

Forum Kritika: Performance and Domination

CARNIVALESQUE ECONOMIES: CLOWNING AND THE NEOLIBERAL IMPASSE

Barnaby King
Edge Hill University, UK
barnaby.king@edgehill.ac.uk

Abstract

In Colombia, clowns are proliferating and thriving, particularly in the context of neoliberal political economies prevailing since the mid-1990s. This paper explores some reasons why this might have occurred, as well as theorizing a two-way relationship of domination and resistance between clown practices and the current iteration of late capitalist global economies; what I call “carnavalesque economies.” While Bakhtin described clowns as “the constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season,” the Colombian case suggests that their breaching of norms and violations of taboos are all too easily co-opted by governments, corporations, and institutions to disseminate normative ideologies and coerce citizens. Nevertheless, these carnivalesque economies can never fully contain or account for the potential of clown performance to rupture and genuinely challenge neoliberal power relations. Rather than speak truth to power, clowns and clowning may speak truth about power, or point to its carnivalesque vulnerability, through play, through comic inversion, and through their particularly intense forms of communication. I focus on three performance moments from my fieldwork in Colombia in order to illustrate this argument about clowns’ ambivalent relationship to neoliberal political economies. The first of these is a performative intervention by clown-mimes in the streets of Bogotá in 1995, part of the “culture of citizenship” initiatives of Mayor Antanas Mockus; the second is a performance by “Buenavista Social Clown” that I witnessed in 2012, called “The Unknown Limit between the Public and the Private” commissioned and funded by a state department, “La Defensoria del Espacio Público;” and the third is a clown show produced by Clowns Without Borders (USA) and Pasos de Payasos (Colombia) in a school in Risaralda in which the audience invaded the stage.

Keywords

Clown, Colombia, Latin America, neoliberalism

About the Author

Barnaby King is a lecturer in performing arts at Edge Hill University (UK). He is an artist/scholar, specializing in clown, humor, and festive performance in their relationships to local political economies. He recently completed his PhD in Performance Studies at Northwestern University, where his dissertation focused on political valences of clowning in Latin America, in particular Colombia. He is also a solo performer, director, and founder of the Clown Encuentro, an international festival of clowning..

Introduction

This essay is another performative iteration of a conference paper/performance that I gave at Edge Hill University on 23 March 2013. I cannot claim that it is a faithful reenactment or reconstruction of what was witnessed there, since its self-evident textuality bespeaks its transformed ontological status, a shift from repertoire to archive, an adaptation necessarily undertaken in order to satisfy the scholarly requirements of a special edition of *Kritika Kultura*. Yet this transition from stage to page does not make it any less subject to the vagaries and variability that attend the performative, any less prone to what Dwight Conquergood called “promiscuous traffic between different ways of knowing” (145), or any less liable to transgress the leaky and contingent boundaries that separate theatre from the everyday, one mode of scholarly expression from another, or words on a page from the kinetic impulses conjured in a person’s body as they read them. Insofar as this paper performs and is thus fully present in the “doing” of performance, it also participates in the “thing done” of past performances and iterations (Diamond 4-5), both recording and reconceiving them. This essay, therefore, is neither an attempt to authorize a performance that is assumed to have disappeared. Nor is it a nostalgic trace of a historical event. Rather, it is an invocation in the present moment of the ever-accumulating palimpsest of temporal and performative layers of which it, too, is now part. That is, it demonstrates how performance “recalls, lingers, and persists, expanding and even exploding the confines of synchronic temporality, appearing as the ongoing opening of history rather than the closing gates of its departure” (Bloom, Bosman, and West 167-8).

I have chosen to represent this simultaneous “netting together” of performative iterations in a dramatic format, partly because this quite fittingly suggests the productive way in which Bloom, Bosman and West’s notion of “intertheatrical citationality” not only preserves past performances, but also “prepares future performances” (169). It is therefore both transcript (a record of a live event in the past) and script (a text written to be performed in the future). Since it is delivered by only one performer it might also be considered a monologue. Yet within this overarching script many other scripts, characters, and performances, both real and implied, jostle and compete. One of these scripts is the scholarly research paper allegedly written by Barnaby King for the Performance and Domination Colloquium, but which never gets delivered in its entirety. Professor Teddy Love, the clown who stands in for Barnaby when he fails to appear, begins by reading this script and faithfully performing the role of the serious scholar. In the script below, the text contained within shaded boxes denote the passages of the paper that he reads, as it were, verbatim. Text that appears outside the boxes, however, designates the clown’s seemingly improvised deviations from the paper either to reflect upon it or, finally, to depart completely from it. Professor Teddy Love’s clownish rendition of the paper also includes his actions and his interactions with

the audience—some rehearsed, others spontaneous. Meanwhile, physical gestures, tone of voice, and facial expressions are expressed as conventional italicized stage directions.

Within these two basic scripts (Barnaby's paper and Teddy's rendition of it), are contained more scripts, however. In Barnaby's paper, for example, there are descriptions of clown performances he witnessed in Colombia, mobilized as evidence to substantiate his argument about Neoliberalism and clowning: mimes directing traffic on the streets of Bogotá; Buenavista's Social Clown's performances of citizenship; and a clown show in a school that gets overwhelmed by a crowd of children. Yet Teddy reads them not as descriptions of past events, but rather as scripts to be performed. And he does so with evident enjoyment, sometimes using audience volunteers to help him play other roles. In so doing, they unfold and exceed their containment within the academic "script," as they become performances in their own right, contiguous and in tension with the scholarly performance and the clown performance. Of course the fact that all these scripts are, in the pages that follow, contained within a single script, serves as an ironic reminder of the scholarly pressure to contain and textualize once again. While the clown, in the performance at Edge Hill, rebelled from his original script and began improvising, these improvisations are now once again fixed, a documentary trace of a historical "fact." That is, even something as ephemeral and chaotic as a clown's ramblings are pressed into service as evidence for another academic paper, and the journey comes full circle.

However, just as the clown was able to undermine the staid performance of scholarship through a quirky performance of failure, so too this new document may be considered both archival transcript and suggestive play script, a scripted monologue of sorts that could potentially be re-enacted, or restaged and therefore subject to new performative transformations in imagined and real future moments. Had I chosen a "historical reconstruction" format for this reflection on my clown performance, this might have suggested an attempt to capture the past and find closure. The choice to present it as dramatic script, conversely, suggests a lack of closure, and invites or predicates future iterations, since a script is always a performance in the making, in potential, not yet realized. That is, it gestures to many possible performative interpretations, and thus, in part, recuperates the clown's improvisational flair from the risk of historical stasis.

I invite the reader or performer to re-present (in the sense of "to make present again") the clown's ramblings in this script, since they themselves were something of the time, of the place, of me, of us. This is particularly evident in the script when the clown dejectedly admits to the convener of the colloquium, "Victor, I don't think we can publish this doom and gloom in *Kritika Kultura*. According to this, clowns are not very critical. In fact they're pretty hegemonic." Such playful self-referentiality is entirely appropriate to the form of a clown performance in which the truth of the performative situation, its inherent power structures, must

become the object of knowing critique and comment. Contained within this simple comment is the double admission that the clown is actually me, Barnaby King, performing, since he admits to complicity with Victor Merriman in the knowledge that these papers are to be reviewed and published. Whose name will go on that published essay, the audience wonders—that of the original paper writer, Barnaby King, or that of the new paper performer, Professor Teddy Love? What are the stakes when these are actually one and the same person? What does this do to the validity of the clown's acerbic critique of the paper if we know that it was really the person performing the clown who wrote it?

The apparent separation of the paper's elements into three voices (the clown reading the paper, the clown's voice commenting on the paper, and the stage directions that describe the clown's actions) is an editorial choice, and it could have been done differently. Indeed, this particular separation of texts and contexts is designed to raise more problems and questions than it can resolve, by inviting a range of disparate interpretations caused by the limitless possible permutations and connections across the different voices. It is less a critical intervention, and more an invitation to critique.

The Performance

[A slightly run-down black box rehearsal studio in a university Performing Arts department. About twenty scholars and artists are seated in roughly arranged chairs facing the stage area, at the back of which is a white projection screen. On the screen are the words "Carnavalesque Economies" written over a photograph of a graffiti image of the Liberator, Simón Bolívar, wearing a red nose. On the stage a man paces about, looking at a paper he is holding. Judging by his red nose, black pants with bright yellow stripes, dark blue school blazer with yellow edging, sparkly purple shirt, and bowler hat that is a little too small for him, he is a clown. The event is an academic colloquium on performance and domination. The session moderator, an important-looking man with short grey hair and a moustache, gets up to explain that Barnaby King, the next presenter, has been unable to attend, but that luckily a real clown, Professor Edward Love (Teddy), has been found to read the paper in his stead. The audience applauds. Teddy stands before the audience with paper in hand, looking slightly nervous, and overly compensating for his nerves by trying to appear authoritative and serious. He begins in a formal tone, reading directly from the paper.]

TEDDY:

In 1993 Antanas Mockus was rector of the National University in Bogotá. Everyday he was confronted by radicalized Marxist students wearing masks and throwing fireworks. He was known for his unorthodox methods of

conflict resolution. But one day, in front of 2000 demonstrating students, his unorthodox methods would shock the entire country. Many people believe that a transformation of Bogotá began right there in that moment. Play video.

TEDDY [*Realizing this is not part of the paper but an instruction*]: Oh, I see. Play video. [*Teddy activates a video, which shows a grainy image of a bearded man on the stage of a large auditorium, staring out, frustrated and impotent, at a sea of anarchic protesting students.¹ In the video a voiceover, presumed to be the voice of Mockus himself, reflects on his feelings at that moment: “Maybe murderers feel like this. They can’t take the humiliation. They have to do something. What I did was to connect two extremes: extreme contempt and extreme submission.” The fuzzy television footage shows Mockus resolving to do something. He unzips his trousers, lets them drop to his ankles, turns to face upstage and bends over, displaying his bare buttocks in the direction of the rioting students. Teddy looks appalled. He rushes to stop the video, but only succeeds in freezing it on the offending image.*]

TEDDY [*flustered and trying to cover the image as he speaks*]: I’m so sorry about that. I had no idea. I... I...back to the paper, the paper.

The idiosyncratic rector connected two extremes – extreme contempt and extreme submission – setting the tone for two decades of clownishness in the public arena. Although it was shocking at first, it involved the “unification” of disparate ideas that Freud says is characteristic of the technique of jokes, in which “new and unexpected unities are set up, relations of ideas to one another, definitions made mutually or by reference to a common third element” (66). In this improvised moment, two things normally kept apart were explosively brought together, creating something new: the third element.

TEDDY [*Looking up from the paper as if trying to figure something out*]: Two things explosively brought together? Oh, you mean extreme contempt and extreme submission. [*Teddy plays with these concepts, making exaggerated gestures for each, going back and forth between the two faster and faster, finally ending with a reenactment of the moony. Triumphantly.*] Aha! The Rector’s Rectum. That must be the “third element.”

Freud also calls this kind of logical short circuit “condensation.”² The pleasure produced by such condensation or unification is very often socially purposeful, making jokes an example of what J. L. Austin calls the “performative” (15). That is, they do something.

TEDDY [*Pointing to his own back-side, and grinning at the audience*]: Well mine certainly does something.

Mockus’s clownish act of condensation was indeed a kind of performative act, which had the direct result of forcing his own resignation. But this was not the end of the story. Later it became both a cause for laughter and the starting point for widespread social transformation.

TEDDY [*Laughing at his own puerile humour*]: I can see the headline now: “rectal condensation leads to rector’s resignation.”

In the weeks that followed, Mockus stood as mayor of Bogotá and won by a landslide. Paradoxically, the shock factor of Mockus’s clownish act, softened by its ridiculousness, made him seem trustworthy: an inversion of the common stereotype of politicians. Once in power he continued in this clownish vein, introducing ridiculous-sounding policies such as self-imposed alcohol curfew, a women’s only night on the streets of Bogotá, a voluntary household tax, and an army of clown-mimes replacing police on the streets.

[During this last section of the paper, Teddy becomes more and more cynical and disbelieving as he reads about Mockus’s initiatives, finally breaking out into laughter when he reads about the clown mimes. An image comes up on the screen of a line of clown mimes on the street in Bogotá, standing in front of a bus, doing an act.]

TEDDY [*with sarcasm*]: Oh, that’s a good one. I suppose they gave out squirry flowers and custard pies as punishments.

[Teddy zips his mouth shut as if to indicate he is now a mime. He goes into a sequence of movements, imitating his idea of the clown mimes. He makes a mess of it and sends the traffic into confusion. He pretends to be giving a beautiful flower to a member of the audience and then squirts them with water, or gives them an electric shock handshake. The following section is delivered sitting down, in a formal “newsreader” voice.]

Statistics demonstrate a dramatic fall in traffic offenses and accidents during the years of the mime project.³ The mimes were effective in just the way that the authorities wished them to be, doing the job of the police but by different means, and clowning was being employed as an indirect means of social coercion that worked since the pleasure it provided distracted from its disciplinary nature. Again, Freud describes how a joke can “bribe the hearer with its yield of pleasure into taking sides with us without any very close investigation” (103).⁴

TEDDY [*Amazed, and slightly appalled*]: Clowning by stealth!

Since Mockus’s clown-mime initiative, Bogotá has experienced a “clown boom.” This phrase captures not only the proliferation of clowning into all walks of public and private life but also its ambivalent link to money, the logics of global capitalism, and of course neoliberalism. William Mitchell describes clowning as a “critical practice” that employs “hegemonic humor.”⁵ Putting together Freud’s tendentious jokes with Mitchell’s hegemonic humor points to a politicized view of clowning in which carnivalesque performance is contained within political economies: carnivalesque economies. Mockus’s mimes not only changed Bogotá. They also foreshadowed the adoption of clowning as an instrument of control that exemplifies what Mbembe calls “zombification” in which grotesque and vulgar aesthetics are not only useful as tactics of resistance but are “an integral part of the stylistics of power” (116).

TEDDY [*takes on the aspect of a military dictator, holding his hat over his chest*]: Neoclowniberalism.

President César Gaviria’s ‘apertura’ policy of the 1990s opened up Colombian markets to globalization, structural adjustment loans, and foreign investment that improved life in Bogotá for vast swathes of the population. What had previously been known as a dangerous, lawless urban chaos transformed into a well-ordered metropolis with increased safety and a range of new cultural amenities. One of the stated aims of this policy was to address poverty yet the National Bureau of Economic Research and the Center for Economic Policy Analysis both cast doubt on these claims. As Lara D. Nielson and Patricia Ybarra explain, “Latin Americanists are acutely aware that any reference to Neoliberalism supplies a kind of doublespeak for economic restructuring, increased disparity in wealth, and a severely diminished middle class, as well as the repressive silencings of military governance and widespread everyday suffering” (7).

TEDDY: Well, that doesn't sound good. But how does it affect clowns?
 [*Suddenly defiant*] They can't silence us.

After the hard structural adjustment of the 1990s, a particular softening of Neoliberalism occurred, which Maurya Wickstrom calls "social partnership initiatives," in which the government solicited the support of the citizens (and the clowns) in applying policies that were supposedly of common social benefit.⁶

TEDDY: Oh I get it. [*He takes on the role of a POLITICIAN, putting on an American accent and shaking hands with audience members.*] Welcome to neoclowniberal-land. You want to be part of a social partnership initiative? We're going to get along so well. You the citizens, me the government—a marriage made in heaven. Public-private partnership. We all basically want the same things—nice clothes for our wives, toys for our children. But I don't want to tell you what to do. I'm not here to complicate your lives with rules and taxes. Life is just one big free market party. I know; let's hire some clowns to keep us entertained. Who wants a job? Looks like we've got quite a few clowns around here.

[*He now switches roles, pretends to be an eager young clown.*] I'll do it. I'm your very own neo-clown. Just pop a red nose on me, wind me up, and watch me go. I'll say anything you like, but I might say it backwards.

[*As POLITICIAN*]: Great. Here's your script. On your bike.

[*As NEO-CLOWN*]: You're going to give me a bike? Oh, he's gone. [*Looks at the script he has been handed*] Well, I suppose I'm going to need some help. [*He brings two volunteers out from the audience.*] It says here that you two are newly-weds and I am an evil property developer. I've just built this huge block of flats, and I'm trying to sell you a flat.

[*Takes on the role of PROPERTY DEVELOPER, with a bad Colombian accent, moving freely between English and Spanish*] Buenos dias, señor, señorita. Perdon, señora. Beautiful apartment building. Just sign the contract here. Es muy muy bonito. You have private community room, private playground, private parking, private shopping mall.

[*As NEO-CLOWN*]: Now, at this point, it says in the script that the young couple signs the contract. In Scene 2 they are in bed and just about to... you know... when their marital bliss is disrupted. They don't get a wink of sleep. The next day the couple is wandering in the playground, dreaming

of the day when they have their own child to bring here, but their reverie is rudely interrupted by a nefarious character.

[*Takes on role of* STREET HAWKER]: Señores, que buscan, que quieren? Tengo de todo. Tengo cigarillos, tengo dulces, tengo chicles, tengo gafas, sombreros, relojes. Tengo drogas. Que quieren?

[*As* NEO-CLOWN]: Here the couple complains that the street hawker is trespassing on private property.

[*The audience volunteers improvise with Teddy, complaining that this is private space*].

[*As* STREET HAWKER]: No, señor, esto es espacio público. I can be here if I want.

[*As* NEO-CLOWN]: In the next scene, they are leaving in their car and they are stopped by a parking attendant.

[*As* PARKING ATTENDANT]: Excuse me, señor, that will be diez mil pesos, por favor.

[*As* NEO-CLOWN]: The couple insists that this is their private car park, and they shouldn't have to pay.

[*As* PARKING ATTENDANT]: No, señor, este parqueadero es público. Diez mil pesos por favor.

[*As* NEO-CLOWN]: The couple is at their wit's end so they call their local government office; a caped crusader, "La Defensoría del Espacio Público," comes to their rescue.

[*As* SUPERHERO GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL]: What exactly is the problem here? [*To the audience members as the young couple explains what has happened and shows the contract to the government official who reviews it and shakes his head.*]

[*As* SUPERHERO GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL]: They were right. It is public space. You have been tricked. Sorry! You have been fooled [Mock tears] I guess you should have read the contract properly.

[As NEO-CLOWN]: And that's the end. So what's the moral of the story, Ladies and Gentlemen? Know your rights. Understand where the line is between private and public. If you crossed it, that's your own fault.

[A slide appears on the screen showing six clowns in white overalls, one of whom is carrying a banner with the words "Alcaldia Local" (Mayor's Office)]

This sketch, called "The Unknown Limit Between Public and Private," was funded by the Defensoría del Espacio Público to educate people about public space, and was performed all over Bogotá by the group Buenavista Social Clown. Judith Segura, director of the group, claims that Buenavista's sketches not only "generated learning about public space, but also constituted a critique of improper behavior in the city: a critique through playfulness." But what kind of critique is being generated "through playfulness?" Who is the object of critique?



Fig. 1: Six members of Buenavista Social Clown, performing the sketch "The Unknown Limit Between Public and Private" in the National Park, Bogotá, 18 Dec 2011.

Photo by the author.

TEDDY: A critique? That sounds good, doesn't it? Judith Butler says critique has "self-transformation at its core," and "risks the orderliness of the code itself." Pretty radical. But wait...

Buenavista's sketch teaches us to observe and respect the line between public and private. It implies that line is unassailable and we'd better know exactly where it is in order to avoid tripping over it. Far from risking the orderliness of the code, this performance teaches us how to be good citizens.

[Teddy looks somber, and reads the next part of the paper as though every word were another nail in his coffin]. Is this Neoclowniberalism?

This is Neoclowniberalism. Out with the greasepaint and baggy trousers. In with the beautiful, clean Cirque du Soleil imitations, sanitized and subjected to the free market. No more welfare support for clowns. They've had their homes repossessed and now they have to fight it out in the real world: on the street, in hospitals, schools, village halls, university performing arts departments, and other obscure corners, with only a red nose for protection. It's not surprising that they have succumbed to the temptation of the "social partnership initiative," mouthpieces for corporations and states, caught in the deadening embrace of global capitalism, their playful inversions and nonsense exploited to reinscribe boundaries and social divides, under the banner of deregulation, liberalization, and democracy.

TEDDY [*downcast and despondent*]: Is that it? Am I doomed to become a neo-clown? Is there no escape from the all-consuming neoclowniberal monster? This is about clowns. Where's the happy ending?

The Neo-clown is a covert operator, sometimes hiding behind charitable discourses of development and social change. Clowns Without Borders, for example, replicates the characteristically neoliberal rhetoric of humanitarianism of international agencies such as Medecins Sans Frontieres. Their slogan, "no child without a smile," constructs humor as a kind of humanitarian aid that can bring relief to the weak and poor.⁸ Maurya Wickstrom critiques humanitarianism as establishing a "divide that separates those who go to do good from those who are the alleged beneficiaries of that effort," thus reinscribing colonial power relations.

TEDDY [*shocked*]: Who would have thought it? Clowns Without Borders part of the Neoclowniberal order?

Another hiding place may be the "social circus," currently in vogue across Latin America, often relying on foreign investment. Circo Ciudad in Bogotá, for example, was founded in 2001 with EU funding amidst romanticized rhetorics of disadvantaged youth from one of Bogotá's most impoverished

neighborhoods overcoming hardship to become polished circus performers. But Circo Ciudad was subject to enormous political pressures used as a pawn by government and local agencies, while the young people, who had been trained as circus artists not as leaders or administrators, were powerless to act.⁹

In 2012 Lucho Guzman and other clowns from Circo Ciudad teamed up with the American chapter of Clowns Without Borders in what can only be described as an alliance of the global Neo-clowniberal order, to undertake a tour of Risaralda, where they aimed to relieve the plight of the 48,000 internal refugees forcibly displaced due to violence in the department of El Choco (RCN Noticias Pereira).

[A slide appears showing a group of clowns performing in front of a large audience of children in a school. One of these clowns is recognizably Teddy himself. He looks at it and has a sudden realization].



Fig. 2. Wilmar Guzman, Tim Cunningham, Carlos Andres Niño, Lucho Guzman, and Professor Teddy Love, performing at Jaime Salazar Robledo school, in the neighborhood of Tokio, Pereira, 27 Feb. 2011. Photo by Molly Jaeger.

TEDDY: Wait a moment. *[Pointing at the image]* That's me. I was one of those clowns. I was there! Why am I reading this? I know what happened, I can tell the story. *[He casts the paper aside and excitedly prepares to tell the story]*. So there we were in front of five hundreds kids from a neighborhood

called Tokio, which is a kind of ghettoized colony built to house displaced refugees from El Choco. The show had an anti-colonial narrative. I played the authoritarian, oppressive clown, always telling the other clowns what to do. But every time I tried to organize them to do something it would end in chaos with me yelling ESO NO. As always happens, the kids would start to repeat ESO NO back to me in a moment of rebellious mimicry: ESO NO, ESO NO, ESO NO. Well, this performance was just like the others, and we were building towards the denouement where the four buffoonish clowns assemble their bodies into a giant ravenous monster that consumes the evil authoritarian clown. But before we got there, something started happening. The front row started slowly but surely creeping forwards on the floor. It was an Indiana Jones moment, as if the walls were closing in on us. We tried to reestablish our boundaries and it became this kind of territorial struggle. But then they came at us again like a tidal wave, unstoppable, several hundred children taking over our space. We were like helpless swimmers, cast adrift in an ocean of heads, arms reaching up to grab hats, noses, faces, props, phones, anything.

[TEDDY *shows himself in the scene, arms aloft, in apparent submission to the sea of children he is describing*].

We give up trying to continue with the show, and abandon ourselves to this new ending, this new thing of the moment. And it feels strangely right. These children should be able to occupy their own space in whatever way they want. Why should they respect the boundaries that we've set for them, we who don't come from here but from far away? As we pack up to leave, a boy runs up to me, smiling:

[As BOY]: Usted es el payaso que vino acá. [Translating for the audience] You're the clown who came here.

[*The following scene is played by TEDDY as a conversation between himself and the boy.*]

[As TEDDY]: You're right. I am the clown who came here. To your home. Because I'm a Neo-clown. Because somebody thousands of miles away decided it would be a good idea to pay for me to come here and "relieve" your suffering. Did we do it? Did we relieve your suffering? Did anything change?

[As BOY]: Usted es el payaso que vino aca.

[As TEDDY]: Why do you keep saying that? Are you saying nothing has changed? But by crossing over that line and invading our stage you reversed the unequal power relations implicit in our quasi-humanitarian objectives of bringing clowning to “help” others. [*Enthusiastic and somewhat sanctimonious*] The transformation of our show expressed your right to occupy your own space, to break down the boundaries we had placed around you. The reciprocity of the performance was a metaphor for what clowning ought to do: transform the self and put at risk the orderliness of the code. You’ve read Judith Butler right?

[As BOY]: Usted es el payaso que vino aca.

[As TEDDY]: Stop saying that! But why, what are the power structures that underpin my presence here? What does it mean for me to be here? Was this just another social partnership initiative, another example of Neoclowniberalism?

[As BOY]: Usted es el payaso que vino aca.

[As TEDDY]: And pretty soon I’m going to be the clown who’s not here anymore. I’ll be over there. I’m the clown who goes away.

[TEDDY *resumes storyteller mode, speaking to audience*] And by now a whole crowd of children is chanting: “Payaso. Payaso. Payaso.” Then it hits me: he didn’t say clown: clown, clod, clump, chump. No. He said payaso: Pagliaccio, Pedrolino, Pierrot, Paillasse. In French it means a straw mattress. Straw man. Insubstantial. Blown on the wind. In motion. Temporary, transient, displaced. [*During this whole section TEDDY again floats his arms to the sky as he had done before*] My experience of displacement was different from his experience. But something connected us in that moment. Payaso. Paillasse. Blown on the wind. In motion.

[TEDDY *seems distracted and meditative in this moment, almost as in a trance, seeing something new for the first time. Then he relaxes and sighs.*]

Victor, I don’t think we can publish this doom and gloom in *Kritika Kultura*. According to this, clowns are not very critical. In fact they’re pretty hegemonic. Perhaps we just need to change it. Make it a bit more upbeat. [*He has an idea.*] I could rewrite it for you. Put the clown’s voice back in. I was the payaso who was there, after all. Take that Mockus, for example. Do you really think he was the progenitor of Neoclowniberalism? Of course he wasn’t. But it makes a good story. He just couldn’t slip that neoliberal net. Even as he tried to be different he couldn’t help reproducing the image

of power he was trying to subvert. Isn't that the conundrum we all face? Us clowns? Payasos. Insubstantial. Blown in the wind. In motion. A few years later he ran for president and he was doing really well in the polls but then he started to become strangely incoherent in interviews, and debates, losing the train of his thought. He became a laughingstock. On April 10, 2010, he announced he had Parkinson's disease [Brings up an image of Mockus wearing a tight-fitting superhero outfit with spandex leggings and a cape] I met him once. When I asked him a question his response would seem to veer off on strange incomprehensible tangents, and sometimes he would tail off into confused silence. But somehow he would always bring it back round to answer the question in a surprising, highly abstract way that would only make sense to me much later. A wise fool. Maybe it was madness to ever think a clown could become president. He demonstrated the limits the clown can never cross. But he also demonstrated what clowns are capable of, and he should be acknowledged for that. [*Addressing the image of him on screen*] Mockus! Usted es el payaso que vino aca. And I'm the clown who came here.

[*Pause as if waiting for something*]

And I think there might be some other clowns waiting to say something to you, so I'll get off and make space for them. Thank you!

[*The audience applauds. Teddy looks slightly embarrassed as he picks up the paper he tossed aside and shuffles off.*]

Notes

1. The video seen here is an extract of Andreas Møl Dalsgaard's documentary, *Cities on Speed: Bogotá Change*, which tells the story of consecutive Bogotá mayors Antanas Mockus and Enrique Peñalosa.
2. Joke technique is described by Freud in quasi-mathematical terms, as the process by which ideas, words, or sentences are reduced or compressed into some kind of composite that did not previously exist and yet is instantly recognizable: "condensation accompanied by the formation of a substitute" (19). Later he theorizes that this condensation produces pleasure because the external or internal obstacles that exist to keep such ideas, words, or sentences discrete from one another require a certain psychical expenditure to maintain. The sudden joining of the ideas thus creates a psychical release of tension, a relaxation of effort normally exerted to keep them apart: "this yield of pleasure corresponds to the psychical expenditure that is saved" (118).
3. According to official figures, the number of drivers who obeyed the stoplights rose from 26.2% in 1995 to 38% in 1996. In 1996, 76.46% of drivers also respected the zebra crossings. A report states, "What distinguished this campaign was the use of playfulness instead of repression in the enforcement of traffic laws" (Mockus 15).
4. Freud divides tendentious (socially purposeful) jokes into four types: obscene, hostile, cynical, and skeptical (94-115). All rely to some extent on pleasure to soften or hide the power behind the jokes, but he says particularly of hostile jokes, that it will "allow us to exploit something ridiculous in our enemy which we could not, on account of obstacles in the way, bring forward openly or consciously; once again, then, the joke will evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible" (103; emphasis in original).
5. William E. Mitchell's *Clowning as Critical Practice* emphasizes the political nature of clowning, its potential to participate in hegemonic discourse as a reinscriptive or a radical influence: "A hegemonic clowning performance may be subversive or conservative; the former when it ridicules culturally accepted practices, persons and ideas, the latter when it ridicules the culturally unacceptable. Both are representations of clowning as critical practice" (24). Mitchell resolves the subversive/conservative dichotomy with a conception of slow drip change, where "heretical, episodic clowning that lampoons established values may persist in the memory as images of difference that continue to challenge the known and the now" (25).
6. Maurya Wickstrom argues that "social partnership initiatives" emerged in the early 2000s, "a softening" of the more conservative brand of neoliberalism that were characterized by structural adjustment in the 1990s (6). The notion of such "social partnership initiatives" was that government agencies worked alongside "citizens" as willing accomplices to reduce poverty and improve quality of life for all.

7. Drawing heavily on Foucault, Judith Butler describes critique as that “which risks the orderliness of the code itself.” This is based on an anti-authoritarian notion of a “critical practice that has self-transformation at its core” (217).
8. According to Clowns Without Borders’ website, the organization “offers laughter to relieve the suffering of all persons, especially children, who live in areas of crisis including refugee camps, conflict zones, and territories in situations of emergency. We bring levity, contemporary clown/circus-oriented performances and workshops into communities so that they can celebrate together and forget for a moment the tensions that darken their daily lives.”
9. This account was obtained through interviews with Luis Eduardo Guzman, one of the founders of Circo Ciudad, during fieldwork conducted in Bogotá between 2008 and 2012.

Works Cited

- Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975. Print.
- Bloom, Gina, Anston Bosman, and William N. West. “Ophelia’s Intertheatricality, or, How Performance Is History.” *Theatre Journal* 65.2 (2013): 165-82. Print.
- Butler, Judith. “What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault’s Virtue.” *In The Political*. Ed. David Ingram. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002. 212-26. Print.
- Cities on Speed: Bogotá Change*. Dir. Andreas Møl Dalsgaard. Upfront Films. 2009. Film.
- Clowns Without Borders USA Website*. Clowns Without Borders USA, 2009. Web. 2 May 2013.
- Conquergood, Dwight. “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research.” *TDR: The Drama Review* 46.2 (2002): 145-56. Print.
- Diamond, Elin. *Performance and Cultural Politics*. London: Routledge, 1996. Print.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. 1905. New York: Norton, 1960. Print.
- Mbembe, Achille. *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2001. Print.
- Mitchell, William E., ed. *Clowning as Critical Practice: Performance Humor in the South Pacific*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1992. Print.
- Mockus, Antanas. *Cultura Ciudadana, Programa Contra La Violencia En Santa Fe De Bogotá, Colombia, 1995- 1997*. Washington DC: Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 2001. Print.
- Nielsen, Lara D., and Patricia Ybarra, eds. *Neoliberalism and Global Theatres: Performance Permutations*. London: Palgrave, 2012. Print.
- RCN Noticias Pereira. “Autoridades Reportan 48 Mil Desplazados En Risaralda.” EJE21, n.d. Web. 21 Feb. 2013.
- Shakespeare, William. *King Lear*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998. Print.
- Wickstrom, Maurya. *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism: Thinking the Political Anew*. London: Palgrave, 2012. Print.