

PHENOMENOLOGICAL CLOWN

“Palhaço Fenomenológico”

Marcelo de Almeida Libanio (Marcelo Beré)
Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
University of London

ABSTRACT: This article introduces the ‘Poetics of the Clown’, a Ph.D thesis submitted in 2016 to the RCSSD, University of London. This thesis proposes a poetics of clown based on the phenomenological analysis of the core principles of clown practice. This article in particular, seeks to relate these principles to the concept of misfitness. In pursuing this hypothesis of misfitness, the article examines the clown as a pragmatic doer – the initial premise is: a clown is what a clown does. It is not through essence but through the practices of clowning that we can identify what ‘makes’ a clown: not the ‘inner clown’ but the ‘outer clown’ – in a Heideggerian sense – the clown as embodied ‘being-in-the-world’.

Keywords: Poetics, clown, phenomenology, misfitness, existential clown, clown practices.

RESUMO: Este artigo apresenta uma introdução à *Poética do Palhaço*, tese de doutoramento apresentada em 2016 à RCSSD, Universidade de Londres. Esta tese propõe uma poética do palhaço com base na análise fenomenológica dos princípios fundamentais da prática do palhaço. Este artigo, em particular, procura relacionar esses princípios ao conceito de desajustamento (*misfitness*). Na prossecução desta hipótese de desajustamento, o artigo examina o palhaço como um fazedor pragmático - a premissa inicial é: o palhaço é o que o palhaço faz. Não é através de essência, mas através das práticas da palhaçada que podemos identificar o que “faz” um palhaço: não se trata do ‘palhaço interior’, mas sim do ‘palhaço exterior’ - o palhaço como a manifestação de um ‘ser-no-mundo’, no sentido Heideggeriano.

Palavras-chaves: Poética, Palhaço, fenomenologia, desajustamento, palhaço existencial, prática do palhaço.

Trajectory of a research

I am a clown.

To be a clown has to do with the way one performs and in my case, with a certain attitude towards life. This article is the introduction of my Ph.D thesis and intends to question what a clown is. Once, when I was a little boy, marching with my class in the Independence Day parade¹, my mother came to me afterwards and said: 'Well done, Marcelo. You were the only one marching in the right way. The rest of the class got it all wrong!' I grew up with this strange sensation that I was always out of time, out of place, always trying to fit into the world and failing. Then, in 1982 I met a circus company called *Circo Teatro Udigrudi* and was invited to join the troupe. Since then, I have been performing and researching the art of clowning together with them. I became a clown through practice. This research did not begin or end within the stipulated period of the doctorate. It began in the early eighties when I became a clown and it will continue for as long as I am a practicing clown. However, as a Ph.D candidate, I have to fit into an academic institution and follow the rules of the program. This was the real challenge: a misfit clown trying to fit into the regulated environment of academic life. This sense of failing to fit in, which arose as a feeling, began to take form as an idea – the idea that is at

the center of this article: that of the clown being the quintessential representative of misfitness, or simply put – the misfit clown.

From inside to outside – From essence to existence

When I started my Ph.D process I brought assumptions and beliefs (based in my experience and formation as clown) that are worth examining from the outset. This analysis shows that, in real research, there is always room for questioning previous assumptions. I began my research by questioning if there could be a path towards the Essential Clown. By 'essential clown' I meant something personal and non-transferable, unique to each performer, something that resides inside them, waiting to be discovered. It might be some kind of personal character that the performer developed or constructed that could be identified only by the personal characteristics of the person/performer where the clown becomes manifested. The essential clown can be seen as the 'inner clown', unique to that performer and emanating from their personal characteristics. Based on my own process of developing and revealing my clown, I started looking at other clowns in order to discover that most of them have what could be understood as an Essential Clown, each one different in their 'essentiality' – this was my aim. To illustrate my argument, I would say that, despite the fact that Charles Chaplin played many

characters in London music halls and theatres as well as in films, from the Keystone films (*Making a Living*, 1914), to the comedian at the end of his career in *Limelight* (1952), the Tramp would be Chaplin's Essential Clown. There is something idiosyncratic about clowns. It is as if the clown reveals and make use of some personal characteristics of the performer who plays the clown.

In my initial approach, I misunderstood the Essential (or Deep) Clown as some kind of inner self or fragment of the personality. I was intending to suggest that we all have a hidden persona (the Greek word for mask) that one could identify as one's ownmost clown. This hidden clown would be 'in there', somewhere inside each person's mind, refraining from appearing in public, avoiding being seen for fear of being considered ridiculous by observers. Thus understood, the hypothesis of the essential clown promotes the idea that every one of us possesses a hidden clown *persona*. This generalisation sent me down obscure routes and pathways, exploring deep psychology and searching out metaphorical parallels, linking the archetypal figure of the trickster² with the clown soul³. In other words, in an essentialist approach to the clown, the clown phenomenon would occur in an 'inner world' or somewhere hidden in 'the rooms behind one's mind'⁴ for which only a metaphorical language would be adequate.

I call this first phase of my research the essentialist phase. In the world of clownery this idea that a clown derives from an inner essence is a widely held view. Several practitioners and theorists use terms like 'inner clown' or 'deep clown.'

The existence of a hidden, deep self, related to the child we once were resonates with Lecoq's advice on working the personal clown: 'we should put the emphasis on the rediscovery of our own *inner clown*' (Lecoq in LeBlanc and Bridel 2015: 9) by working on 'certain gestures buried deep in our childhood bodies' (LECOQ, 2002, p. 157). Jacques Lecoq (2002) is responsible for the 'new wave' in clown training for at least the last fifty years. Lecoq and his followers, among them Philippe Gaulier, the contemporary clown master, suggest an approach to clowning that is related to the 'inner child' and 'inner clown'. Louise Peacock (2009) summarizes this line of thought when she posits:

For Lecoq... we need to be reminded of the existence of our inner child, when it is important for us to reconnect with our own ability to play. ... Many people use the discovery of the inner clown as a way of increasing self-awareness. (2009, p. 155)

Sue Morrison (2013) explaining her workshop 'Clown Through Mask' states: 'The entire workshop that is Clown Through Mask is clown without words. *Essential clown*. Baby Clown' (2013, p. 69). Morrison's work suggests

a mixture of Lecoquian techniques (i.e. neutral mask and other masks) with Richard Pochinko's research on North American tribal clowns (i.e. shaman clown); the workshop could be seen as a spiritual search to discover the deep clown – the search for the inner clown is a 'spiritual quest' (MORRISON, 2013, p. 9). Another clown teacher and theorist Eli Simon (2012), opens his book *The Art of Clown* with this statement:

We all have an inner clown living somewhere inside us. Sometimes our clown energy is readily apparent; sometimes lurking just beneath the surface of our consciousness, and sometimes buried so deeply that nobody knows where it came from, who it is, or what makes it tick. (2012, p. 1)

The metaphorical image of a clown living inside us – sometimes in the shallow 'consciousness' of the performer, sometimes 'buried deeply' in our unconscious, could be seen as the main paradigm that guides some (if not the majority) of clown philosophy and clown training nowadays. Making a far-reaching statement that we all have a clown within us and that the solution to the question of how to be a clown is to 'cast the clown off' and let the clown flow from this deep source, can be found in other theorists such as John Wright (2006): 'We're all clowns really, but we've all spent most of our lives trying to hide this embarrassing reality under layers of intelligence, sensibility, sophistication, and social nicety' (2006, p. 184).

However, this 'essentialist' approach is problematic. The idea of having an inner clown is directly linked to an assumption that the world is reducible to (subjective) mental predicates; in other words, that the being of the clown is explicable in terms of either psychological or metaphysical structures. One of the problems that I identify with the claim that 'we are all clowns' is that it rests on a set of dogmatic assumptions about what it is to be a clown. Moreover, to claim that we all have a clown inside us is something that is extremely difficult to demonstrate, to prove or even to acknowledge; one could say the same about virtually any profession or way of being and thus the claim quickly descends into a form of reasoning known as *reductio ad absurdum* (one could just as easily say that we all have a tragic actor inside us.) Another issue with respect to the clown being an essential aspect of the self is that it would seem to presuppose that, in order to become a clown, the performer should go through a psychological process in order to reveal this deeply concealed clown personality, a process which seems to overlook the significant role played by clown training and performing. The main subject of concern regarding this essentialist approach then becomes: how can one access a phenomenon that is happening (or is supposed to be happening) inside someone else's mind? The idea of having a clown inside the mind is similar to Ludwig Wittgenstein's analogy of the beetle-in-the-box or the improbable reality

of a private language that only can be understood by a single individual. The concept of 'inner' is problematic in itself. 'Inner' could be related to something unique to the individual. The question is: How accessible this 'inner' is? I am arguing that, despite that 'inner' might be related to something private, one only has access to it when it becomes public. In order to understand the nature of this 'insiderness', the 'inner' must be manifested in the world. Therefore, the phenomenon that we all experience when we see a clown in action is not an internal phenomenon but an exteriorized one. As a clown I can even say that my clown appears when I am in front of the audience/camera, and is a construct of my doing and their perceiving.

What I am calling the essentialist approach, and the idea of an 'inner clown', grasps the idea of being a clown in an erroneous metaphorical way. Thus the more I began to explore this inner clown, the more I found that there was a problem with this view precisely because it failed to grasp the clown phenomenon in itself. The problematic starts with the subjective view of the clown being as a fragment of the self, an internal reality, or inner child – and goes on to elaborate on it in metaphysical terms – clown soul, clown spirit, being possessed by the deep clown and so on. However, the phenomenon in question in this approach – the essence of the clown – confronts a significant ontological dilemma: in order to know

what a clown's essence is, I must first know what and how that clown is. And as phenomenologists have pointed out: essence does not come first, rather, existence comes first. Moreover, in order to locate the 'inner clown' we need first to know what a clown is – it is not something to be discovered 'inside', but in fact, some imported from how clowns are actually encountered in the world. So, in fact the essential clown really contributes nothing to our understanding of what a clown is or how one goes about becoming a clown. To be a clown is to exist as a clown in the world; it is to act as a clown. To be a clown implies, then, practical involvement with the world. It means to perform. The existence of the clown precedes the essence of the clown. The phenomenon examined in this article is thus not the 'inner clown' but the 'outer clown'; not the 'essential clown' but the clown that exists in the world, the existential clown.

To be a clown-in-the-world means to be a performer who is defined by his or her practices. If clowns are what they do, then the focus of my research begins with clown practices – or rather, with the phenomenon of what I call 'being a clown in the world'⁵.

Methodological Turn

At this point in my research, I realized that the focus of my investigation ought to be the

phenomenon that really matters to me as a clown/researcher: the clown as involved in clown practices. The shifting point in my research happened when I decided to abandon assumptions related to metaphysical concepts such as soul, archetypes and psychological metaphors – and decided, instead, to analyse the phenomena of clowns through their pragmatic engagement with worldly contexts while performing.

My initial intention was to do an ethnographical examination of my own practice as a clown and use my experience as a practitioner as the basis of the investigation. *Circo Teatro Udigrudi*, a clown company founded in 1982 in Brazil, was going to be the main case study. But I found out that ‘research’ also means re-search, searching again, from different perspectives, and finding new ways of approaching the same phenomenon. My Ph.D (Philosophy Doctor) research implied a commitment to the Ph. of these initials, or in other words, to the philosophical structure of the thesis. As a clown, touring with the company most of the time, I did not have time to read or write – at least not in academic terms. The privilege of being sponsored by the Brazilian government took me to great libraries in London and a stimulating supervision at Central led me to fundamentally reappraise my research project. The high level of my Ph.D peers and the motivating academic environment of Central provided the right op-

portunity for this personal change: from clown to clown-philosopher.

The first aspect of this methodological turn appeared in the development of a philosophical approach, insofar as the methodological turn I underwent was grounded on an ontological turn. If the actual focus of my research is related to the examination of the meaning of being a clown in the world and the practices involved in it, I had to find a philosophical approach that could help me to draw out an understanding of the phenomenon of ‘being’ as well as of the phenomenon of ‘clown’. I was preoccupied in examining not just the clown as an entity but also the very meaning of ‘being’ a clown. Reading Martin Heidegger’s ([1927] 2012) *Being and Time* and some of his commentators, (Hubert Dreyfus (1991, 1992, 2014), Stephen Mulhall (2005), Taylor Carman (2003), Tony Fisher (2012) and Shaun May (2015), I found the appropriate philosophical grounding for my investigation. Heidegger’s fundamental question is: ‘What does ‘being’ mean?’ This is, of course, a fundamental question of philosophy. However, Heidegger’s original approach – to what he termed a ‘fundamental ontology’ – differs from the ‘traditional’ ontology of the philosophical or ‘metaphysical’ tradition in many aspects: while the latter occupies itself with entities (and ‘questions such as ‘what there is’ or ‘why there is what there is’ or even ‘why there is anything at all and not no-

thing” (CARMAN, 2003, p. 8). Heidegger interrogates why the fundamental question of ‘being’ has been neglected. Acknowledging that the Greeks (mainly Parmenides and the pre-Socratics) had a similar approach to his interpretation of being – that the understanding of Being is intrinsically related to the way this Being is *in* the world – Heidegger posits that ‘in the course of this history [of philosophy] certain domains of Being have come into view and have served as primary guides for subsequent problematics: the *ego cogito* of Descartes, the subject, the ‘I’, reason, spirit, person’ (2012, p. 44), terms and concepts that Heidegger rejects. The originality with which Heidegger approaches the question of being, heavily criticizing ‘traditional ontologies’ – mainly Descartes and his followers – provided a useful basis from which to attempt an original approach to phenomenology, and in the case of the hypothesis developed in this article, the phenomenology of the clown.

The Phenomenon of Phenomenology

In the introduction of *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes clear what he means by phenomenology: ‘The expression ‘phenomenology’ signifies primarily a *methodological conception*. This expression does not characterize the *what* of the objects of philosophical research as a subject-matter, but rather the *how* of that research’ (HEIDEGGER 2012, p. 50) and he adds: ‘phenome-

nology means ... to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself’ (Ibid, p. 58). The definition of the word ‘phenomenon’ is crucial to the argument of this article. Heidegger says that ‘we have to keep in mind that the expression ‘*phenomenon*’ signifies that which shows itself in itself, the manifested’ (Ibid, p. 51) and at the same time:

Manifestly, it is something that proximally and for most part *does not* show itself at all: it is something that lies *hidden* ... Yet that which remains hidden in an egregious sense, or which relapses and gets covered up again, or which shows itself only “*in disguise*”, is not just this entity or that, but rather the Being of entities ... “Behind” the phenomena of phenomenology there is essentially nothing else; on the other hand, what is to become a phenomenon can be hidden. And just because the phenomena are proximally and for the most part not given, there is the need for phenomenology. Covered-up-ness is the counter-concept to “phenomenon”. (HEIDEGGER, 2012, p. 60)

In order to understand the meaning of phenomenon for Heidegger, it is necessary to interpret this important statement in detail. Several things can be understood from this passage:

1. The phenomenon is that which shows itself;
2. What is concealed in that showing is the ‘being’ of the phenomenon – not that it lies ‘beneath’, for that being is not itself a being, e.g.,

it is not an underlying substance – but rather it is how that being commonly manifests itself as something in the world, and which we take for granted;

3. There is ‘nothing else’ ‘behind’ the phenomenon – no inner essence, or secret foundation;

4. To grasp the phenomenon in its being, means, to undertake a phenomenological analysis – a kind of reversal of how the meaning of being is covered up by everyday dogmatic opinions and prejudices;

5. It requires a ‘hermeneutic’ (meaning interpretation or understanding), unravelling of the phenomenon in which what is reversed is the process by which it is concealed from us by our own activities of covering up.

Heideggerian description of phenomenological method could be seen as the methodology of revealing through a hermeneutic approach, that which is concealed from us in our everyday practices, precisely because it is too ‘close’ to us – too familiar. The concept of phenomenon (that which shows itself, which stands in the light or clearing of being, that which shows up), according to this view, is complemented by the counter-concept of *hiddenness*. Heidegger states that behind the

phenomenon there is ‘nothing else’⁶, yet the phenomena can be ‘covered up’ and ‘distorted’. The paradox embedded in this description of ‘phenomenon’ – revealing/concealing, hidden/shown – which is axiomatic for Heidegger, is better understood in terms of practice, because in our everyday experience in the world things are revealed and concealed. Heidegger’s proposition is to ground ontology in the context of everyday experience and practice. The way in which we relate to the world, to others and to things (our mundane practices) are interconnected with their pragmatic meaning. And he posits: ‘ontology is possible only as phenomenology’ (2012, p. 35). But a phenomenology of what? Well, it is with that being for whom the meaning of its own being is – as Heidegger says – at issue for it. Heidegger thus pursues the question of being through an ‘analytic of Dasein’. *Being and Time* describes his enterprise as working towards a definition of Dasein. This word plays such an important role in my dissertation that is worth clarifying at least some of its meanings at the outset.

‘Every thing we talk about, everything we have in view, everything towards which we comport ourselves in any way, is being; what we are *is* being, and so is how we are’ (HEIDEGGER, 2012, p. 26). The definition of Dasein starts with a peculiar approach to the human being: To be means to be ‘in’, meaning, to be ‘in’-volved. Heidegger, in or-

der to approach the answer to the question of what Dasein is, begins with our average everyday way of being in the world. Dasein, which is translated as 'there-being', is actually better understood as being-in-the-world. The whole concept of being-in denotes an involvement. To be in the world is misunderstood if conceived as a metaphor of containment – it is different from being inside something (the world), like the wine inside a glass. This involvement with others and the things around us is fundamental for the understanding of Dasein. Being-in-the-world involves an engagement with practical activities and projects that are important to each one of us. Nor is Dasein correctly grasped as a being in the sense of a creature with limbs and the ability to perceive through the senses – visual and sensorial experiences. Dasein defines an existential phenomenon: first, of how we appear to ourselves and others in taking a stand in our being and, second, in how we have to do that by using the public world of others. In other words, Dasein is what one *does*; the term contains in itself the idea of *publicness* or an interaction-with-others. The world is here understood as 'the interlocking practices, equipment, and skills for using them' (DREYFUS, 1997, p. 99). Heidegger says that Dasein, in the first instance, is 'mine'; it is my projects; what I do; how I am with others. This is the concept of *Jemeinigkeit* or the idea of 'mineness' characteristic of Dasein. That is to say, one's existence is unique and differs from the

existence of anyone else, insofar as it is 'mine', and yet being Dasein allows me to commune with a collective of strangers and a myriad of things that I interact with in my everyday life. Insofar as I am, I am with others. I developed this idea of Dasein (and other Heideggerian terms) further throughout my Ph.D dissertation. For now, I just want to make clear the link between Dasein (this complex term that Heidegger uses to define the human being) and the pragmatic involvement that being in the world requires.

Poetics as Practice

'One is what one *does*' (HEIDEGGER, 2012, p. 289). The practices that each Dasein gets involved with and the way Dasein copes with each task defines the way we are in the world. Through Heidegger we can understand artistic practices and the notion of poetics as belonging to Dasein – as being in the world. Following the precepts of fundamental ontology – which in fact is Heidegger's analytic phenomenology⁷ – the practices of everyday life disclose the phenomenon of the world. If a practice reveals and conceals (a key characteristic of the phenomenon), then an artistic practice (or poetics) is not just a set of techniques and specific ways of doing things but it is also the manifestation of the artistic Being of Dasein. Poetics inevitably calls to mind Aristotle's Poetics. However, the approach that I suggest can

be traced back to a time prior to Aristotle and is intrinsically linked to the concept of *poesis* that is found in Pre-Socratic philosophers, particularly in Parmenides (discussed in HEIDEGGER, 1998). In fact, what inspires me to use poetics in the title of this thesis comes from the study that Martin Heidegger ([1935] 2008) conducted, particularly in the lecture given in 1935, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, on *poesis* – a concept he located in Pre-Socratic philosophy. The reinterpretation of the term *physis* (Greek word for ‘constant blossom’), which for Aristotle was the beginning of growth and change in all things, led Heidegger to reassess his concept of *poesis*. In this approach, *physis* contains an intrinsic ambiguity: to reveal and conceal (characteristic of Heideggerian ontology). While Plato and Aristotle’s understanding of *poesis* linked it to the concept of mimesis, this new reading suggests that *poesis* is *physis* – in the sense that they both describe a production. However, while the work of *Physis* – natural *poesis* – comes forth not by means of the artist but simply insofar as it ‘arises out of itself’ – like a flower that blooms, *Poesis* is related to artistic creation or better, it implies the production of a craftsman or an artist. *Poesis* (the etymological root of poetics), thus is best grasped not as mimesis, but as artistic *production*. It is through the experience of *physis* as *poesis* – poetic as doing and making - that human artistic *production* is distinguished and finds its connections to Dasein.

Not only handicraft manufacture, not only artistic and poetical bringing into appearance and concrete imagery, is a bringing forth, *poesis*. *Physis*, also, the rising of something from out of itself, is a bringing-forth. *Physis* is indeed *poesis* in the highest sense. For what presences by means of *physis* has the irruption Belonging to bringing-forth, e.g., the bursting of a blossom into bloom, in itself. In contrast, what is express forth by the artisan or the artist, e.g. the silver chalice, has the irruption Belonging to bringing-forth, not in itself, but in another, in the craftsman or artist. (HEIDEGGER, 2008, p. 317)

Poetics is revealed through artistic practice. Poetics is thus used in my thesis to define a set of practices that I take to be characteristic of the art of the clown; here called both clowning or clownery. To describe my effort as a ‘poetics’ of the clown is to simply say that I am attempting to bring to light hidden aspects of the tacit practice of the art of clowning based on the notion of pragmatic production. Poetics, as well as the concept of *physis* and *poesis* in later Heidegger, is related to the act of making, with practice, and to the analysis of the technique of artistic making. It is also related to the idea of hiding and revealing, themselves characteristics of the phenomenon of being in the world, suggested by Heidegger. In my approach, the clown is ‘revealed’ in the poetic production of the clown – through what the performer does. The poetics is manifested not as an act of imitation or representation, but as making – doing – practice being in the world.

I will borrow Sara Jane Baile's (2011) concept of poetics to clarify my approach to the core subject: 'Poetics' foregrounds the idea of *making*, calling to attention the principles and techniques that constitute a practice, in this case, a practice where failure underlies the activity' (2011, p. xvi). Therefore, my approach to the Poetics of the Clown can be understood as proposing an interpretative analysis of the practices that are involved in being a clown. Because failure and the way in which clowns process failure in their practice is also part of my inquiry – in fact, failing is seen here as a technique to reveal the comic and poetic aspects of a clown's performance – then 'clown poetics' might also be understood as a 'hermeneutics of failure'.

It might seem that because there are so many clowns and various clown practices any effort to define common principles of practice is an impossible task. For this reason, and because I will be dealing with the nature of my own experience as well as examining the experience of other clowns, hermeneutic phenomenology, whose focus is the interpretation of our experience of being in the world, offers the best methodology for examining the way in which clowns are experienced – as well as clown *experience*. The aim of that methodology is not to provide an exhaustive set of techniques, but precisely to suggest what is *common* to clowns, insofar as we can say that

such-and-such a performance is a *clown* performance. Thus discussion about the practices of other clowns and my own practice happens interpretively, or in phenomenological terms through a hermeneutic approach, in which I consider what I take to be the basic principles of clown practice. With all its faults and vices, I hope to be able to bring through my own 'hermeneutics of failure' a different perspective on this area of study, via the approach of the practitioner researcher.

So, I intend to develop an understanding of what I am calling the Poetics of the Clown through a phenomenological enquiry into the 'common' principles of clown practice. From the outset, I have tried to draw attention to the connection between poetics and practice. I could have called my thesis 'Aesthetics of the Clown', or a 'Phenomenology of the Clown'. However, I would rather suggest a practical view, or better, a view of the practice that is involved in 'being-a-clown-in-the-world'. This is not just a play on words with Heidegger's notion of Dasein or 'being-in-the-world'. Understanding the Dasein of the clown, the meaning of being-a-clown-in-the-world or, to put it in more technical terms, the primordial ontological feature that makes possible the existence of the clown is at the core of this phenomenological analysis.

This article examines the hypothesis that

what makes a clown 'a clown' can only be understood by looking at the clown in performance – at how he does what he does and when he does it. In other words: the clown is the result of a performer's practice. It is through the practice of the craft, the use of specific techniques and skills in a specific context that we recognize a performer as a clown. My thesis is called 'Poetics of the Clown' because it is an attempt to analyse principles of practice that are typically characteristic of the art of clowning. To undertake an enquiry into the principles of clown practice is, for this thesis, to engage in the hermeneutics of the mode of being that typifies a clown: the hermeneutics of failure.

From Essential Clown to Clown as the Quintessential Representative of Misfitness

Heidegger posits that to be a human being – to be *Dasein* – is to be in the world and to dwell on the earth; and yet he also believed that *we are never at home in the world*. My reading of this Heideggerian paradox is that we are – as human beings – misfits. To the extent that we are never fully at home in the world we are always trying to 'fit into' the world. How we fit in is through everyday practiced ways of coping, but insofar as our coping skills are imperfect, we also fail to fit in. One of the core suggestions of this article is that being a misfit is one of the defining features of the being of *Dasein*.

Misfitness⁸ is not a word you can find in the dictionary but the concept is relatively easy to understand. If we take Heidegger's expression 'thrownness' (*Geworfenheit*) as a starting point to understand the concept of 'misfitness' we can say that every single human being is thrown into existence and each is thrown into a particular existential situation. This statement implies that we did not have the option to choose our condition as existential beings. We simply came (or were thrown) into this world, into a family and into a specific society; into a time and place. Or more specifically put, we are thrown into the world at a certain point in historical time and in geographical place on the planet, which we did not have a chance to choose. Moreover, to be 'thrown', in the Heideggerian sense, means that I understand the possibilities of my existence from the contingent world in which I find myself and at the same time, because I do not have the option of choosing which 'world' this world is, it is also *necessary* for me: the world could have been otherwise, but this is how it is for me. The misfit condition of the human being is not only an anthropological and sociological one: it is a primordial ontological condition for *Dasein* – as Alva Nöe (2012) puts it:

Modern political [and philosophical] thought begins with the recognition that we don't choose to be born, and we don't choose the conditions of our birth. You don't choose to be born a human being. You don't choose to be born here rather than there, now rather

than then, male rather than female, loved rather than unloved, sick rather than healthy, wealthy rather than poor. One day you are here. You are like Gregor Samsa in Kafka's story. You wake up and find that you are present. (2012, p. 13)

But once we are here and now, we find it necessary to fit in. To fit in to the family, we did not choose; to fit in to the school we attend and the society of which we are a part; to fit into the world. The risk of not fitting in is the risk of being considered an outsider, alien, alienated or mad. However, I am not implying that 'thrownness' is a sufficient condition of misfitness. Another Heideggerian concept is *das Man* also translated as They, the One, the others. *Das Man* stands for the average one, or the average intelligibility to which we all tend to conform. In order to understand the concept of misfitness, we have to try to draw an understanding of what fitting-in means. Once we are thrown in the world, we face a contingent condition of adaptation to norms. Fitting in could be seen as an invisible phenomenon. We all tend to conform to norms, even if we do not notice or realize it. Once the norm is there, contingent and imperceptible, it becomes so familiar that we tend to fit in without noticing that we are doing so.

Misfitness implies something else: I am constantly in a mode of adaptive being-in-the-world: I try to do things, with *more or less* success; I try to fit in with others (*das Man*), with *more or*

less success; I understand who I am by means of conventions that I do not question, with *more or less* success – it is in the difference between 'more or less', in my trying to fit in that I can also fail... and that is where and when I am constituted as a kind of misfit. The point I want to make here, in other words, is that misfitness is both a universal condition and a singular one: Universal in the sense that we all can be seen as misfits; but singular insofar as each one of us fails to fit in in our own particular way. Now, my argument is that the clown represents the one who accepts his condition as misfit and makes the most of it⁹. Clowns are misfits because they fail to conform (even when they try) to habitual and practiced ways of doing things. We do the things we do in the way we do because we just take this way of doing for granted. The performer that performs the clown uses techniques that highlight the misfit qualities of the clown, in other words, that the clown does not fit into an everyday context, the 'world' or into theatrical conventions. The clown performer proposes and creates clown conventions in relation to the given practical context of our average being-in-the-world – this is what I am calling the poetics of the clown, the main hypothesis to be examined in this thesis. Behind the 'appearance' of the clown-misfit, however, there is poetic technique that produces the sense of failure that I relate to the concept of misfitness. The clown performer uses his body in-the-moment, for example, to ensure

that this difference is what makes each one of us unique; while the clown figure – what the *poiesis* produces – highlights our differences¹⁰.

To summarise, then: in this article I develop the following hypothesis – that to understand the clown is to understand the condition of the clown via a concept defined above as ‘misfitness’, grasped phenomenologically through a ‘hermeneutics of failure’. I intend – more broadly - to question whether clowns have definable principles of practice and what the relationship between these principles and the ‘misfit condition’ of the clown might be.

NOTAS

¹ In Brazil, we celebrate the Independence Day on the 7th of September. I grew up during the dictatorship, when school children were obliged to march along with the ruling military.

² Reference to Carl Jung (2003) Four Archetypes

³ Reference to James Hillman (1994) Healing Fiction

⁴ Reference to Jimmy Hendrix Experience (1967) song Up from the Skies.

⁵ Despite the fact that I mostly use the gendered pronoun ‘he’ when I write about the character clown

in general, I am aware of the issues regarding the gendered clown. However, it should be made clear from the outset that the clown in my approach is not to be understood as gendered, just as Dasein, clown is neither male or female.

⁶ For Heidegger there is no ‘true’ or ‘inner’ being – no real ‘substance’ in Aristotle’s sense, which informs the entire metaphysical tradition i.e., soul=substance=psyche=cogito=subject. All of these terms refer to the same ontological assumption that behind the phenomenon there is some thing hidden. In most of the philosophical tradition, the thing that is hidden cannot be encountered by ordinary sense perception, but must be intellectually intuited or deduced.

⁷ Heidegger’s Being and Time is divided in two divisions: Division one (analytic) and division two (synthetic). I am referring to division one.

⁸ Misfitness is a neologism and it will be used recurrently throughout this thesis as a fundamental concept. It is derived from the adjective misfit. Adding the suffix ‘ness’ literally means the state of the original adjective, i.e., the state of being misfit. The word does not ‘fit’ in the English dictionary yet though.

⁹ It will be argued in this dissertation that the clown ‘makes the most of it’ in several senses. For example: the playfulness of clowns is in itself a sort of misfit response to the supposed seriousness of life.

¹⁰ It is important to disambiguate the term clown, which I intend to do throughout the thesis: 1. The clown is understood as the performer of clown; and 2. The clown as performed.

* MARCELO DE ALMEIDA LIBANIO (Marcelo Beré) é doutor em Teatro com especialização em Palhaço pela *Royal Central School of Speech and Drama - University of London* (2016), com financiamento da CAPES, mestre em Teatro pela *Royal Holloway and Bedford New College - University of London* (1992) e licenciado em Artes Plásticas pela Universidade de Brasília (1984). É professor efetivo da *Fundação Educacional do Distrito Federal* desde 1986. É co-fundador do Circo Teatro Udigrudi, em 1982, e atua como palhaço/produtor/diretor desde então.

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