than explain.

FIGURE 24: EXAMPLE WITH CHLOE, CLOWN EXPERIMENTATION IN THE THEATRE LABORATORY, 2022, UNISQ THEATRE REHEARSAL ROOM, TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

(See Video: Example with Chloe)

As discussed in Chapter 2.2.11, Lecoq's notion of silence before speech as linked to the state of not-knowing, humility and the propensity for the clown and audience to simply bear witness to each other (Lecoq, 2001, 29)

is evident here. In the context of the exercise Chloe is bearing witness to the mother and she is gradually revealing herself to the clown about how she parents and she demonstrates a willingness to want to share.

In the second attempt at this experiment, Ashlynn engages with the teenager of the scenario who has been the centre of much of the family conflict. Ash's playfulness quickly disarms the young person and she can build a rapport. However, it is Ash's stupidity and willingness to listen to the teenager's language and accept their point of view that stand out.

FIGURE 25: EXAMPLE WITH ASHLYNN, CLOWN EXPERIMENTATION IN THE THEATRE LABORATORY, 2022, UNISQ THEATRE REHEARSAL ROOM, TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

(See Video: Example with Ashlynn)

Halberstam (2011) argues that through resisting mastery, subjugated knowledges can be enacted and engaged (Brown, 2014, p. 4). Subjugated knowledges contest grand narratives and global theories (Peterson, 2016, p. 158). The privileging of truth claims generated from the methods of science have been criticized, arguing that this has led to the subjugation of local, marginal and indigenous knowledge. These exiled subjugated

knowledges have been stripped of their legitimacy in public discourse (White & Epston, 1990, p. 26).

In resisting the master knowledges, Halberstam's (2011) notion of "conversation" emerges as a way of being and knowing without seeking to measure with dictates that determine goals, practices, and legitimate forms of knowledge (Sandlin and Letts, 2016, pp. 99 – 100). Halberstam (2011) argues the usefulness of *stupidity* to resist the prerogative that there is a single-entry point to knowledge (Peterson, 2016, p. 158). This appears to be what has occurred in Ash's improvisation: the clown's stupidity legitimises the young person's knowledge and understanding of their world. As a result, dialogue and conversation emerge resulting in a shared understanding of the teenager's experience.

4.4 Formulating a clown theory

Based on my practice of clowning, experiments, and reflection on the literature, I propose the following definition of clown theory:

> The clown encounters problems as they fail to perform the intended tasks of an object. The knowledge constructed regarding the object is interrupted by the clown's failure to achieve the rules governing it. As the clown flops, that is they share with the audience that they are too stupid to solve the problem, they reveal their humanity. The audience laughs and finds pleasure at the clown's inevitable failure as the rules are exposed as false. The clown's stupefaction of the

object enacts a state of not-knowing that elicits astonishment and discovery of the object as new, free of the conventional ways-of-knowing. The clown is then free to playfully discover the object anew, seeing it as malleable, an alternative meaning emerges, full of possibility and yet, refusing to be fixed. The object, the rules and problem are dislodged from fixed-logics and as such new ideas for solutions to the problem can be explored. The clown as open, vulnerable and willing, shares every moment of failure, hope and discovery with the audience. It is this journey of sharing that ascribes new meaning to an object and the ideas generated to overcome problems, not the solution, which is often ridiculous.

4.5 Summary

The clowning principles constitute a relational practice that encounters problems with a vulnerable sharing of failure. The five principles of clown practice correlate with social work: engagement, failure, stupidity, playfulness and problem-solving. The clowns' propensity to 1) engage with a hopeful anticipation for success, 2) be willing to fail, 3) share their failure with the audience, 4) accept, 5) leave and 6) come back to try again – all the while remaining open to finding play, joy and pleasure create a curious way to be in relationship with the world and to encounter problems. My meandering through various sits of clown practice have led to the discovery of clown principles that constitute as a way of being in the world despite

failure. The ongoing experimentation and reflection of these principles in practice have led to a conceptualisation and definition of clown theory. I turn now to explore the manner in which clown theory might correlate with social work theory and propose that it transgresses disciplinary boundaries and form a new approach to child protection work entitled Clown Based Social Work.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Findings: Towards a clown-based social work

This project has stepped out in uncertainty away from social work to explore clowning, and in so doing discovered an alternative way of being and doing when faced with an impossible task. This result constitutes a clown theory. This chapter outlines the most significant finding stemming from the research: conceptualisation for clown-theory that not only correlates with social work theory but generates a new approach to child protection practice. *Clown-Based Social Work* is introduced through a social work lens to clown theory and practice, considering how this might be applied in the child protection context. This chapter returns to child protection practice as *impossible* (as outlined in Chapter 2), and travels back to social work theory and practice as informed by clown theory. Clown theory as enacted through my creative practice is theoretically considered across disciplinary boundaries as I reflect on my child protection practice and look forward to using clown theory with children and families in social work practice.

5.1.1 Key concepts

Clown-Based Social Work draws on clown-theory (as defined in Chapter 4) to enact a relational presence that aims to connect, listen, and understand, while moving between states of hope and failure. As discussed in Chapter 2, Social Work Theory typically provides an explanation for causality,

method and technique when social workers engage with people and their circumstances (Connolly, Harms, & Maidment, 2017, p. 4). In describing the cause of the problem, the theory proposes a method for practice that offers specific skills and techniques for the social worker to enact in alliance with the theoretical view of choice (Connolly, Harms, & Maidment, 2017, p. 4). The experiments in *clown theory* and practice (discussed in Chapter 4.3) look to provide an alternative approach to inform how social workers might perform child protection practice in the future.

Clown-Based Social Work draws on De Bont's (2019) *Objective, Problem* and *Solution* and Byland's (2019) *Disruption* and *Catastrophe* pedagogies for clown devising as a framework for social work practice (discussed in Chapter 4.1.1). *Clown-Based Social Work* aims only to explore the *objectives* (hopes) of parents and children, the *problems* (failure) that can *distract* or *catastrophically* derail the objective, and the imaginable *solutions* (Chapter 4.2.2; 4.25). This aim is performed by the social worker with a vulnerable engagement, willing to fail and try again despite the *impossible task.* Drawing on my findings in clown theory and practice, seven key concepts are fundamental to Clown-Based Social Work:

1. Failure is inevitable.

2. It is possible to experience joy and pleasure regardless of failure.

3. Playful encounters are privileged over other case management or therapeutic tasks.

4. The social worker wants to understand the problems and solutions of the service user but never will.

5. Reimagine goals through discovery, playfulness and dialogue with the service user.

6. Change may not be possible but a vulnerable and open acceptance of living as best as possible while inevitably failing may be achieved.

7. Anything is possible.

It is proposed that the fundamental concepts of Clown-Based Social Work are practised with children and families through the simple framework of a) Objective, b) Problem and c) Solution. By exploring the *Objectives,* the social worker highlights the intentions of parents and allows for acceptance of families where they are now – *I intend to love my child, I intend to keep them safe, I intend to be sober* and so on. Intentions are full of hope as demonstrated by the clown game Carton – *I intend to keep the carton in the air* (Chapter 4.1.2; 4.2.2). The *hope* that a parent might rehabilitate from drug addiction or that they might find secure housing, the hope that families will stay together or be reunified, the hope that children will be safe and thrive, and the hope as practitioners that we can contribute towards helping are all possible intentions. However, this hopeful anticipation is blunted by inevitable failure.

Problems and *objectives* become impossible tasks due to socio-political inevitabilities of parenting and of family experiences (also discussed in

Chapter 2.1.6; 2.1.7; 2.1.8; 2.1.9). Exploring the *problems* that exist and obstruct *objectives* opens possibilities to accept reality as it is. This approach has a critical view, recognising that social problems exist due to the socio-political nature of oppressive structures. Hence, the outcome of *objectives* and *problems* of service users are *impossible tasks.* According to Clown-Based Social Work, the social worker accepts the circumstance as a complete catastrophe (Chapter 2.2.4) and shares their own failure with the service user. The social worker must accept that they cannot change the service user or their environment, which results in a low-status positionality to children and families (Chapter 2.2.5). The aim while working between hope (objective) and failure (problem) is not to "fix" the problem as identified but rather to accept it and discover *fluid ways* of being playful and imaginative while in relationship with the service-user (Chapter 2.2.9). By moving fluidly between hope and failure the aim is to find ways to live with joy in this in-between space.

Playful exploration with no purpose other than *joy without demands* is pursued in this in-between space. This might include games/exercises as discussed earlier (Chapter 4.2.4), privileging forms of play that curb competitive motivations. The practitioner focuses on playing games/exercises with parents and children that the family finds fun and joyful. Clown-Based Social Work is consistent with Butler's (2012, p. 69) argument that clown-logic operates in the *here and now*, free of the past and resistant of the future. The approach therefore resists timeframes and prescribed steps toward progress but rather seeks ongoing *foolish*

engagement as an approach to build relationships and find ways to *live well in the present*. Since objectives and hopes will inevitably fail the possibilities for pleasure and joy in the *here and now* are privileged over future ambitions. It is possible to experience joy and pleasure regardless of failure.

5.2 Practice principles

Reflecting on the findings of a distinct clown theory, I turn to explore how this logic might be considered a social work theory and reflect on its practical application in the child protection context. The following practice principles will be discussed: a) Discovery-led Engagement, b) Engaging with Unmasked Failure and Hope, c) Trying to Understand with Stupefaction and Astonishment; d) Privileging Playfulness and Joy; and e) Reimaging Goals, Exploring Solutions. The principles will be considered in relation to the social work home visit that has been the historical axis of child protection work in protecting children and supporting families. The nature of the child protection home visit will be outlined before exploring the way Clown-Based Social Work practice principles might be applied.

5.2.1 The home visit

The aim of child protection practice is protecting children from harm. The most invasive and maximum measure practitioners can take to protect children is to remove them from their parents (Ainsworth & Hansen, 2012,

p. 146). Child protection intervention is typically understood as involving two *opposing* practices: *child protection and family support* (Venables, Healy & Harrison, 2015, p. 10). The dichotomous dual role in child protection work is described by Syrstad and Slettebø (2020, p. 100) as a complex cycle between parents and children. In the Australian practice context, the *child protection* focus is dominant, placing priority on evidence gathering, investigation, assessment and monitoring (Venables, Healy & Harrison, 2015, p. 10). Practice that aims to support the family to keep their children safely in the home aligns with human rights perspectives and international conventions (UNCRC, 1986).

Home visitation programs are a mode of service delivery predominant across programs that focus on the prevention of child abuse and neglect and family preservation through intensive case work and therapeutic intervention with parents (Scerra, 2010, p. 20). Home visiting interventions have been designed in service delivery in both statutory and non-Government agencies to work with families' complex and multiple problems. Many intensive home visiting programs based in Non-Government Organisations include multiple visits each week and smaller caseloads to be responsive and to engage with the daily life of families.

During home visits, child protection workers move into families' private spaces, not only the living room but bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchens (Ferguson, 2018, p. 75). Inspections may including looking in cupboards, fridges and waste bins in order to understand the life of the family as well

as interviewing parents and children. Ferguson (2018, p. 75) observes the manner in which objects, such as toys and photos were used to make connection and empathy with families and children

5.2.2 Discovery-Led engagement which removes authoritarian demonisation

Smithson and Gibson (2017, 565) have found that social workers authoritarian positioning in child protection work used the parents' lack of influence and the fears of child removal as a threat to enforce compliance (Smithson and Gibson, 2017, p. 565). Featherstone, White and Morris (2014, p. 35) refer to social work practice in the child protection field as *authoritarian demonisation.* The authors highlight that social justice (a key value of social work) is incompatible with the *muscular authoritarianism* of contemporary child protection policy and practice (Featherstone, White & Morris, 2014, p. 2). Important to this discussion is framing of 'professionalism', which according to Garrett (2021a, p. 6) '…can be viewed as the managerial ideology of the social work 'apparatus' which amplifies 'degraded' versions of practitioner roles'. The author argues that this apparatus is more concerned with the rules and codes of conduct, such as dress codes, than a homeless person sleeping in tents (Garrett, 2021b, p. 1141). Reisch (2013, p. 76) questions whether the social justice aims of social work are compatible with professionalism. The author details how professionalism perpetuates '…dominant cultural values, hierarchical

relationships, patronising views of those who receive services and individualistic, top-down views of change…' (Reisch, 2013, p. 76).

Reisch (2013, p. 77) argues for an alternative to approaching *professionalism* that draws on the tradition of Critical Social Work and involves the balancing of the power relations between practitioners and service-users through empowerment. Venables et al. (2015) discovered that Child Safety Officers often used their power over parents, resorting to threatening tactics to coerce participation, particularly through the investigation and assessment phase. The power imbalance with parents and children in child protection work produces mistrust that is impossible to mitigate (Cocks, 2019, p. 203).

Reisch and Garvin (2016, p. 183) define *power* as '…the influence and resources needed to accomplish desired goals'. The harnessing and mobilizing of power are fundamental to social work in its efforts to create social justice. The authors explain that there are distinctive sources of power that work together to maintain privilege and oppressive social structures. The concept of *status* is crucial to understanding these *sources of power*, as it draws attention to the manner in which unearned privilege reinforces oppression. Status signifies difference of power within group members as a result of certain attributes held by members external to the group. Social categories that are assigned to status commonly include '…ability, age, class, culture, ethnicity, family structure, gender (including gender identity and gender expression), marital status, national origin,

geographic location (e.g., rural, suburban, and urban), race, religion or spirituality, and sexual orientation' (Reisch and Garvin, 2016, p. 184). These categories often define who has high or low status and therefore, in terms of social justice, who has privilege and who will experience oppression (Reisch and Garvin, 2016, pp. 184 - 185).

A key aim of Clown-Based Social Work is to not only be aware of, but to disrupt these forms of power through the practitioners own deliberate lowering of their social status. Clown-Based Social Work aims to explore the home and draws on the practice of *discovery;* however, not from a position of power. Linge (2011, p. 7) as discussed in Chapter 2.2.6 describes the healthcare clown as having a reversed relationship with patients, whereby the low-status of the clown is empowering for children. When I engaged in the clown practice of *Discovering the Audience* (4.2.1), the vulnerability, of looking out with nothing to offer, led to the audience becoming empowered. Lecoq (2000, p. 154) emphasized that *discovery* is linked to the concept of a *clown-dimension* that is explained as *not playing the clown* but by revealing the actor, the person. Butler (2012, p. 71) also asserts that the clown's discovery of the world begins with relinquishing knowledge and finding a basic state of humanity and then re-approaching the world.

Clown Based Social Work begins with the stripping away of *authoritarian demonisation*, professionalism and status through the unfolding practice of *unmasking failure, stupefaction* and *playfulness.* The social worker strips

away their status to vulnerably expose the person behind the practitioner and openly share their discovery of the service user and the circumstance. Clown-Based Social Work is therefore a discovery-led approach that resists explanatory theories.

5.2.3 Engaging with unmasked failure and hope

In social work, *engagement* is the first step of the helping process and essentially refers to getting to know the service user and building a connection or rapport with them. Clown-Based Social Work abandons the falseness of professionalism and reveals the person within the social worker role who has failures and hopes (Chapter 2.3.1). As in the exercises discussed (Chapter 4.2.2; 4.3.1) authentic hope is revealed from failure. If the social worker tries to eagerly assess, problem solve or change the circumstance they have let ego drive the engagement and they have lost genuine care. The acceptance of failure is the recognition of reality and positions the work with the service user in the real world rather than in abstracted optimism. This approach accepts that the social worker cannot change the reality they are presented with. The Clown-Based social worker persistently returns to hope despite the failures they encounter; however, they never pretend that they have succeeded. They must always accept failure (Chapter 2.1.10).

Unmasked Failure and Hope are aesthetic qualities of the practitioner's positionality, attitude, and state but they also instigate dialogue. The

clown-based social worker's dialogue is minimal; for example they might say in acceptance of failure: *I'm sorry; this is shit; or what a disaster, this is terrible.* From this position of shared vulnerability, the social worker will also explore the failure of the parents through the following set of enquiries: *What happens when you think about cleaning your house? Show me, what do you do? When do you give up? Do you think about getting off drugs? How long will you think about it? Why do you stop thinking about it?* The social worker is curious about the moments of failure between *objective* and *problem.* The practitioner therefore is interested in trying to understand the service user's own *objectives* and what happens when they encounter *problems. What is the thought in your mind when you encounter a problem? What distracts you from your objective? What keeps interrupting you?*

The Clown-Based Social Worker draws on Byland's (2019) clown dramaturgy for the *Disruption or Catastrophe* routine. The *Disruption* approach follows the formula of *Objective – Disruption – Fiasco.* The social worker explores an objective (*cleaning the hous*e), then three distractions (*tiredness, visitors* and *infant crying)* interrupt this goal until the fiasco emerges which is the acceptance of failure and *giving up.* The practitioner will work with the service user to tell the *Distraction story.* It might be performed with the family, written, or drawn as a cartoon strip. The social worker partners with the parent and child to tell the story of what has happened using either dramaturgy or in order to increase a sense of safety for the family, metaphors might be used for the objective and problems –

such as being weighed down by bricks or being stuck in a toilet (Chapter 4.1.13). Performing the story is important as to reflect back to the service user their reality (Chapter 2.2.4). The aim is for the service user to be vulnerable, to accept failure and to share this openly with the social worker.

5.2.4 Trying to understand with stupefaction and astonishment

In the helping process social workers typically have a phase of information gathering and assessment to understand what is going on, prioritise problems and goals, and consider possible solutions. The Clown-Based Social Worker is stupefied by the Objectives and Problems explored with the parents and children. To be stupefied is to continue to *want to understand* even though you are unable to comprehend (discussed in Chapter 2.2.6; 4.2.3). The social worker as one who does not understand but wants to understand is motivated to engage further, ask more questions, clarify answers, and resist fixed knowledge.

The naïve social worker is attentive and present to each moment, ready for anything that might help understanding. Every step or moment is a new possibility to understand, the practitioner can restart and step beyond their own understanding to perceive reality as it is (Mele, 2021, pp. 9 – 10). Labels, assessments, and diagnosis are not explored in this approach. The practitioner responds to reality as it is lived rather than responding to a description of reality. The social worker might say: *help me to understand; I don't understand how this has happened;* or simply, *what do you think?*

Astonishment is an important state as it motivates the curiosity of the social worker to continue to explore and discover the person and their environment. The world of the service user is big and unknowable, so the social worker is genuinely astonished by the service user and their actions. This locates Clown-Based Social Work in the strength-based tradition of social work; however, it is differentiated by a genuine sense of wonder at the actions of service user. Astonished the social worker might say to a parent or child – *that was incredible, you are amazing, I don't know how you do it.* The social worker facilitates activity and experiences that provide opportunity for the practitioner to observe the skills of the parents and children such as posing the following questions: *Can you show me how you read? What do you cook for dinner? How do you spend time together?* The aim is to remain naïve and astonished, allowing the humanity of the family to be highlighted and celebrated.

5.2.5 Privileging playfulness and joy

The Clown-Based Social Worker in the child protection context discovers the games and activities that bring joy to the family in the here and now. This approach acknowledges inevitable failure and finds hope in the possibility of joy regardless of social circumstance, and therefore seeks out pleasure through play.

The social worker may ask questions about games the parent played as a child or explore the type of play their children enjoy. *What was your favourite toy or game?* The practitioner will then actively set up times to

participate in play – attending a home visit when the children are home to play tag, grandma's footsteps or whatever the parent or child suggests. The Clown-Based Social Worker aims to encourage and develop the play-state of parents and children. Further they explore playfulness as it relates to two core movements: a) find the game and b) keep the game going (Chapter 2.2.9; 2.3.3; 4.2.5). In this way, the approach to play might take many varied forms and different experiences leading to a multifaceted understanding of play. However, this approach prioritises play that finds joy and pleasure in the game itself, resisting the competitive or educational agendas that can influence play. This might be particularly useful in the family contact practice context. Children who have been removed typically have at least weekly visitations with their parents. Using these times to structure and teach play may be positive for both parents and children.

The social worker will seek out a game, much like a clown searching for a game with an audience, sensitive to the responses of the parents and children. Dialogue might emerge from games like *Carton* (Outlined in Chapter 4.2.2), regarding hope and failure. In the Theatre Laboratory, I experimented with storytelling in this game, i.e. *there are kittens in the carton, if it drops one will die.* In a home visit, the practitioner might ask a parent, to choose a goal to *put in the carton, i.e. sobriety, cleanliness, getting the kids to school* and so on. *How long can we keep this goal going for?* Of course, we eventually fail and drop the carton. The social worker might ask questions such as, *How did we keep it going for so long? What helped us with this goal? How come we failed? Who dropped the carton?*

Why do we keep failing at keeping it in the air? Is this impossible? What is possible? While dialogue might emerge from playfulness the aim is to activate fun and pleasure in the here and now.

Engaging children and families with a sense of playfulness provides a presence that can engage and empower children. Playfulness creates a lightness of movement in the dynamic action between failure, confusion, not-knowing, curiosity, astonishment, and discovery of alternative knowledge. This lightness of movement might be used in social work to establish more attuned and caring relationships with children and families.

5.2.6 Reimaging goals, exploring solutions

Social work processes often refer to 'intervention' or 'involvement' as taking some form of action or solutions-finding with service users. Typically, it might involve actions such as sourcing housing, or drug rehabilitation, or a safety plan to help a situation of family violence or mental health difficulty. In the Clown-Based Social Work the paradoxical concepts of a) accepting that the impossible task will lead to failure and b) despite this continuing, believing that anything is possible prompts resiliency in failing and trying again. However, rather than living in false optimism or succumbing to being stuck (discussed in Chapter 2), failure will always be acknowledged and will return to playful and pleasurable ways to live in-between hope and failure. The practitioner might ask, when returning with a sense of hopefulness: *What should we do? What's next?* Hence, the Clown-Based

Social Worker only acts out of hopeful anticipation, regardless of inevitable failure. Neither hope nor failure are masked, the social worker is always authentic.

Returning to the story of the family and the Objective and Problem, the practitioner may imagine with them a possible solution. Drawing on learning from De Bont (2019), a clown solution might be extraordinary, unique, and a completely original idea. These solutions may not be tangible; dialogue using metaphors such as a floating balloon or a super-flush (Chapter 4.2.5) might be used to imagine a different future. The metaphor for the solution might be as ridiculous as with full acceptance that it is uncertain whether anything will be different. Re-performing the story, now including the imagined solution opens up the possibility to laugh and cry. The practitioner and the service-user can circle, round and round again, trying and failing, reaching towards an imagined hopeful solution all the while discovering how to live with joy and pleasure in the present. Anything is possible.

5.2.7 Summary

Ferguson (2018, p. 65) highlights the home visit as a *distinct sphere of practice* in child protection work that has been largely ignored by theory and research. He argues that child protection social workers perform their role in the home more than any other place and that they *make* home visits

through *creativity* and *improvisation* (Ferguson, 2018, p. 65). Ferguson (2018, p. 66) writes:

> Social work in families' homes was found to be a complex activity and in attempting to meet their aims social workers and family members adopted a range of strategies. This was exemplified by a social worker who after being observed completing a sophisticated visit in which she moved from room to room, interviewing the children and parents alone and together in different combinations, described what she was doing as 'working the house'.

Ferguson (2018, p. 70) argues, based on his ethnographic study of child protection social workers on home visits, that it is through movement and improvisation that practitioners are able to create meaningful engagement with parents and children. The transition from office to suburb to street to fence to doorstep to the home is a '…ritual and the body and senses in action must be described, analysed and theorised (Ferguson, 2018, p. 70). Ferguson (2018, p. 69) discusses how social workers make home visits through creativity, movement, stillness and encounters with people, objects and materials. He draws on Pink and Leder-Mackley (2016, p. 178) who refer to the way in which *knowing happens in movement* and *routines of movement* create atmosphere and affects the way people perceive the home environment that is how it *feels.* Clown-Based Social Work offers an approach that generates *movement*, *creativity* and *improvisation.*

Home visiting programs are informed by a number of theoretical perspectives and some use standardised curriculums within the case management framework (Scerra, 2010, p. 20). Home visits have mostly been considered an enaction of the '…organisation, policies and procedures into the domestic domain' (Ferguson, 2018, p 67). Therefore, the shape of what social workers do is characterised by the bureaucratic tasks involved, that is lists, forms and checklists. Practitioners' approaches to interventions with families is shaped by organisational cultures and factors in local contexts (D'Cruz, 2004; Kemp, Marcenko, Hoagwood, & Vesneski, 2009; Venables, 2019, p. 2). The local context of the organisation determines decisions regarding the approach, the intervention, the understanding and the solutions pursued by practitioners when working with families. The culture of child protection agencies both statutory and community-based is persuasive in how practitioners engage parents with interventions (Ferguson, 2011; Kemp et al., 2014). Despite this. Ferguson (2018, p. 68) argues that while managerial procedures influence social work practice, the home visit is shaped by practitioners. The author (Ferguson, 2018, p. 68) asserts that there is no blueprint for home visits; rather, they are made and crafted through creativity and improvisation more so than bureaucratic rules.

5.3 Discussion: Clown based social work as dissent

This project began with a personal experience of feeling stuck as a child protection worker. The research inquiry has explored the possible correlations between clowning, social work, and child protection practice. At the onset, I was determined to abandon social work and I sympathised with Maylea's (2020) assertions that social work has failed and was beyond saving. Despite this, as I have clowned, I have rediscovered social work and a reinvigorated sense that impossible tasks and inevitable failures can be rich relational journeys. Joy, pleasure and playful encounters can be discovered despite the human tragedy. To clown is to listen, look, discover, lose, fail, accept, try-again, fail again, and again, and again, a hundred times, until an unexpected moment of joy appears, and we stay with it for as long as possible. I have a hunch that clown theory offers an alternative but still relational approach to engage in social work practice with children and families. Returning to consider Clown-Based Social Work from a critical and radical social work perspective, this discussion will consider the way this new approach can navigate the tensions highlighted in Chapter 2. Clown-Based Social Work will be presented as a possible form of Paul Michael Garrett's *Dissenting Social Work*.

5.3.1 Dissenting social work

Critical and radical perspectives in social work recognise the structural barriers in society and how they contribute to service users' experience of

oppression (Webb, 2019, p. xxxii). Some of these structural barriers were discussed in Chapter 2.1.6, highlighting the practice dilemma that while social work is built on principles of social justice, most funded programmes aim only for direct work that addresses the individual day to day problems of service-users. Social work practice is performed in '…a highly individualistic climate in which social problems are seen more as personal issues and clients are expected to care for themselves, with minimum government support' (Feldman, 2022, p. 760). Important to the individualisation of social problems is the dominant political ideas of Neoliberalism that emphasises the role of Government in welfare and community services. This approach holds that Government should not interfere in the lives of individuals, who are expected to be self-sufficient. Social policy that informs the sites and professional role of social work is dominated by Neoliberal ideals. A reality that has spurred Whelan (2021, p. 1171) to assert that '…social work is, effectively, a bourgeoise profession…with social workers functioning as "bureau professionals" …meaning social work itself mirrors the dominant ideology of the neoliberal state'. The fundamental ideology inherent in Neoliberalism is that individuals are competing for wealth accumulation, family, and safety on a field of equal opportunities for education and resources. Neoliberalism holds that those who lose, '…engender the construction of 'welfare dependence' as an addiction, lifestyle choice or simply the result of individual failure' (Morley and Macfarlane, 2014, p. 338).

The vocational discomfort that emerges from having to compromise on your view of social problems and surrender to practice that effectively equates to being part of the problem is disillusioning. This is particularly so as managerialism infiltrates the neo-liberal agenda in human service organisations where social workers are employed. Managerialism is preoccupied with high caseloads, bureaucratic tasks, accountability, risk and a framing of individual blame for social problems (Brockmann & Garrett, 2022, p. 888; Fenton, 2014, p. 324). The capacity for social workers to explore critical or radical tactics, such as protesting or engaging in macro-level practices advocating for social and structural change is limited in these climates that target individualism. As such, Brockmann & Garrett (2022, p. 889) have found social work practitioners have neoliberal ideals seeped into their beliefs and attitudes toward service users to the extent that there is a discourse of blame placed on the individual for the social problems they experience.

The 'welfare state' has effectively pissed all over itself; any practitioner with a bent toward social justice cannot avoid the splashback, not least service users. It is a catastrophe, we can't go on, can we? This was the position of Maylea (2020, p. 783) calling for the disbanding of social work. A position, which as I read his paper when it was published correlated with the direction of this research. I had just returned from training with Pierre Byland (*and performed The Pee Pee*), where if it is a catastrophe, it can't go on, so leave the stage. However, other scholars such as Paul Michael Garrett (2021b), who agrees mostly with Maylea's assessment of social

work, suggest the answer can be found via Dissenting Social Work (DSW). Garrett (2021b, p. 1143) draws on terms such as resistance, subversiveness, dissidence, and disruption to loosely define DSW as an alternative way of responding to a social problem that is opposite to the dominant or hegemonic ideology. As such DSW 'radically reimagines' social work theory and practice in a way that both resists the dominant hegemony and offers '… 'counter-narratives', imbued with a sense of hope…' (Garrett, 2021b, p. 1145).

With this definition in mind, I will consider the ways in which key concepts presented for Clown-Based Social Work dissent from the dominant hegemonic practices inherent in the child protection field. Garrett (2021b, p. 1144) asserts that DSW is a commitment to eradicating the harms caused by neoliberal capitalism. Key concepts of Clown-Based Social Work will be discussed as forms of dissent in child protection work: Failure, Stupidity and Play.

5.3.2 Failure as dissent

Failure has a long history with capitalism, a market economy will always produce winners and losers (Halberstam, 2011). The socio-cultural obsession with winning diverts attention away from other pathways for being in the world (Fabbre, 2014, p. 146). Failure to succeed at leading a normal life offers an opportunity to '…set alternative parameters for one's existence, however unproductive these may seem from a mainstream perspective' (Fabbre, 2014, p. 146). In the Child Protection Field dominant

narratives for parenting draw heavily on Attachment Theory as the formative rules regarding whether children's brains will be hard-wired for success or failure (Edwards et al., 2015, p. 167). Attachment Theory contends that children emotionally and socially adapt to the care provided by their primary caregiver (in particular, the mother). White, et. al. (2019, p. 2) explains further:

> If a carer meets a child's needs for care and comfort in a sensitive and responsive manner, the child develops a 'secure' attachment, while unresponsive and insensitive parenting may create 'insecure' attachment behaviors in children.

The theory has been influential among social workers working in the child protection field as a theory to support decision-making (White, et. al. 2019, p. 2). Since its earliest formations in the research of John Bowlby, Attachment Theory has focused on the adverse effects of major child–caregiver separations (Forslund et. al., 2022, p. 3). The emotional sensitivity of the caregiver is linked to the quality of the child's attachment, which is linked to their development and wellbeing (Forslund et. al. 2022, p. 3;). Further Attachment Theory and research have resulted in multiple evidence-based interventions and courses that claim to improve the sensitivity of caregivers and benefit the wellbeing of children (Forslund et. al. 2022, p. 3)

In the child protection field, practitioners are required to form risk-assessment and make decisions based on scientific evidence. The

classifications that can be formed from Attachment Theory regarding the caregiving quality and its impact on child development and wellbeing is frequently used by child protection practitioners (Hammarlund et. al., 2022, p. 712). The Attachment Theory knowledge-base is so commonplace in child protection work that the range of 'attachment disorders' now frame the way '…social workers think about the children and families they work with' (White, 2019, p. 63).

Garrett (2023, p. 113 – 114) has warned that in the neo-liberal emphasis of high caseloads and efficiency, the prevalence of fast assessment has resulted in conceptual shortcuts. Practitioners tend to classify attachment styles and parental sensitivity after only a few observations; this is particularly problematic due to the gendered and hegemonic coding implicit in Attachment Theory (Edwards et al., 2015, p. 167). Attachment theory is criticised for its '…exclusive emphasis on the role of the mother' for a child to achieve a secure attachment (Garrett, 2023, p. 112). While contemporary scholars and practitioners semantically substitute terms such as parent or caregiver into Bowlby's concepts, Garrett (2023, p. 113) asserts that '…it is still mothers—and more so if they lack income and are socially peripheral—who will be the targets of intervention…'. Furthermore, Edwards et al. (2015, p. 178) argue that the dominant reason for secure-attachment is the mother-child relationship and central to many attachment-based interventions is the notion that poverty is the result of the personal failure of parents, in particular, mothers. It is in this context that failure is seen as something to avoid, as it relates to parenting due to

the possible irreversible consequences stemming from insecure attachment styles.

Lane (2018, p. 68) proposes a Poetics of Maternal Failure that draws on her clown practice to '…disrupt entrenched ideas about failure in motherhood…'. She explores how the clown's approach to failure dissents from neoliberal connotations that failure is only productive if it is understood as part of the road to success (Lane, 2018, p. 68). The expectation on mothers to succeed in the intensive parenting practices (for example the sensitivity required to achieve a secure attachment) is impossible, yet failure is considered irrefutably negative (Lane, 2018, p. 69). The author explores further that notions of failure and success in clown theory are not opposed to each other, instead the clown discovers all the possibilities for success that exist within failure (Lane, 2018, pp. 72 – 73). Lane (2018, p. 69) explains that a poetics of maternal failure:

> …Reclaims the experience of failing within mothering practices by recasting the relationship between failure and success, by examining the patriarchal and oppressive ways that success is defined in relation to motherhood, and, finally, by arguing that as mothers, we can engage with the creative possibilities of failure and thus put failure to work for us.

Clown-Based Social Work aligns with Lane (2018, p. 70) suggesting that the aim is not to avoid failure from mothering and parenting but view failure as a site of creativity. The concept that Failure is Inevitable and the social

worker's unmasked acceptance of failure enacts what Lane (2018, p. 79) describes as '…a refusal to value success over failure'. This refusal is dissent, opening up the possibilities for joy and pleasure regardless of failure, which might even be viewed as a destination, itself, rather than a cliched stop-over on the road to success (Lane, 2018, p. 68).

The Clown-Based Social Work practitioner accepts and unmasks their sense of failure and the impossibility of socio-political realities. The concept of inevitable failure is not practised as a criticism of the service-user or to curtail hopes. Dissenting from the success narrative inherent within discourses of parenting and attachment allows practitioners and parents to reclaim '…both the image and the world of mothering' (Lane, 2018, p. 82). Failure dissents from these the neo-liberal ideals for success. Hence, in Clown-Based Social Work practice, failure feeds and houses success, as Lane (2018, p. 82) suggests, arguing that in motherhood '…the relationship between failure and success is marked by ups and downs, give and take, struggle and hope'

The concept of inevitable failure and the social workers' relational unmasking of their own failure with service users reveals the falseness of Neoliberal ambitions and rules for success. This returns to Bakhtin's (1981, p. 159) notion that clowns see the underside and the falseness of every situation and Bere's (2019, p. 3) contention that clowns are agents of disclosure (discussed in Chapter 2.2.6). As discussed, Bere's (2019) hermeneutics of failure explains that the clown's contrasting understanding

of the world reveals or discloses the tacit rules that govern the social and political world. With the falseness of parenting rules exposed, through the vulnerable acceptance of failure, the practitioner and service user are now liberated to play by different rules and explore alternative possibilities for joy and pleasure (Lane, 2018, p. 78). Halberstam asserts that the 'the queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being'. Failure dissents as it generates new possibilities (Greteman, 2014, p. 428), does something differently, fails, tries again, searching for new destinations.

5.3.3 Stupidity as dissent

Garrett (2021b, p. 201) considers how DSW perspectives might inform direct practice in relation to the way in which service users are '…situated in categories which classify, dominate and demean'. He argues for practitioners to hone a relational antennae that resists categorisation of service users. 'It is wrong to "thingify"' individuals to "dissolve" them and empty them of "substance" by forcing them into reductive categories' (Garrett, 2021b, p. 201). The problem of categorisation echoes the discourse of blame that is widespread in direct social work practice with parents involved in the child protection system. The categorising of service users as morally deficient and riddled with social problems makes different and others vulnerable groups.

Difference and otherness are equally complex ideas in child protection practice that rely on the legal classification of identity – 'an abusive parent', 'a parent with no insight', 'an abused child', 'mental health problems', 'resistant to change' and so on. These categories and descriptors highlight further Munro's (2021, p. 42) argument that bias, in particular people's reluctance to change their opinion, has a negative impact on child protection work. Ploesser and Mecheril (2011) discuss the problem social work theory has had with the concepts of difference and otherness. According to the authors the classification of service users as different, and other, limit social work practice and limit solutions. Ploesser and Mecheril (2011, pp. 795 - 801) assert:

> '…There is no approach to otherness that is able to avoid the epistemological, symbolic and social effects of power… otherness implies exclusions and that, with every definition of the 'girls', 'the migrants' or 'the homosexuals' differences within the groups will be concealed. For social work this shows the need to track down possible compulsions and standardizations in concepts, methods and institutional orders.'

The problem with classification is relevant in the context of cultural practice, where the concept of difference and otherness is important. It has been discussed in both Chapters 2 and 3 the limits and failures of cultural social work practice in child protection with First Nations people. A key criticism of cultural competency is the aim of mastery and competence that assumes

the ability of holding broad knowledge of multiple groups and further applied to lived experience of service users in direct practice (Dean, 2001; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009; Wear, 2003, p. 550). Furthermore, the difference and otherness of service users as discussed above takes an arrogant position of normality as white, Western culture and the other characterised as '…non-white, non-Western, non-heterosexual, non-English-speaking, and non-Christian' (Wear, 2003, p. 550). Drawing on the notion of intersectionality in social work theory Anastas (2010, p. 91) writes that 'it is impossible to understand all the intersectionalities that we, our students, and our clients inhabit and enact'. Ploesser and Mecheril (2011, pp. 800 - 801) argue for a deconstructive approach to otherness in social work theory to criticise heteronormative descriptors, concepts and knowledge production and query the way we understand otherness. The authors highlight the value of non-knowledge, emphasising that while knowledge is important '…knowledge about the other is neither innocent nor sufficient' (Ploesser & Mecheril, 2011, p. 801).

The Clown-Based Social Worker's stupidity and naivety therefore allows the service user to lead and inform the practitioner's own understanding (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 460). From this state of modesty, the person engaging with another resists explanatory discourse, allowing words to emerge from silence (Lecoq 2001, pp. 26 – 27). The concept that the social worker wants to understand the experiences of the service user but never will, speaks to the manner in which clowns explore and discover that which they do not understand, rather than seeking to classify and know.

The Clown-Based Social Worker is open to any possibility, including remaining in the unknown. Lane (2018, p. 79) highlights a perpetual learning that seeks the unknown and resists the narrative that knowledge has to be successfully known. Drawing on Halberstam (2011), Staśkiewicz (2021, p. 190) asserts that stupidity is a counterintuitive mode of knowing that dissociates from Capitalist principles of success, however '…not a lack of knowledge but a withdrawal from the restrictions and structures of hegemonic knowledge production'. Stupidity dissents from the hegemonic modes of knowledge production and instead searches for an alternative way though the curiosities of naivety.

Laird (2014, p. 109) has proposed that social work practitioners should engage with questions that emerge from a position of informed not-knowers. She contends that we cannot know the other and the more we assert our pre-knowledge the more closed and fixed our understanding becomes, even forming opinions based only on what we expect. Laird (2014, p. 109) therefore proposes this position of an informed not knower who might '…bring a wealth of expertise in asking good questions -- questions that help to make more visible (both to us and to the "other") their meanings, as well as the sources of those meanings'. In child protection practice a dichotomous dynamic emerges between not-knowing and having a fixed expectation of what will happen. Laird's proposition of informed not-knowing (2014, p. 109) is a paradoxical merging of knowledge and stupidity that according to Dean (2001, p. 628) captures lack of competence important in cross-cultural practice. She argues that

this position of informed not knowing that motivates genuinely curious questions and discovery can enhance trust and understanding. Practice that embodies a genuine not-knowing that does not manipulatively conceal or disrespect service users through dishonesty is challenging. Stupidity, as a form of dissent from classifications, listens and explores, before knowing and doing and hence enacts humility in the social workers relationship with service users.

5.3.4 Play as dissent

Garrett (2021a p. 226) highlights that DSW is at odds with trends towards brain-science approaches, such as mindfulness and neuroscience that '…may actually serve to obscure – some of the structurally generated problems confronting practitioners'. In the child protection field neuroscience in particular has been promoted within scholarly and political spheres to argue for the notion of early intervention in the lives of children and families (Garrett, 2018, p. 656). However, the 'neuromolecular gaze' as it has been coined has been criticised for '…justifying gendered, raced and social inequalities, positioning poor mothers as architects of their children's deprivation' (Edwards et al., 2015, p. 167). The uncritical acceptance, particularly in the child protection field of neuroscience as a hopeful path forward hides an interrogation of generalisations made by academics and politicians who have limited understanding of the working

class or with poverty (Beddoe & Joy, 2017, p. 65; Garrett, 2018, p. 662; 668).

Henceforth, a number of scholars have noted that the rise in brain-science has coincided with the advance of the neo-liberal ideology in social welfare (Beddoe & Joy, 2017; Nadesan, 2002; Pitts-Taylor, 2010; Schmitz & Höppner, 2014; Wall, 2010). One of the implications is that neoliberalism is using neuroscience to create an ethic of self-care and personal responsibility, whereby looking after yourself '…avoids being a financial liability to the state' (Beddoe & Joy, 2017, p. 65). Neuroscience has promoted an ideal neoliberal citizen who is educated, upholds good behaviour, has a moral obligation to work and manages family matters competently and safely (Beddoe & Joy, 2017, p. 70; Parton, 2016, p. 8). This ideal has become the dominant hegemonic perspective in the child protection field, which if not achieved must mean parents have something intrinsically amiss in their mind, body and soul (Beddoe & Joy, 2017, p. 70; Gillies and Edwards, 2017, p. 19). While neuroscience recognises the effects of poverty on parenting and families the connection is inversed so to claim that certain parenting practices are the cause for poverty (Beddoe & Joy, 2017, p. 71).

As a result, the market-boom in neuroparenting, with books, courses and therapeutic models have become dominant in the child protection field as both explanatory models and solutions (or treatment) to problems. One such model that is prevalent in the child protection field is Dyadic

Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), defined as a treatment for traumatised children based on attachment and brain science research (Hughes, 2017, p. 599). This approach promotes an attitude of PACE - playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, empathy in order to facilitate '…an open and engaged, intersubjective, therapeutic stance' (Hughes, 2017, p. 595). The goal, emphasises Hughes (2017, p. 595), is to use the therapeutic relationship to reduce the impact of trauma through experiencing a new care-giving experience. Playfulness is promoted as a means towards an optimistic future, whereby the child or young person is healed from their past and now have new healthy relationships. Hughes (2017, p. 600) writes:

> Playfulness conveys a sense of optimism and hope for the family's journey forward together. It provides context so that the problems are not experienced in isolation from the routines and special events of daily living. At times it conveys lightness and laughter, looking for ways to experience and enhance the positive qualities of their relationships. This enables the child to experience a bit of happiness and companionship which she is going to need if she is to move beyond her isolation, fears, and shame.

The clinicians' use of playfulness so the child can experience *a bit of happiness* highlights the privileging of the more serious forms of therapy and healing. Gray, Donnelly & Gibson (2019, p. 456) assert that serious therapeutic approaches informed by academic research, bioscience and

healthcare, dismiss foolish and nonsensical ways of understanding the world. However, that which has been made redundant or irrelevant by the serious is what clowns embrace (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 456). Play is viewed as a relational tactic that is serious to children but not to adults. Gray, Donnelly and Gibson (2019, p. 457) criticise the use of play in therapeutic practices:

> Play and pleasure are often used by clinicians as devices, tools, and tricks to secure the compliance of children towards realizing more "serious" therapy goals or as forms of assessment…Games and rewards are also employed in treatment sessions to make therapy fun and secure children's cooperation…The uptake of play for instrumental purposes in rehabilitation may be well intentioned but ultimately signals how play and pleasure are seldom pursued or valued as ends in themselves (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, p. 457).

The brain science imperative to move beyond and overcome trauma, when paired with neoliberal goals reveal the underlining dominant discourses of the normalisation of social roles as productive citizens (Gray, Donnelly & Gibson, 2019, pp. 456 – 457; Halberstam, 2011). Clown-Based Social Work offers a counter-narrative to hegemonic notions of parenting and the therapeutic-goals that aim to heal or change children and young people. Instead, we look to the frivolous, to all the possibilities for pleasure and joy

in the here and now that are enacted though the low-forms of play found in clowning practice, such as Grandma's Footsteps, Hide and Seek and Tag.

Halberstam (2011, Low Theory section) draws on the notion of low theory to describe ways of knowing that are detached from '…from prescriptive methods, fixed logics and epistemes'. Hence, the playfulness employed in Clown-Based Social Work dissents from the prescriptions and treatments advocated for in the Neurosciences in order to resist being '…snared by the hooks of hegemony…' Halberstam (2011, Low Theory section). The Clown-Based Social Worker privileges play over therapeutic intervention, not to re-wire the brain but to discover the pleasure and fun in parent and child relationships. Viewing these not as means to an optimistic better relationship or more secure attachment, but valuable and purposeful to the love shared between parents and children. Snoek & Horstkötter (2021, p. 400) argue that parents '…play games with their children and make them laugh because that is fun and because they love them, not because neuroscience has appointed these behaviours as conducive for brain development'.

According to the literature for children on short-term custody orders there are two significantly important moments of their experience: the moment of removal and the moment of reunification (Balsells et al. 2014; Farmer, 2014; Mateos, Vaquero, Balsells and Ponce, 2017). Mateos, Vaquero, Balsells and Ponce (2017, p. 871) argue that the voices of children in child protection work are overlooked in practice. Fuentes-Peláez et al

(2013) have found that children and young people receive little support during both of these moments, despite the importance of them understanding the decision-making behind either removal or returning home. Significantly, the key concern is the propensity for child protection workers to develop relationships with children and young people that provide the time and trust for their thoughts, emotions and voices to be heard (Nybell 2013; Cossar et al. 2014; Mateos, et.al, 2017, p. 873). Mateos, et.al (2017, p. 873) highlight '…the need to strengthen joint communication in spaces in which parents, children and professionals are present as equals.' A social worker who actively plays with children is able to engage and see them, allowing for a richer understanding of their experience.

As an undisciplined practice, playing with parents and children during home visits enacts low theory as a mode of knowledge that refuses to know and instead detours and explores (Halberstam, 2011, Low Theory section). Playfulness gets lost, runs away, forgets, explores, listens, revels in purposelessness, laughs and opens dialogue in a manner that '…seeks not to explain but to involve' (Halberstam, 2011, Low Theory section). Playfulness puts children at the forefront of social work practice and views their '…curious, creative and immature play…' as '…a site of opportunity…' for exploring and discovering alternative solutions (Baspehlivan, 2022, p. 88). Baspehlivan (2022, p. 88) asserts that children are in a liminal relationship with their social world because they don't understand the function of authority and therefore resist, question and play with social

rules and norms (i.e. maturity). This playfulness can result in resisting and exposing the '…limits of the authoritative and discursive structures in which they (children) are situated' (Baspehlivan, 2022, p. 88). Hence playfulness can manifest a counterhegemonic theorization of alternatives, that dissents from adults and their mechanisms for hegemony to privilege the child.

5.3.5 Summary

Dissenting Social Work is a new approach that draws on critical theory, in particular Marxism in order find a way for social work to wriggle out of the Neo-liberal clasp to which it is stuck. However, Garrett (2021a, p. 226) calls for pathways and strategies, asking, 'How might DSW – imbued perspectives impact on the way that practitioners engage with those having regard to services?'. The relational concepts and principles of Clown-Based Social Work offer a specific approach for direct DSW practice with families and children in the child protection field. These practice principles have been discovered and explored during my own clown practice and reverberated throughout the historical practices of clowning and scattered throughout the literature as a clown theory.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Correlations on failure

To what extent is there a correlation between clowning, social work and the child protection field and what are the possibilities for direct practice? Clown Theory correlates with Social Work Theory and the interaction between the common concepts have generated a new model. Both Clown Theory and Social Work Theory offer a way of being in relationship with people in impossible circumstances. Both share common concepts, most notably *engagement, empathy, understanding, play, problem solving, and failure.* Failure is evident in the impossibility of child protection work and the current limits to the social worker role. The clown's commitment to failure as a destination to be explored for possibilities has also been demonstrated.

The research has engaged in thinking through creative practice. Clown Practice offers an opportunity to stop, fail, share, accept and carry on. This process has inspired reflection on the limits of humanity and what is really possible in an unfair and oppressive system. Hence, while correlations between Clown Theory and Social Work Theory exist, the clown dissents, withdraws from established ways of knowing and normative familial ideals to focus on all the possibilities that might exist for joy and pleasure, here and now.

Clown-Based Social Work is a way to keep moving forward despite inevitable and ongoing failure, while remaining engaged in relationships

with vulnerable people. Clown practice is proposed as a pedagogical tool to bring out relational states that can position an embodied baseline for social work. Clown-Based Social Work enacts a relational presence which aims to connect, listen, and understand in the social and emotional context of hope and failure. The Future Implications for Clown-Based Social Work in Child Protection Work will now be considered.

6.2 Future implications

The application of Clown-Based Social Work to the child protection field is the overall aim of current and future research into a new approach. Ongoing theoretical explorations of clown theory, social work theory and dissent, will continue to inform an ongoing discovery of practice. There is more to discover and learn as a researcher and as a practitioner; a perpetual learning that will, hopefully, have no end point. I will continue to meander between the Grid-Posts, clown training and workshops, theatre laboratory, clowning devising and performing and drawing. However, a critical Grid-Post I aim to include in this ongoing exploration, is practical work with parents, children and social work practitioners.

Firstly, there are many clown pedagogies that explore clown theory and practice that will have relevance for ongoing research into Clown-Based Social Work. In particular, Peta Lily's Dark Clown, Vivial Gladwell Healthcare clowning, and ongoing research in Gerado Mele's clown pedagogy offer future research possibilities in the exploration of Clown-Based Social Work. Second, the inclusion of ongoing practice research with

children and families is critical for the ongoing development of this approach. I aim to draw on networks within the child protection sector to ethically apply, question and explore the concepts and principles of this approach with children and families. I aim to expand on the work I have recently commenced with Human Services organisations in Toowoomba conducting play workshops for parents and children drawing on the practices. These have received positive feedback from practitioners and participants as practical strategies for playing with children that are fun and easy to learn. Third, I aim to explore the clown pedagogy presented in this study with current social workers and child protection practitioners. This will include clown training for current practitioners and exploring with them their experiences and integrating the learning into their practice.

6.3 Conclusion

My research has folded back onto itself in multiple ways, whereby the literature, methodology and findings have replicated each other. Key reverberating concepts have sounded throughout each chapter; most notably failure, stupidity, playfulness, and not-knowing in both social work and clowning. That these perceptions have contributed to the research background, the methods, methodologies and the findings is curious and demonstrates a perpetual correlation between clowning, social work and child protection practice. My research begins with failure, explores failure, and discovers more failure, yet in doing so spirals and reveals correlations and new ways of practicing social work. Behind the superficiality is perhaps

one of the key findings – the clown will explore every possibility that exists for an object or moment. Research has explored all the possible movements that lie within failure, sit in the shit, look out to the audience, and find a way to keep going. The clown's dilemma is applied to the child protection environment and the clown's responses strongly suggest connections with future child protection practice.

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In social work, *engagement* is the first step of the helping process and essentially refers to getting to know the service user and building a connection or rapport with them. Clown-Based Social Work abandons the falseness of professionalism and reveals the person within the social worker role who has failures and hopes (Chapter 2.3.1). As in the exercises discussed (Chapter 4.2.2; 4.3.1) authentic hope is revealed from failure.

If the social worker tries to eagerly assess, problem solve or change the circumstance they have let ego drive the engagement and they have lost genuine care. The acceptance of failure is the recognition of reality and positions the work with the service user in the real world rather than in abstracted optimism. This approach accepts that the social worker cannot change the reality they are presented with. The Clown-Based social worker persistently returns to hope despite the failures they encounter; however, they never pretend that they have succeeded. They must always accept failure (Chapter 2.1.10).

Unmasked Failure and Hope are aesthetic qualities of the practitioner's positionality, attitude, and state but they also instigate dialogue. The clown-based social worker's dialogue is minimal; for example they might say in acceptance of failure: *I'm sorry; this is shit; or what a disaster, this is terrible.* From this position of shared vulnerability, the social worker will also explore the failure of the parents through the following set of enquiries: *What happens when you think about cleaning your house? Show me, what do you do? When do you give up? Do you think about getting off drugs? How long will you think about it? Why do you stop thinking about it?* The social worker is curious about the moments of failure between *objective* and *problem.* The practitioner therefore is interested in trying to understand the service user's own *objectives* and what happens when they encounter *problems. What is the thought in your mind when you encounter a problem? What distracts you from your objective? What keeps interrupting you?*

The Clown-Based Social Worker draws on Byland's (2019) clown dramaturgy for the *Disruption or Catastrophe* routine. The *Disruption* approach follows the formula of *Objective – Disruption – Fiasco.* The social worker explores an objective (*cleaning the hous*e), then three distractions (*tiredness, visitors* and *infant crying)* interrupt this goal until the fiasco emerges which is the acceptance of failure and *giving up.* The practitioner will work with the service user to tell the *Distraction story.* It might be performed with the family, written, or drawn as a cartoon strip. The social worker partners with the parent and child to tell the story of what has happened using either dramaturgy or in order to increase a sense of safety for the family, metaphors might be used for the objective and problems – such as being weighed down by bricks or being stuck in a toilet (Chapter 4.1.13). Performing the story is important as to reflect back to the service user their reality (Chapter 2.2.4). The aim is for the service user to be vulnerable, to accept failure and to share this openly with the social worker.