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Documented Artistic Research Project
(Doctoral Thesis)

*This Untethered Buffoon or
the Trickster in Everything*

SQUIRM
the book

FRAGMENT
Nº 06



complicated laughter

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Stacey Sacks

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SQUIRM (the book)
Fragment No. 6.1, complicated laughter
Documented Artistic Research Project (Doctoral Thesis)
Stacey Sacks
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Cover Image

Front - Me as monkey in our lounge, Harare, circa 1982.

Back - Baubo figurine from Priene. © Wikimedia Commons

‘Do you understand what self-deprecation means when it comes from somebody who already exists in the margins? It’s not humility. It’s humiliation.’

HANNAH GADSBY
Nanette (2018)

POLY POLONY¹ (PP)

interviews

Stacey Sacks (SS)

about how to understand the world of clown in the project's research

¹ Poly Polony is a raging imaginary clown with an epic polemic entitled *On the Misuse and Abuse of the Word Clown*, available for hire should you need this rant at a TED talk or anything.

PP: Your comedy is always rimming the edge of cringe.

SS: Yes, I play with productive shame, a term popularised by Paul Gilroy (2005, p.99). There's a Yiddish word *shemsach* which has those squirmy, cringy connotations. The laughter can emerge from embarrassment, shame, recognition, and implication. I'm interested in stirring complicities, in all variants of the word.

PP: Ok before you get too academic and shoowawa, what is a clown and what is its relationship to research?

SS: I'm thinking at the moment of clowning and clouds. (*PP rolls eyes*) Constant transformation, eternal evolution, softness, ephemerality, interruption, fragility, wonder. In the research the clown is both subject – the one doing the researching – as well as object – the one being researched. It is fundamentally and purposefully ambiguous. While playing, clowning is a state of being, a way of seeing the world in curious dimensions. I could ascribe to Avner the Eccentric's idea of not believing in clowns, but in clowning (2019).² Clowning is a verb not a noun and, as he says, the point is not to be interesting, but interested.

Clowning is gardening the now: curiosity, anticipation, potentiality. It's a methodological device I experiment with in the studio, on the stage, while sculpting, drawing, filming, and everywhere. Clowning is a zone of playing, a being WITH whatever is. It's the fertile generative space for the *all-of-a-sudden* to happen. If the clown is the one who makes us laugh, the question that must follow is, how? For renowned pedagogue Jacques Lecoq (1997, p.154), the clown is not a character attempting to be funny, it is 'the person underneath stripped bare for all to see' ... The clown is the one who 'flops' and 'through the failure, reveals his profoundly human nature'. The clown does not exist outside of the actor who performs. The clown appears when the performer is 'free to be who they are', when the performer is 'genuinely playing the self and not playing the clown'. Yet by actively seeking a political dimension in my work, perhaps this agenda causes my 'self' to become hidden or masked. Is that the great paradox of this experiment?

PP: No idea. That was a very long answer. Monologue even. And the footnote and referencing in the middle there really don't help keep this fragment in the realm of a conversation. (*PP exhales deeply*). This already feels a long day. Does your clowning have a style?

SS: It's a strange hybrid genre, a kind of eclectic mash-up, a multi-modal clashing of clowning/Nature/mask/film/animation, as if pastiche fucked assemblage and their splintering rhizomatic babies are squirming all over the place, slippery in all directions.

PP: Ok, that's visceral.

SS: It's queer, you could say, not normal. There's something I enjoy about pushing up against something, creating friction with this so-called version of normality, exposing the hypocrisies of this racist capitalist heteropatriarchal life-denying economy, laughing all the way to the grave. Different. Alone. Together.

PP: You're pathetic.

SS: I've cried many tears.

PP: This isn't about you, white fragility, though it clearly completely is. Let's move on. Is it important what a clown looks like?

SS: For me clowning is not about wearing stupid big shoes, crazy hair, making ridiculous faces and doing silly walks. It's no reason for grown adults to abdicate responsibility by assuming their inner Peter Pan and having an alibi to behave like complete and utter idiots in public spaces. And I use idiots here in the bad sense of the word, the kind of idiots who definitely don't make children laugh.

PP: Finally I agree! You can't just stick on a pair of mis-matched stripy socks, put your underwear on the outside, slap on a red nose with a shrill irritating voice and call yourself a clown!
(*note: PP looks exactly like this*)

² I write 2019 because this information is based on an interview we had via Skype on 29 August 2019. Avner the Eccentric has been teaching these concepts for decades, see his Eccentric principles on https://avnertheeccentric.com/eccentric_principles.php (accessed 7 February 2016).

SS: Exactly! It's sad to me the last several years, the way clowning has become associated with narcissistic and greedy war-mongering racist politicians as well as horror movies and pedophiles.

PP: IT MAKES ME SOOOOO FUCKEN ANGRY! DICKSHIT FUCKERY! CLOWNS ARE FUCKING LOVABLE and I'll beat anybody up who says they're not! Hunt those father-fuckers down!

SS: Thing is, even contemporary jesters like Trevor Noah are reinforcing this trope.

PP: No, no don't start with Trevor. Stop that! Trevor Noah can do no wrong.

SS: I'm not saying anything bad about him, just that on several occasions, he's referred to D.T., as a clown.

PP: OK, I'll write to him about it on his IG but he hasn't replied to my previous comments so I can't guarantee we'll get an answer soon. He's busy you know.

SS: Most of those late-night comedy hosts in New York – Stephen Colbert, John Oliver – they've all referred to nasty politicians as CLOWNS! Oliver is one of the comedians I respect the most but in July 2019 he named B.J., the new PM of the UK, a 'clownish figure'! I mean I can see the stereotype with the hair and all, but ...

PP: FFS Johnny Oilly! You're meant to be punching up, not down! That's how satire works you BRIT-SHIT!! Calling him a clown is a compliment! Those imbecilic entitled white enthusiast fuckwit shit-twits are not clowning. But forget them, let's speak more about Trevor!

SS: I find Noah's positionality interesting, due to the body he's in and his defining life experiences.

PP: If you say so Professor.

SS: Somehow he's entitled to reinforce all kinds of dubious tropes, especially of people of colour, particularly Africans. But I'm not sure his satirical depictions really do anything but help reinforce those problematic tropes. Sorry Poly I know you love him; I've become terribly critical. It's probably the instrument I've sharpened most during this PhD process. What is satire and parody DOING in these times? What does mocking D.T. or B.J. really achieve? What does it do when Noah mimics Africans as being uncaring about whales, as perceiving plastic as something only white people think and care about? Or representing African leaders predominantly as dictators...

PP: Yea, I can't think of anyone who's done that.

SS: ...or Africans as being unsavvy with technology, as if the continent is living in another time? I've seen him reproducing the idea that African fathers beat their children, imitating them with, 'Go fetch my belt!' And sometimes his gendered comedy can uncritically reproduce dodgy gender tropes too. What does it mean when he reinforces the idea that all men are solely controlled by their dicks? Look, stereotypes exist for a reason, but ...

PP: Judging from your hair and your projections of wokeness, I'd say you're going for the Rachel Dolezal stereotype?

SS: You mean Nkechi Amare Diallo? (*PP laughs hysterically*) I don't know what you're insinuating, she's a special case of bad taste. At least when I drag it's under the umbrella of comedy and satire and I fully admit it can flop terribly. Her passing as black is complicated by the reality that she was benefitting from presenting herself as a POC (person of colour) in the world. And she claims to have a kind of body dysmorphic disorder. It's a bizarre case. But about comedy ...

PP: Rachel Dolezal *is* comedy.

SS: Why are we giving Dolezal so much space here?

PP: Dunno. You're writing it.

SS: I'm more interested in exploring whose bodies can tell what jokes. Who are comedians entitled to mock? Does Noah making those jokes reveal to us that satire has truly reached a critical moment of PC-ness when comedians have the right to only make jokes about certain people because they're *inside* of the community they're parodying? Just like the way John Oliver uses the word 'Brit-face' to refer to B.J., but makes it clear to the audience, 'And by the way, I can say Brit-face. You can't.' That's what I mean when I call this project an intra-cultural excavation: it's from me being on the inside, mocking the invisibility of whiteness while being invisible myself. It's a paradoxical and problematic situation. Here in Stockholm my difference is undetectable, as long as I keep my mouth shut.

PP: Well, you just answered a bunch of questions I didn't even ask. Thanks. Why are there so few womxn with their own shows in late-night satire?

SS: It's irritating, and what is even more frustrating is how womxn are presented when they do appear. In July 2019 American comedian Samantha Bee makes a pilot of her own late-night chat show, but what's it called? 'The Shrii!' Womxn are always charged with extreme emotionality.

PP: FUCK! I HATE THAT!

SS: ... and the worst thing is she has a guy in a spotlight sitting with a microphone to the side, interjecting her comments and interviews with the most ridiculous clowny-sexist White male insertions, as if she needs that irritating sidekick, to be MAN-SAT at her very own show! And I don't care he's her real-life husband. Even worse. Imagine him doing that at home. (Sarcastically 'Oh, you wanna go out for dinner!?' *squeaky squeak honkity honk!*)

Imagine Trevor Noah with his girlfriend or Stephen Colbert's or Seth Meyers' wives sitting in a spotlight with a microphone on the side, interrupting their monologues with whistles and bongs and *waa-waaaa-waaaaaaa!!! IT JUST WOULDN'T HAPPEN*. I hate when I shout in caps and somehow can't help thinking of D.T.'s twitter rants. SAD!

PP: You are so colonised by the Americans and the Brits. Do you only watch American satire channels?

SS: For satire in Africa my go-to is Nigerian comedian and political commentator Adeola Fayehun's YouTube channel 'Keeping It Real'. She's one of the most socially aware and seriously funny activist comedians I've encountered online. Her channel seems to have significant impact in the world: developing software applications for transferring money to some African countries as well as raising money for charitable causes.

Her insistent commentary on governmental corruption and hypocrisy is biting and incisive. It's fresh to encounter her clear ethicality, her alignment with the dispossessed, the way she cuts powerful individuals and regimes down to size, at the same time offering alternatives and other ways of being, making us laugh along the way. Her fake curtsies to corrupt politicians and (one-sided) banter with her off-camera collaborator crack me up. Also, her material is unapologetically African; she rarely refers to countries outside of Africa. Fayehun calls pan-African corrupt governments to account, isn't afraid to name and shame and subjects men to the same body-scrutiny as womxn have traditionally endured. I'd love to create a post-doc that grants me an interview with Adeola. Oh Goddesses! If you're there, please grant my wish.

PP: Good luck with that. Keep praying. Let's talk about circus and its shocking relationship with colonial logic.

SS: The history of the modern circus is deeply entangled with racism. I'm thinking of P.T. Barnum displaying Joice Heth in 1835.

PP: Oh, hello Wikipedia, here we go ...

SS: Barnum bought Heth from a slave owner and put her on display, claiming she was George Washington's nanny and 161 years old. He was clearly inspired by the treatment of Sara Baartman and other people enslaved, denigrated and displayed in Europe's 'human zoos' – those popular fairs and shows of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

PP: Yes, remember you wrote about that in the *W(w)hitenesses* fragment, repetitious Sue.

SS: But what I didn't write there is that she made him a load of money and died penniless a year later; and even then, in typical humbuggery fashion, Barnum profited from her death, making it too a spectacle, as he charged people to attend her autopsy. It's all so dark, so fundamentally wrong, and this sense of superiority and entitlement stems from pseudoscientific 'race biology', originated in the 1700s by Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus whose theories have been used for centuries to back up racist and genocidal beliefs.

PP: That shit's making a comeback. Do you know how many white people are calling geneticists to confirm they're descended from Vikings?!

SS: Whiteness noisily insists on its superiority and continues to capitalise from the enslavement, humiliation, degradation, pain and death of POC. And Sweden certainly isn't as colonially innocent as it likes to frame itself. Did you know that in 1909 a Swedish society for the promotion of racial hygiene was founded? It was the third such society in the world, called *Svenska sällskapet för rashygien*.³ Race science philosophies then led to the creation of the Swedish State Institute for Racial Biology in 1922. Have you heard about Sweden's programme of racial purification, a Nazi-style campaign of forced sterilisation of women between 1935 and 1976?

PP: No, horrific! It's a practice also common to and documented in countries worldwide, including Canada, Australia and South Africa over the same period. I'm good at Wikipedia too Sacks, but what's this got to do with comedy or the circus?

SS: Just that circus has to acknowledge and face its racist roots, just like whites need to see how we have historically benefitted and continue to benefit from Whiteness. The question is, what happens after the acknowledgement, what happens after the recognition and the apology? How do we enter phases of reparation and reconciliation, how can we forge solidarities from here and redress rampant inequalities, erasures, dispossession and displacement?

PP: (*eyes widening*) You asking me?

SS: Should there be forgiveness for the perpetrators? South Africa tried that with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but many criticise that process as being a whitewashing of historical trauma, violence and abuse. The critique of 'rainbowism' is alive and well, especially post #FeesMustFall, check out this online article as an example.⁴ There was not one sacrifice for the privileged white minority; those who had either silently enjoyed or loudly protested the benefits of being considered the superior race during apartheid. They remained 'masters' and in the case of ownership of the economy, still do. White men continue to occupy 70% of the top positions in businesses in SA.

PP: Well this is just a laugh a minute. In one of your film essays you ask the question: am I still a clown even if no one is laughing?

SS: I've come to accept that clowning doesn't have to make its audience laugh, just help them breathe a bit deeper. Does a conversation about clown always have to involve something about laughter too? Is that the purpose of a clown? Clown pedagogues disagree. Philippe Gaulier would say yes, Avvner the Eccentric doesn't commit to that outcome in his 12 essential points. Certainly, there is some hope that clowning might elicit laughter, it's fuel for a clown's being-in-the-world, but not essential. My co-author of *The Clown Manifesto* and founder of Clowns Without Borders – Sweden, Nalle Laanela, would say the clown's job is not only to make the audience laugh but to make them FEEL.

³ Swedish for 'Swedish Society for Racial Hygiene'.

⁴ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-10-17-breaking-a-rainbow-building-a-nation-the-politics-behind-mustfall-movements/> (accessed 21 March 2019).

As long as you're playing and connecting with the audience, you are firmly in the world of clowning, regardless of whether you're wrestling or doing a Shakespearean monologue, whether the audience is laughing, groaning, booing or crying.

Besides, laughter is not always affiliated with happiness; it can evolve out of systemic cruelty and serve to maintain hegemonic norms and perpetuate hateful stereotypes too. Physically it's not always good for you either, there are some medical conditions connected to the stomach and diaphragm that are worsened by laughing.

As I said earlier, for me, clowning is a state of being, a way of listening to the world around. It's being alongside the audience, the space, that which comes into being. Clowning is being as humxn as humxn gets, both enacting and revealing the shameful; an outcast, the discarded or out of place.

PP: Are you calling me a freak?

SS: I associate marginality and distance as positions of the clown, like Charlie Chaplin's Tramp or Buster Keaton's dead-pan or Gardi Hutter's seamstress Hanna or Ana E. Smith's 'Miss Beige' or Emilia Kokko's 'Talking Tit aka reincarnation of Judith Butt-ler' or Dean Hutton's 'Fuck White People' artwork. My kind of clowning leans towards the realms of the trickster and the buffoon. The beauty of these border-dwellers is in their ambiguity, being both inside and outside of mainstream culture simultaneously. Existing on the edges allows them to point to and comment on humxnity's foibles while sharing their failures, insecurities, blindnesses and biases.

I like to imagine I'm walking in the shadow of historical, mythological, trans-cultural, shamanic traditions of the holy fool; from hyper-horny Pan to the parodic 'satyr plays' of ancient Greece to the Feast of Fools and the Lord of Misrule, to clowning as part of fertility rites – paying homage to the sacred Pueblo clowns, jesters in the Kachina religion – to Medieval and Renaissance court-fools, the clown as poet and clairvoyant, scrying a future worth living.

The jester was historically enfolded warmly into the armpit of the institutionally powerful yet given the privilege and sacred task of shitting on the head of the person with the highest position, both to entertain the court and to keep leaders in check, speaking truth to power.

From Tarot, clowning is the space occupied by the Fool; it resides at the zero point. The Fool steps off the cliff with hope and curiosity in the heart, with hardly any thought for consequence. Ordinarily, clowns don't have personal histories, they exist only there and then in the moment of encounter. So besides carving time for their audiences to breathe deeper, they offer the option to sink into the moment in the form of KAIROS.

PP: Kairos shmairos.

SS: Think deep time, like insects trapped in amber from millions of years ago.

PP: Stop this pseudo-spiritual airy-fairy shit. You sound like your character Anastasia. Who, I may add, is much more like you than you care to think. She's definitely you doing a parody of yourself. Self-absorbed white African, failed anarchist, idiot-feminist clown, punk new-Age do-gooder, volunteerist Narcissist fool, always sticking her foot in her hippie mouth. The violent pacifist, armchair activist, the self-styled 'not-a-guru' who shoots fighter jets from her eyes, fire from her palms and glitter from her pussy! You can't say she's not based on you.

SS: The exploration with Anastasia was about fictionalising reality in absurd ways. It was early in the project and part of digging into the ridiculousness of identity politics as well as asking the dual questions: what bodies am I entitled to inhabit, and, what is appropriate appropriation? What does an auto-parody mean in my case? Plus, it was an experimental collective improvisation exercise in front of the camera by a group of self-reflective feminist clown punks. Looking back it's actually a perfect exploration of the questions I was asking at the time, as well as part of the process of me learning to undo a certain production-oriented mentality.



Anastasia shoots fighter jets from her eyes and ears in *Meat Anastasia*, 2016. Cinematographer: Alex Hinchcliffe



Lala Poofluffy, GlitterBug, Rude Raven and Anastasia Moonpower make a b@nd and attempt to improvise a song about white feminism, using kitchen implements. Still frame from *Meat Anastasia*, 2016. Cinematographer: Alex Hinchcliffe

PP: How did that go?

SS: It was a productive failure that way, we stopped making those sketches though Anastasia still accompanies the exploration, consistently popping up in a myriad of ways, as hastily scratched sketches and germinations of ideas in notebooks. As films for the future, ready on the page.

PP: So you left Anastasia who had your face as her mask, and then you started wearing wooden masks from Bali. Why?

SS: No, the masks and Anastasia emerged simultaneously in 2016. When I try to analyse the reason why I like to play masks, or let the masks play me, I can imagine alongside Pueblo tricksters from the southwestern United States, believing that in order for a clown to perform meaningful social commentary via humour, the clown's identity should be concealed. For me, perhaps I can only approach heavy satire through masks.

PP: But you're not a Pueblo clown. How is that appropriate appropriation?

SS: I'm hoping in this case it's not appropriation. I'm drawing inspiration from other thought forms as part of my project of re-centering knowledge.

PP: Fine lines, Sacks. So what meaningful social commentary are you performing through the mask of your mother ... I mean, your clowter, Granny?

SS: The main clowters emerging through this body as part of this PhD exploration are Granny and Stanly G., both of whom are historically, socially and politically situated. And Granny is certainly not my mother.

PP: Just as well. Can't stand her.



SS: But she's an interesting confrontation or, in the right context, a provocation. Granny is a decolonial gesture, which may fall flat on its face. Being a hybrid of clown and character, she's a clown leaning towards the trickster realm, a strange amalgam of particularity and stereotype, but an idiosyncratic trope.

PP: How can a trope be idiosyncratic? That's an oxymoron.

SS: Exactly.

PP: Ok now you're just being obscure.

SS: She's playing mask and counter-mask simultaneously, the vulnerable vicious, the oppressor-victim, collapsing binaries. I would say Granny is a clown in that in the moment of her creation, her arrival was immediate. There was no making a character, building up a world, none of that Stanislavski stuff he teaches in *An Actor Prepares* (1936) – given circumstances, objectives and so on – a part of the acting knowledge I was taught in the Drama Department at the University of Cape Town. She emerged as an instant composition. According to Giovanni Fusetti, when stories and narratives arrive in this immediate fashion, they have a certain urgency and necessity for the times.⁵

During the performance essays I stage, Granny's material composes itself live in the encounter with an audience. Not to say she doesn't have a script, she definitely does. She's stuck in a loop, the story of her victimhood. It's the same story over and over. She perceives herself as severely persecuted though most of her life she's occupied a distinct position of privilege. She plays vulnerability and fragility perfectly, makes the audience care for her while hearing her story, perhaps even triggering a state of compassion. And then she reveals her nastiness in uncomfortable cringe-y moments, which I hope on some level can give audiences the gift of an ethical response. But that can't be guaranteed, so if any measure of discomfort is stirred, I'm happy. I believe stories have the capacity to soften and comedy the imperative to hurt, sometimes.

⁵ Giovanni shared this perspective with me in a doctoral supervision session in April 2016.

PP: But she's not a clown!

SS: She's always responding to the room she's in. Granny's drawn from a type, and she's definitely seeking connection with her audiences. I guess it depends on what you define as 'being a clown'. Perhaps she's more in the half-mask realm of Commedia dell'Arte, but the persona, the cliché or stereotype she inhabits isn't immediately recognisable in the Scandinavian region. Granny is a mask made in Bali, emerging from the half-mask *Bondres* tradition, known for performing at religious or ceremonial functions, improvising humorous scenes during ritual ceremonies. Often the masks are drawn from types on the fringes of society – outcasts, drunks, the elderly, those with physical and mental functional variations.⁶ There is no exact equivalent of the *Bondres* in a European context since they are so entangled in Bali with spiritual and religious practice, but in terms of performance strategies, the closest would likely be Commedia Dell'Arte types, or simply improvising clowns using masked performances to create laughter for any gathered community.

PP: And how does that pan out in Stockholm?

SS: In the Swedish context Granny emerges as a luxurious migrant with a cautionary tale for Sweden's future. I like to think of her as a trans-generational haunting, a warning. She evolves intuitively, organically. One of my supervisors, professor Rebecca Hilton, paraphrases performance theorist Bojana Cvejic as having said, 'Intuition is the fastest assimilation of everything you already know'. It's helpful to think of Granny's emergence this way. A convergence of history, politics and personal experience. Inside of this research context, with the way Granny evolves, I must ask what it means, what it does, to perform racism at this particular juncture of our geo/political/social/historical now? Sure, it's an imitation, a doubling of the times, but I am still not entirely sure if it reproduces or splinters colonial logic.

PP: And what about that other irritating guy who doesn't stop talking and flirting?

SS: Stanley G.? He's also carved out of Balinese Pule wood. I was in Ubud, studying Balinese dance and shadow puppetry, contemplating deeper notions of cutting and carving as well as what there is to learn from light and shadow. There, I asked Ida Bagus Putu Wirabumi (aka 'Pak Gustu'), a Balinese mask-maker and my dance teacher, to help me manifest a concept for a mask. Initially, I had the idea to create a T-mask that could mock or parody traditionally held notions of the Judeo-Christian God. I designed the mask and co-created it with Pak Gustu. But when I put it on, something completely unexpected emerged. It was a perfect lesson in how the research needs to be open to intentions being derailed. The clowter that emerged, Stanley Goldwater, or Stanley G., is a Yiddish-like great grandfather I never had.

He's less of a know-all and more of a know-nothing, having the temperament of both a horny humanist, new materialist philosopher and wannabe professor. He's also a tongue sculptor, sometimes performing a Temporary Hallway Encounter (T.H.E.) called *Dialoco//Dialogos*. He mimics the limits of discursivity while positioning himself as the 'Turd/Third Opponent' to the project's artistic research output. The tongue sculpting parodies notions of representation, and is a stirring of dialogue around the politics of talking and shutting up. I'm hoping people can see that it questions ideas of 'the original', authenticity and a lot more. You can read more about Stanley G. and tongues in the fragments devoted to them.

PP: So maybe the difference between a clowter and a clown is personal history? Is the clown a tabula rasa, completely blank?

SS: No not really but yes completely.

PP: Great.

⁶ For more information about *Bondres* and other Balinese masks, see Judy Slattum's 2012 book, *Balinese Masks: Spirits of an Ancient Drama*.



blank posts this picture on facebook with the caption *this is what happens when you try write a phd thing.*

SS: It's blank in the sense that it responds to whatever it comes into contact with, so there's no preconceived intention when the clown enters. Contradicting this, however, clowns also have the option of arriving with pre-determined states. Pre-determined by the clown's state of being in that singular moment, in the body that presents itself to the world at that moment in time. It's why I persist with the idea that each body has innumerable clowns. Each day we can arrive inhabiting any state we feel to be appropriate and logical for that instant from inside that body.

PP: Well that's convenient. Is your clown 'blank' blank?

SS: I wouldn't say blank is a clown the way Stanley G. and Granny are.

PP: What then?

SS: A boundary hopper, everything and nothing at all. A TRICKOON, a BUFFICKSTER, a trickster/buffoon. A thing.

PP: But you're a thing, I'm a thing, this page is a thing, EVERYTHING'S A FUCKEN THING!!

SS: No need to shout Poly ...

PP: DON'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO YOU FUCKFACE DICKSHIT!!

SS: But ultimately, I do decide what you do, I'm the one writing this document; right now, you are a figment of my imagination.

PP: *(totally offended)* No I'm not!

SS: Yes, you are!

PP: NO! I'M NOT!!

SS: You are actually!

PP: Then why are you sitting here, taking up paper space, arguing with your SELF?

SS: (*silent*)

PP: Now who's looking ridiculous. And just so your readers know, that's an old joke you just reproduced, a predictable trope appropriated, stolen from the field of ventriloquism. At least we now understand how those millions of YouTube films you watched of ventriloquist Nina Conti were an integral part of your research.⁷

SS: But it's an important question! And deeply connected to the research. Are you just a dramaturgical device or am I operating as a sort of vessel for your voice? What agencies do clowters have? Do they engrave upon me as much as I carve, mould and distinguish them? Can I move away from these binaries? Can I dissolve, or simply get out of the way?

PP: Yes, just get out of the way. Or stay and shut up.

SS: I want to argue against this idea of clowter as surrogacy. It's not simply an evocation of my private ideologies, imagination and situated perspectives.

PP: I'm not sure these squirmy fragments help that perspective.

SS: And I also mean the opposite; that is, the clowter evolves absolutely through my own particular life experience and perspective. But not utterly. The thing has its own desire to be manifest in the world, I have to learn how to move out of its way. How to open the portal to be both host and guest, simultaneously maker and receiver. As Marcel Duchamp (1953) said, a guest plus a host equals a ghost.

PP: I'm in the business of ridiculousness and your nonsense hardly makes sense to me.



Anastasia shoots glitter from her pussy in *Meat Anastasia*, 2016. Cinematographer: Alex Hinchcliffe



Anastasia is so not a guru in *Meat Anastasia*, 2016. Cinematographer: Alex Hinchcliffe

⁷ See <https://www.ninaconti.net> for hours of fun.

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