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Joan Littlewood and Ariane Mnouchkine against the canon:

Developing the actors' social representations through clowning

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Abstract

The investigation of how Joan Littlewood and Ariane Mnouchkine used clowning to develop actors with social purposes responds to the current interest in the neglected counterhegemonic training processes of women. It also contributes to current efforts to decolonise and decentre actor training. Using Theatre Workshop's *Oh What A Lovely War* (1963) and Théâtre du Soleil's *Les Clowns* (1969) as exemplars, this article traces how Littlewood and Mnouchkine trained actors on clowning to theatricalise social struggles and develop their social representations. Through ensemble improvisations that exploited clown devices such as the master-servant, clown logic, object misuse, misfitness, and the flop the actors tackled their biases in two stages: the serious/comedic dissonance alienated the actor to critically explore social gests, and the process of finding the appropriate social representations during group improvisations. Contemporary actor training that wishes to invite students to explore how their body, voice and imagination in performance can resist dominant ideologies and historical stereotypes might proliferate from the use of clowning to create social representations. The tracing of Mnouchkine's and Littlewood's clown training processes through the deconstruction of their key works, can inspire and offer insights to pedagogues who wish to decolonise and decentre their processes.

Introduction

To address the lack of women in actor training lineages (Pitches 2015, 56), current research investigated 'the forgotten and marginalised contributions made by various collaborative artists and practitioners to the development of performer training during the twentieth and twenty first centuries' (Evans, Fleming and Reed 2020, 245). Joan Littlewood and Ariane Mnouchkine developed actors with social purposes in post-world war two Europe through collaborative clown-driven devising with their companies Theatre Workshop and Théâtre du Soleil, respectively. Littlewood and Mnouchkine might have not been conscious of their role as trainers. But the processes of making *Oh What a Lovely War* (1963) and *Les Clowns* (1969), respectively, framed the actors to use clowning to address their biases. My understanding of biases draws on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *bodily hexis,* described as 'embodied dispositions like ways of walking, talking, standing, speaking' and even 'feeling and thinking' (Bourdieu 2008, 70). Such mechanisms perpetuate social power unconsciously and dominate communities that have been historically marginalised, such as women and people of colour. Because of such dispositions, actors might reproduce historical stereotypes of marginalised communities through their body, voice and imagination. Considering that training against naturalism can tackle the embodied ideologies of trainees (Thompson 2003, 129), and especially in the aftermath of the systemic inequalities that have been revealed as a result of the killing of George Floyd, the #Metoo movement and the Covid-19 pandemic, this essay also contributes to discourses about decolonising actor training.

The tracing of Littlewood's and Mnouchkine's training processes draws on scripts and archival material, notes from rehearsal, interviews, relevant scholarship, and actors' testimonies. The methodology capitalises on how Bertolt Brecht's observations

of the Chinese opera actor (Brecht and Bentley 1961) mobilised training processes for creating *gestus*, which are described as 'actions that are both themselves and emblematic of larger social practices' (Martin and Bial 2000, 5). As actor training for devised theatre in the West draws heavily on *commedia dell' arte* and clowning (Evans 2006, 117) and contemporary clown practice has adopted character and narrative building devices from *commedia*, this article illuminates how clown-driven devising can decolonise and decentre actor training. Tools from Littlewood and Mnouchkine can inspire contemporary performer trainers to invite the actors to expose and explore how their unconscious biases manifest in performance and make critical decisions about social representations.

Clown training often combines playfulness with power, like in master-servant improvisations that exploit the status relationships between master and servant characters (Davison 2013, 72). Paradoxically, clown improvisations aim to provoke laughter but can also involve various forms of sophistication, such as 'philosophizing, angst, or political criticism' (McManus 2003, 12) and 'fulfilling any number of social, artistic, cultural or political functions as can be imagined' (Davison 2013, 3). Power is often questioned through the clown's 'defiance of normal rules of behaviour, or physical logic', which allows them to 'function both inside and outside of the theatrical fiction' (McManus 2003, 13). Clown training develops actors to create clown characters that manage, 'through skill or stupidity, to break the rules governing the fictional world' (13). Those rules concern not only 'the rules of performance, governing the mimetic conventions being used', but also the 'social rules, governing the cultural norms of the world being imitated on stage' (13). This can be brought to pedagogical thinking through the practice of misfitness (Beré 2013). Littlewood and Mnouchkine proliferated from the clown's misfitness to call for social justice but this could not have been

achieved without training the actors to use clown techniques, which, inevitably, disrupted their biases.

Actors who choose clowning often share an innate motivation to 'go against the grain' using 'a kind of naïve scepticism, no malice intended' (Davison 2013, 3). Actor training can use such mechanisms to develop actors to question their own embodied social structures, which also contributes to decentering the studio. Current actor training research has focused on how students 'find their own clown' using the techniques of Jacques Lecoq and Philippe Gaulier (Amsden 2016, 2017; Kendrick 2011; Purcell Gates 2011) and has related the training techniques of other practitioners, such as Johnny Hutch (Cuming 2017) and Monica Pagneaux (Evans 2020) to Lecoq's and Gaulier's. In practice, it varies how the techniques of Lecoq are applied in training settings (Russell 2020), which can be argued for most clown training. Clowning has also been acknowledged for enriching devised theatre pedagogies (Savory Fuller 2018) and improving the resilience and well-being of trainees (McDonald, Alderdice and Cutcliffe 2019). Even though Littlewood and Mnouchkine might not have implemented clown elements consciously to develop the actors' social representations, their processes will be traced as exemplars that illuminate such potential.

Littlewood decolonised the actors' social representations to represent the working class positively. Mnouchkine targeted the actors' biases more directly because plots and characters concerning social issues were drawn from the actors' lives. Their shared key to the actors' biases involves clowning as a strategised playfulness. Roger Caillois used the term *ludus* to describe a type of complex and ridiculous play, distinguishing it from the playfulness that is common in free improvisation, which he describes as *paidia* (Caillois 2001, 13). Play that is closer to *paidia* is less limited by rules and therefore more independent and unpredictable. On the other hand, play that is

closer to *ludus* is likely to be restricted by rules as it follows specific aims. Multiple actor training practices use play in various ways. This article focuses on Littlewood's and Mnouchkine's devices that exploit the ludic playfulness of clowning. The next sections identify two critical frameworks that Littlewood and Mnouchkine applied in practice, in ways both similar and distinct, to develop actors with social purposes: a framing of the actors to use clown devices to create social representations and a critically driven improvisation process that supported the development of the actors towards positive social representations of marginalised communities.

Social representations in Littlewood's training

The Theatre Workshop, founded by Littlewood and Ewan McColl in 1945 (Holdsworth 2011, 14), trained actors as social agents. Littlewood resisted the canonical training of 1930s British conservatoire-trained actors (Barker 2010, 137): she combined Stanislavski and Laban (Barker 2010, 131) with popular forms and an accessible theatrical language (Goorney 1981, 8), and emphasised collaboration and research (Burt 2014, 119). She trained the actors to transform the space and characters without props, costumes, and set, and create metaphors and allegories that were associated with social struggles (Barker 2010, 134). Littlewood invited actors to critically explore how they may unconsciously reproduce social structures of domination. Victor Spinetti testifies*:* 'on a simple scene… we might spend hours. We had to re-evaluate everything, question God, religion, the state, power, belief and disbelief' (Theatre Workshop 1976, 92). On scripted plays, her process was similar to Brecht's: after individual research, the actors explored the social backgrounds of plays during rehearsal, experimented with dialogue, and discovered 'qualities of irony or social gest' (Barker 2010, 135). Littlewood's concepts 'qualities of irony' and 'social gest' resonate with Brecht's 'contradictions'

and *gestus* respectively. The qualities of irony and social gest that are manifested in *Oh What a Lovely War* were generated through the clown-driven devising of the actors. Because their improvisations were measured against Littlewood's commitment to 'exploring the forces of capitalism, nationalism and imperialism that drive war' (Holdsworth 2011, 35), actors were developed to create 'social gests' to subvert dominant ideologies.

Clive Barker's testimony describes how Littlewood addressed the performance of stereotypes in rehearsal:

> Sometimes a drastic process of breaking down personality defences is necessary to allow the actor the flexibility to choose alternative ways of acting. Sexually unsure and inexperienced, and coming from a society rootedly homophobic, I was made by Littlewood to get up on stage and display femininity. I hated doing this, but as with other things it broke through my defensive inhibitions. (2010, 138)

Considering that Barker drew on his life to 'display femininity', the improvisation invited him to explore and reveal his dispositions about femininity. Such targeted embodiment of female identity markers called Barker to consider that his acting choices were aligned to heteronormativity. This triggered 'alternative ways of acting', which implies developed social representations that transcended stereotypes of women and gay men.

Such processes were particularly successful when they involved clowning. Littlewood appropriated *commedia dell'arte* for character development (Leach 2006, 82). Her performances imply clown training to theatricalise social struggles. For example, the adaptation of *The Good Soldier Schweik* (1956) used 'exaggerated

cartoon-like characters' (Holdsworth 2011, 45). Her socially-inclined comedic style evolved from the Theatre Union's living newspaper *Last Edition* (1940), which was an 'eclectic, variety style mix of sketches, song and dance' (Holdsworth 2011, 49) that explored the 'interconnectivity between fascism, colonialism and an anti-Soviet and anti-working-class agenda' (48). In sketch comedy, the comedic scenes are usually created by the actors through improvisation. Littlewood invited improvisations in 'specific styles, such as Naturalism, melodrama, slapstick, 'sentimental romantic' and tragic realism' (Leach 2006, 94), but particularly appreciated slapstick for 'destroying false dignity, hypocrisy and vulgarity' (94). So she trained the actors to use physical comedy in improvisations to expose and subvert social power.

To draw insights for actor training it is necessary to consider how Littlewood's training and rehearsal processes intersected. Because the practice of Theatre Workshop was experimental and constantly evolving, they provided training alongside rehearsing for their performances (Leach 2006, 78). This has been described as 'a lack of delineation between training exercises, improvisation, and rehearsal' (Macpherson 2016, 469). Littlewood and MacColl invented a set of training exercises 'without reference to existing curricula, largely by trial and error', which 'related in part to particular productions they were working on' (Leach 2006, 78). This suggests that even though exercises were invented to facilitate the needs of particular productions, they were also used for future training. To put it the other way, original training exercises can be extracted from their rehearsal processes and used in contemporary training contexts, irrespective of whether such exercises were identified by Littlewood at the time.

It is problematic to distinguish the moment a training exercise turns to rehearsal, or vice versa, especially in the context of training actors to improvise characters and

narratives for devised theatre. Because Littlewood aimed at integrating 'all the elements of performance –relaxation, movement, voice, Stanislavsky's system, and more' the actors were trained 'through games and improvisations' (Leach 2006, 93). Basic movement exercises led to improvisations signposted as 'Two people meeting on the street' (84), which is a scenario asking the actors to implement specific movement techniques in the devising of narrative and character. Such a scenario invited any social representation. However, typical scenarios used in Littlewood's training-- such as 'a daughter of poor parents leaving home' (93) and 'a thin man and a fat man meeting; an Indian coolie and a white man; two old gossiping women telling scandal about a woman in the street' (94)—invited specific social representations that might have been linked to specific productions. For example, the training scenario titled 'food's gone up to pay for the war' (94) could have inspired *Oh What A Lovely War*, or could have been the outline for improvising a crowd scene in *Oh What A Lovely War*. This illuminates how training and rehearsal processes dissolved into each other and emerged from each other while processing the social representations of the actors.

Because all the aforementioned scenarios invite the actors to apply specific techniques with their body, voice and imagination to create characters that represent marginalised communities, such as women and people of colour, we can see the opportunities to train the actors to develop their social representations. *Oh What a Lovely War* is used as an exemplar to argue that the implementation of clowning skills to devise scenarios that involve social representations can train actors to decolonise themselves. In other words, the role of clowning in challenging the actors' social representations can be traced in *Oh What a Lovely War*. I generate insights that can be considered and adopted by contemporary actor trainers.

Tracing the clown training in *Oh What a Lovely War*

In *Oh What a Lovely War*, the actors used clown devices for narrative and characters, characterisation, movement, and dialogue and, through improvisations about the first world war, created scenes. Their acting style was unemotional, directed to the audience, and combined with singing and dancing (Paget 1990a, 61), which also describes clown performance. The clowning juxtaposed archive materials to create a 'deliberately unsentimental variety format' (Holdsworth 2011, 70), which was a misfit choice. Marcelo Beré describes misfit as 'something or someone that does not fit in (miss + fit) to the norms of a given society or culture' (2013, 208). The misfit choices in *Oh What a Lovely War* were received as 'didactic and entertaining, educational and pleasurable, uproarious and deeply moving' (Holdsworth 2017, 82). This suggests that the actors were trained beyond the creation of comedic material, but to explore whether their narratives and characters were thought-provoking or offensive, entertaining or jarring, and anti-war or disrespectful, which was crucial for their development. Littlewood's appropriated clown training can be traced in her use of misfit techniques, such as 'misfit image', 'misfit relationships' and 'misfit objects' (Beré 2013, 209).

The misfit image implies a 'figure whose image does not fit into all that surrounds it' and '[t]he costume of the clown is a fundamental part for the conception of the misfit image of the clown' (210). As the misfit costume is culturally and historically dependent (211) and the Pierrots are associated with the British national identity and its link to the monarchy (Calvert 2013, 107), Littlewood's chosen aesthetic of a 'Pierrot show' to theatricalise the first world war (Littlewood 2000, as cited in Theatre Workshop 1976, x) led to destabilising dispositions about national, individual, and collective identity (Holdsworth 2011, 75). Because the image of misfit is directly related to the attitude and behaviour of the clown (Beré 2013, 211), the framing of the

actors as culturally specific misfits invited them to explore misfit attitudes and behaviours that related to the British identity during the first world war. In the process of doing so, they tested how their dispositions concerning the British identity manifested in their social representations.

The misfit image is exploited in the Pierrots who wear helmets to signify soldiers (Littlewood 2000, as cited in Theatre Workshop 1976, x). However, the use of the helmets is not merely metonymic, as often in physical theatre, but also metaphoric and allegoric of social situations. As illustrated in the archive of Theatre Royal Stratford East (https://www.stratfordeast.com/about-us/history/1953-1979/)[1], helmets on Pierrots indicate soldiers, but the clown costumes also create metaphors about the ridiculousness and theatricality of war and the vulnerability of ordinary soldiers. The jarring costume puts the actor in a liminal space of presenting neither the British working-class soldier nor the Pierrot but instead exploring the associations and contradictions between the two. As the jarring costume dominates their efforts to represent the misfit soldier with their body, voice and imagination in improvisations, they manifest their dispositions about how the British working-class is expected to move, speak and behave. Drawing on this example, contemporary actor trainers can consider employing the misfit image with costume choices that not only contradict specific improvisation scenarios but also invite metaphorical and allegorical associations, depending on the social representations that they wish to tackle in the studio.

Another clown technique that Littlewood combined with symbolic and allegorical use is the misfit object, which gives 'life, sometimes a voice and a

[1] Scroll down to the fifth image of the second column.

personality, to an inanimate object', in a way that 'is not seen as appropriate for an adult though it is acceptable in the child's make-believe world' (Beré 2013, 212). Littlewood used the device to interrupt the plot, as in the scene featuring the song 'The Bells of Hell Go Ting-a-ling-a-ling' (Theatre Workshop 1976, 79), which involves soldiers burying their dead. It opens with actors performing a 'more realistic, mimetic representation' of shovelling, which eventually climaxes in 'song and dance, with shovels taking the place of skeletal partners' (Barker 2010, 139), before returning to the original, more realistic representation. The scene is structured using a stylised portrayal of something recognisable as a graveyard, so even though the acting is alienated from the start, the actors improvise drawing on their experience of burial practices which are associated with spirituality, grief, and seriousness. To expose the upper-classes celebrating their profits from war, indifferent to the dead soldiers, they employ the personification of the shovels, the ironic and allegorical function of which climaxes with the comedic song and dance. This misfit behaviour plays with and against the actors' dispositions surrounding the dead which becomes clearer to them when they return to the more realistic representation as if the misfit object was an absurd window to a disturbing truth behind the deaths of the soldiers. Because burial rituals and entertainment, like song and dance, are culturally specific, the actors use the misfit object in a context that invites the manifestation of their dispositions concerning how identity divisions are associated with grief and entertainment. For example, as the shovels became dance partners specific choices were made about their gender and class. Such strategised use of the misfit object in actor training can create an ironic distance from the real, inviting actors to reflect on how they embody contradictions concerning the portrayed social groups.

Another device that can be traced is the 'misfit relationship', which assumes that

‘the clown exists in relation to others, the audience, fellow clowns, materials things, music etc.’ (Beré 2013, 211). The clown reacts ‘through impulses of stupidity’, forming relationships that are ‘based on *misfitness,* meaning that they bring to light the absurdity of human kind’ (211). So if the narratives and characters in clown-driven improvisations are drawn from real social struggles and employ the misfit relationship, the actors are tasked with illuminating the absurdity of the specific social struggles. Littlewood’s choices of narrative and characters surrounding the first world war gave the ordinary soldier a voice and a justice in theatrical form by ‘counteracting official narratives and examining and unsettling power relations based on class and national nostalgia for a lost empire’ (Holdsworth 2011, 70). To expose the ‘upperclass incompetence, insensitivity and hypocrisy’ (Paget 1990b, 119), the characters represented key agents, such as soldiers and officers of several ranks, businessmen, bankers, and civilians that served the propaganda. In the process of considering and suggesting to the group what might be a misfit reaction during the interactions amongst the above characters, the actors’ explored their dispositions about class and national identity.

The misfit relationship provides a direct route to the actors’ embodied dispositions during master-servant scenarios that enact real events in exaggerated ways. An example from *Oh What a Lovely War* is the scene following the newspanel ‘21000 Americans became millionaires during the war’ (Theatre Workshop 1976, 41), which parodies economically powerful agents of the first world war. While grouse-hunting, which is allegorical of their remorseless killing of the soldiers, weaponry manufacturers, and a banker-- named after their countries of origin Britain, France, Germany, America, and Switzerland-- are served by a Scottish ghillie. The dialogue between two of the masters draws on historical peace negotiations between countries but exposes them for

continuing the war for profit:

> **America** …so long as peace doesn't break out. What about that peace scare in France, Count? Caused a flutter on Wall Street, I can tell you. Have you scotched it?
>
> **France** We flooded our papers with talk of defeatism and shot every pacifist we could find. (Theatre Workshop 1976, 43)

The subversion of the master characters proliferates from miscommunications, like the one below:

> **America** … my president is deeply grieved by this war and you can tell your mother this—he regards the whole thing as tragedy.
>
> **Britain** I understand he's a very sick man.
>
> **America** Yes, he's an idealist. (44)

The literal "sick" as "ill" and the metaphorical "sick" as "perverted" expose the insensitivity of the manufacturers. The grotesque master characters are juxtaposed by the anti-war servant/ghillie, who represents the soldiers in a multiple-masters/single-servant clowning scenario. Ghillie's question 'How do you think the war is progressing, Sir?' is misunderstood by Britain who replies 'Oh, not too badly—everything's under control' (44). The miscommunication exploits their antithetical attitudes for comedic effect, which can be further amplified by the actors' non-verbal gests. Before reaching the final version of the scene, the actors used their body, voice and imagination to improvise exaggerated social representations and reflected within the group context which of these choices represented positively the working-class soldiers and exposed the upper class. This process not only developed their pre-disposed social representations but also trained them for future contexts. Contemporary actor training can invite actors to draw on key agents and attitudes that are associated with historical

issues to improvise master-servant scenarios and juxtapose their attitudes and behaviours to those of the characters, exploring and exposing identity markers, such as gestures and language, that perpetuate power.

The tracing of how Littlewood appropriated clown techniques to develop the social representations of the actors during the making of *Oh What a Lovely War* identifies clown devices that can be adapted for contemporary actor training. The misfit image that exploits culturally and historically specific costume elements*;* the misfit object that interrupts the plot at key points to invite decisions about the various identities of the personified object; the misfit relationship between characters within narratives that are drawn from real social struggles to subvert key identity markers, such as language; and the use of master-servant scenarios to dramatize historical events turn the actors' attention towards their biases. The devices tackle the misrepresentation of marginalised communities in two stages: the tragic/comedic dissonance alienates the actor to critically explore how their biases are manifested through their body, voice and imagination during improvisations, and the process of finding the appropriate social representations addresses their biases. However, the historical distance of *Oh What a Lovely War* limited the actors to primarily explore their biases concerning the role of dominant ideologies during the first world war, which left little room to explore and expose how the actors' internalised ideologies related to their contemporary social struggles.

When clown training draws on the actors' lives, their biases are addressed in more significant and direct ways. Such a model has been applied by Mnouchkine and is discussed next. It complements Littlewood's process.

Social representations in Mnouchkine's training

Mnouchkine founded the Théâtre du Soleil in 1964 to explore 'socially relevant and compelling themes' (Richardson 2010, 250). She trained actors to find 'the external gesture and emotional state that represents the character's inner and outer conflicts' and focused 'on a character's choices in the face of moral and social imperatives rather than purely personal issues' (Richardson 2010, 261). Her constant experimentation with models and forms (253) developed a kind of actor-as-author who used theatre to subvert forms of power found in plays, historical events, and the actors' lives. Mnouchkine's process responded to the social upheavals of May '68 in France, following many 'artists-activists' that targeted 'prevailing societal systemic injustices and imbalances' (Bredeson 2019, 6) and blurred 'life, art and activism' to address 'power dynamics on and off stage' (175). Her themes represented various marginalised communities, such as women, people of colour and the working class (67-69). Employing entertaining forms for social purposes (Miller 2018, 10-11), Mnouchkine envisioned 'a populist theater, consciousness about privilege and class, a rejection of theatrical conventions, and a reinvention of traditions' (Bredeson 2019, 132). Inspired by Copeau, she blended *commedia* and clown 'to build collectively a new, modern comedy with symbolic characters capturing the major conflicts of the times' (Miller 2018, 25), and developing socially aware actors.

Usually, actors improvised on a scenario to fill the 'empty space with their own particular imagination, demonstrating a strong ability to tell a story through the body as well as words' (259). Gestures should have 'realistic details while at the same time pushing the character into a theatricality that suggests a type' (Richardson 2010, 261). For example, in *l'Age d'Or* (1975) that portrayed the lives of migrants in France, characters such as 'the miser Pantalone and the servant Arlequino, transformed into the

rapacious contractor-businessman Volpis and the poor émigré worker Abdallah' (255). With questions such as 'How does a king walk?' (256), Mnouchkine stimulated the actor who played Abdallah to embody symbolic gestures. As an émigré worker with the physicality of the Arlequino, the actor created the gesture of sleeping in a leg-stand with his shoulder on the floor (255). The leg-stand worked both as a playful metonym for sleep in a crowded room and as a metaphor for the hardships of migrant workers. For such non-realistic representations, the actors combined the form with gestures from their life, bringing their embodied biases to a ludic space. The ludic space worked as a critical space in which their biases were explored until the generated offers represented Mnouchkine's social aims.

Efforts to address the actors' biases proliferate from clowning, because it exaggerates the social representations and their meanings. To contribute to contemporary actor training that facilitates a critical exploration of biases, the next section traces Mnouchkine's process used in *Les Clowns* that developed the actors' social representations through specific clown techniques.

Tracing the clown training in *Les Clowns*

Mnouchkine's description of *Les Clowns* as 'théâtre militant' (ina.fr 1969a, 00:03:54), which means 'activist theatre', implies that the actors were invited to use clowning to subtly campaign for marginalised groups, which resonates with Littlewood's process. Each actor led an autobiographical vignette on a social issue that concerned them. They created clown characters with identities that were associated with social struggles, and used clown devices such as object misuse, clown logic, misfit look, and clown flop to create metaphors and allegories that subverted social power. The analysis of how the

process addressed the actors' biases can inspire contemporary actor training to employ them for similar purposes.

The autobiographical clown scenarios isolate the actors' social representations. In *Les Clowns*, the 'collectively created series of autobiographical scenes, investigated Jean-Paul Sartre's imperative for personal responsibility' (Miller 2018, 82), which suggests that each actor worked with the rest of the group to represent a story from their life that related to social conflict. The actors employed improvisations adopted from Mnouchkine's training with Lecoq on clowning and *commedia dell'arte* (Miller 2018, 23) to create 'entrées', which means gags or comedic sketches, but on issues that were meaningful to them (Mnouchkine, as interviewed in ina.fr 1970 sec. 00:04:34-00:04:41). The company's shift from adapting classical works to drawing characters and narratives from the actors' lives emphasised their 'political position' (Miller 1977, 55). *Les Clowns* was not created in the usual collaborative ways of the company but engaged the actors' ability to create individually, which enabled them to 'find their own language' (Mnouchkine 1971, as cited in Bradby 1991, 195). Because individual vignettes ultimately involved the group, the dispositions of each leading actor concerning the social issue of their choice were juxtaposed by the group. The selection processes concerning which improvised materials were included in the final performance imply that each actor's representations underwent a process of development. This development involved scrutinising body, voice, and imagination choices about what kind of social representations promoted the social cause of each actor. The multiple embodied representations in actor training settings that use clown-driven devising frame each actor's gests, leading to developed representations of marginalised groups.

This process implies an affinity to the training process *autocours* that Lecoq and Gaulier pioneered (Murray 2010, 219), which can be translated as 'self-run'. Small groups of trainees were given a week to create a new work, before showing the work to their tutors and receiving feedback (219). This echoes the devising process of *Les Clowns,* suggesting that Mnouchkine appropriated the training process as a rehearsal process. The self-run sessions lasted between an hour and an hour per day and did not involve tutor supervision (Lecoq, Carasso and Lallias 2009, 96). But as the works would be performed publicly, the content of the *autocours* went beyond mere improvisation, emphasising 'production, playwriting, and also the necessity for collaborative work in theatre' (97). This highlights how Lecoq-driven training and rehearsal processes, including Mnouchkine's in *Les Clowns,* intersected.

The autobiographical clown scenarios initiate a misfit process that contradicts typical devices from autobiographical or documentary theatre. Instead, they 'improvised physical comedy and created a "satirical collage", which was polemical' (Miller 2018, 11), employing comedic music to create a context for the vignettes as circus numbers and underpin the physical comedy (ina.fr 1970, 00:00:20-00:00:55). Clowning was initially chosen because of its accessibility and popularity (00:03:50-00:04:00), but was eventually adopted because it produced funny and at the same time serious material that addressed social issues with optimism (00:10:15-00:10:34). Contemporary actor training can invite an exploration of the absurd or ridiculous in current social conflicts to distance the actors from the materials and enable a critical engagement.

Clown in characterisation is key to the development of social representations. In *Les Clowns,* each actor created clown characters (Richardson 2010, 254) with identities that were associated with the social issues that concerned them. Because such characterisation technique exaggerates identity markers, unconscious dispositions are

magnified in the generated materials. When identity markers are associated with social stereotypes, positive or negative representations are negotiated during the evaluation of improvised materials. For example, in the vignettes about 'the good mother' (ina.fr 1970, 00:07:26-00:09:31) or 'the man as seducer' (ina.fr 1969b) gender stereotypes come into play. When an actor is invited to represent certain marginalised groups, their representations are scrutinised through the group improvisation processes. The development of movement, voice, and attitudes of clown characters in similar group training contexts offers opportunities to identify and tackle misrepresentations that manifest unconscious negative dispositions.

Such peer-review processes can be further applied with clown devices to create metaphors and allegories that enable a type of covert campaigning. Even though Mnouchkine suggests that Chinese Theatre inspired the symbolisms in *Les Clowns* (ina.fr 1970, 00:04:00-00:04:06), we can identify certain clown devices that have been adapted for social purposes: clown logic, object misuse, misfit look, and clown flop. All devices exploited a symbolic object around which each vignette's narrative was developed. For example, in one of the vignettes, the symbolic object is a magic duster, the 'mandragore'. Whoever possesses it 'can get anything they want, do anything they want, and become anything they want' (00:11:00-00:11:17). The duster works as a symbol of objects, skills, and identities that a clown lacks and desires, so it is an object with mystified power. The object misuse, the ridiculousness of using a duster as a symbol of power, invited the actors to explore and expose how objects, skills, and identities can perpetuate power in hidden ways.

Object misuse can be partnered with clown logic. The clown logic brings to the surface the forms of power that are desirable for the clown characters and worthy of subversion by the actors. Both the forms of power and the way they are subverted reveal

the actors' biases. For example, in the vignette with the duster, a clown describes his desirable forms of power:

> The people in the audience, I can turn them into pistachio ice-cream. Then I can become a great professor, a great prophet, a great chiropodist, or a great arsonist. Or I can make this hall a castle with the best restaurants. I can compose symphonies and conduct chamber orchestras of five hundred musicians. (ina.fr 1970, 00: 11:25- 00:12:06)

The clown's equal desire for ice-cream and a castle or fine dining subverts economic power. The clown's equal enthusiasm for the arsonist's skillset and the skillset of the professor, or prophet, or medical professional, or chamber music composer subverts the aforementioned social positions. The clown logic does not solely provoke laughter through juxtaposing rational/irrational associations but also subverts power in the academic, religious, health, and cultural sectors. The manifestation of such social gests in *Les Clowns* implies an improvisation process that explored and developed the actor's dispositions about how social groups exploited power in the respective sectors of the actors' lives. To put it in reverse, contemporary actor training that wishes to develop the actors' social representations can invite actors to use clown logic to subvert power.

Clown logic can be employed to subvert embodied power. In the "bottom gag", when the clown expresses his desire for a 'better bottom', he is presented with improved options such as 'a big bottom, or a flat bottom. A bottom with a fountain, with light, that projects films, or with little flowers… a bottom with music' (ina.fr 1970, 00:12:06-00:12:43). The gag provokes laughter, but also exposes body shape as power. The actor's gestures, exclamations, and tone that suggest the desirability of the 'curvy' or 'skinny' bottom are drawn from their life and reveal their dispositions about such form

of embodied power. Then the clown envisions their bottom as a town square, a lit object, a cinema, a garden, a musical instrument. The absurd associations also reveal dispositions about cultural power. The potential of clown logic to address the actor's biases becomes clearer with identity as embodied power. For example, in the aforementioned vignette the clown ultimately decides to use the mandragore to transform himself into a "seducer", which brings gender representation in focus. The clown's ridiculous attempts to seduce a woman with his new skills (ina.fr 1969a) further explore and expose the actor's dispositions concerning gender representation. Mnouchkine clarifies that the mandragore works allegorically to show that society can't change through miracles but through social struggles (ina.fr 1970, 00:10:36-00:10:43), but the specific ways in which the actors misused it and played with clown logic to create metaphors and allegories with social and political connotations worked as a window to their biases. Actor training can exploit such devices.

Gender representations can be also developed through the misfit look and the clown flop. Both devices are traced in the vignette about women's stereotypes that are associated with parenting (ina.fr 1970, 00:07:19-00:09:24). The opening of the vignette has little text, which maximises the use of the objects as symbols that signify power. The female clown enters the stage wearing clown make-up, hair rollers, a little sequined black dress, high heels, and a feathered boa. Because of her clown make-up, her look is misfit. The rollers, the revealing dress, the heels, and the boa indicate that she followed beauty dispositions to construct a female identity, only to subvert it with the clown make-up. The clown make-up also works as an exaggeration of women's make-up. It exposes its power and also magnifies another stereotype associated with women: they should not be funny. The clown walks into light, jumps and holds onto the boa displaying it to the audience rather than letting it flow around her shoulders. The misfit

combination of costume/make-up and the exaggerated gestures suggest a failure to construct a beautified version of female identity, which is funny. The actor's choices position her against general dispositions about how women should look and move, but also reveal her biases about specific female identity markers. The clown counts on the audience's shared dispositions to provoke laughter and subvert stereotypes. The exaggeration and ridiculing of identity markers brought the actor's dispositions in the studio and invited the company to negotiate how women are expected to look and behave and how this could be subverted for comedic and social effect. As such processes involve a juxtaposition of various actors' dispositions, the biases of each actor are addressed.

More opportunities are presented with the clown flop. In the above vignette, the clown flop subverts the 'good mother' who tries to put her babies to sleep. She picks up five puppets that represent babies and walks towards the cot cautiously to put them to bed. As she tries to put them in the cot, clowns from the live band make cooing and crying sounds. The babies seem asleep so she moves away in her feminine walk and smile. The babies soon start crying and make her return frantically. This is repeated three times. Then she has the idea to leave a heel hanging from the cot, which brings dispositions about beauty to the mix. The babies can feel her presence and stay asleep, but her beauty is compromised: after a comic walk on one heel, she goes bare feet. The choice of holding on to five babies at once works as an exaggeration that provokes laughter. It also exposes social dispositions about women's childbearing and childcare: the good mother has many children and takes good care of all simultaneously. Every time the babies cry and she clumsily throws herself to the cradle, she fails in feminine beauty because she drops the pose, and also fails to be a good mother because the babies are unhappy. The actor exposes the domination of women through beauty markers and

expectations about motherly behaviours. At the same time, she reveals her dispositions concerning the 'beautiful woman', the 'good mother', and how they play together in parenting. The clown is anxious not only to provoke laughter but also to represent a positive gender representation. This raises the stakes of failure, which not only provokes laughter but also exposes and develops the actor's representations of the stereotypes.

Similar to Littlewood, Mnouchkine's processes do not suggest that the produced ludic social gests replace social struggles. However, the processes traced in the deconstruction of *Les Clowns* complement Littlewood's processes. The autobiographical clown scenarios target the actor's relevant dispositions and the group context triggers a juxtaposition of each actor's embodied representations to those of the rest of the group, which promotes positive social representations. The clowning distances the actors from social suffering and allows them to critically explore how their embodied dispositions are manifested in improvisation. If the clown characters' identities are associated with social struggles, reflective and evaluative discussions around identity representation are triggered. The construction of a narrative around a symbolic object facilitates the use of metaphor and allegory to expose social power. The adaptation of object misuse, clown logic, misfit look, and clown flop creates complex and sophisticated metaphors and allegories that subvert power while inviting the actors to reveal, explore, and develop their dispositions.

Conclusion

Recent scholarship on actor training against the canon focuses on 'overlooked or underrecognised practitioners and pedagogues' (Evans, Fleming and Reed, 245), prioritises actor training processes that promote groups with marginalised identities

(245), and invites articles to address the gap using alternative methodologies and styles (247). This article contributes to all three: it illuminates the actor training processes of Littlewood and Mnouchkine that develop the actors' social representations through clowning, it analyses how clowning processes invite the actors to expose and explore their biases and develop their representations and suggests the deconstruction of scripts and performances to trace actor training processes.

Actor trainers can get inspired by how Littlewood and Mnouchkine appropriated clown techniques to develop actors to represent marginalised communities positively. Actor trainers can use or adapt the identified clown devices to develop the actors' social representations. This article highlights that processes of creating social representations for laughter exaggerate and expose the actor's dispositions and the group context juxtaposes and scrutinises them. The jarring aesthetic further distances the actors from their representations and invites their critical engagement to their materials. Actor trainers can enrich their processes with similar combinations or refocus how they work with such paradoxical combinations to address the unconscious biases of trainees.

Another important contribution is to suggest a methodology of tracing the actor training processes used in seminal works, such as *Oh What a Lovely War* and *Les Clowns.* Even though such a methodology will make more sense to practitioners and pedagogues of popular performance, any actor trainer that uses improvisation techniques can consider how the final works of practitioners manifest the results of improvisation processes, which can be traced back drawing on the embodied understanding of the applied practices.

Finally, this article aims to inspire performance pedagogues to trace and adapt practices for the purposes of equality, diversity, and inclusivity in actor training. Because the set of egalitarian values that are assumed in the processes of Littlewood

and Mnouchkine do not always resonate with postmodern actor training, further application and research is required into how actor trainers can implement appropriate critical frameworks to invite actors to explore and expose their biases and develop their social representations.

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