

(extract from ÜBER DEN CLOWN by Richard Weihe, currently available in German)

“What is clown?”

Well, there is a question for the ages. Perhaps it is a Koan.

Clown is a word. Words are symbols. Words become talismans once we imbue them with specific meaning. Once a person commits to the programming of the symbol, the talisman may trigger deep emotional and spiritual responses when the word is uttered or seen. Clown seems to be one of those words which has strength in this regard. People tend to imbue it with great importance and will fight and defend the meaning it holds for them. This is very interesting, indeed.

Clown is a word which, for me, describes both a being and a state of being. We have come to accept that clown addresses a particular figure in the realm of public performance, who has a particular way of addressing an audience. We tend to think of the clown as a heroic figure who can demonstrate for us the futility of our collective obsession with having answers for everything. This clown reveals to us that we take ourselves too seriously. Clown reminds of the futility of the mind attempting to claim dominion over all things. Clown reveals to us the power of being without answers, of being free from limitations, of being available to experience without labeling or prejudgement. Clown shows and reminds us of the power of creation and the Great Mystery. The clown stands in the doorway between dreams and our everyday reality and can guide us in both realms. Clown is humanity, distilled in the fool’s courage to defy social fear and stereotyping.

Clown is most often discussed in terms of relationship to the self and an audience. In my perspective, no audience is needed for the clown to exist. I can see clown in everyday life, almost anywhere I look. On TV, in the mall, in any park, in hospital, at the driver’s license renewal center, in the mirror!

With a leaf...I can be in a clown experience and frequency.

For me, the clown emerges..it is not some sort of byproduct of clever thinking, nor is it the carefully rehearsed application of particular mechanics in front of an audience. The clown comes from a space between fantasy and the physical reality we call everyday life. it resides in all of us, and so it resonates with us all.

Surely, one can choose to focus on clown in terms of a performance discipline. The question I find most interesting involves the actual experience in performance. Is "Clown" just the acting out of a Role? And learning the skills of the clown and incorporating those into the performance of the role? If so, then surely any actor with some basic talent and dexterity can be a clown. Learn the rules and skills, do the stereotype through its particular codified vocabulary, dress up, do the text, and voila. Instant clown. Likewise I can be a king, or a dragon slayer, surely. I have long been fascinated with the question of performance....not solely limited to the stage. Performance is a conceptual matter. We perform in daily life, we perform in competitions such as sports. Performance is something we in the west are conditioned to associate with achievement. The word clown certainly can be used to label a few performance disciplines, but also the term can be and is widely used to reference a quality which lies beneath or is somehow inherent in the many expressions which in some way seem to express what many now refer to as the "state of" clown. Namely, there is a universal aspect which we as humans relate to, which examines and reveals something of our deeper humor, as individuals, as communities, as societies.

We experience multiple fields and layers of consciousness. We dream both in sleep and while awake. We are awake both in sleep and while physically active. We live our lives in the spaces between action and personal: sensorial, physiological, and emotional experience. We are visceral, electromagnetic, light, electric, organic creatures.

Any feeble maneuver or attempt to understand or win dominion over the physical realm we inhabit results in a stupid reprise, always, a return to square one, where we find ourselves right where we started life, stupid. The stupid man who clings to nothing remains forever smart because he is not limited to just one way of doing or perceiving. The clever man is forever stupid because without the full range of resources and support he so clings to out of necessity, he fails.

Whether or not a performer makes an audience respond with vocalized "laughter" is not really a gauge of that performers success as a clown. Making an audience respond with laughter might simply involve showing funny cat videos on a big screen. The greater area of interest for many of us has something to do with our deep attraction to bearing witness to the bare translucent experience-being of another human confronting head-on the absurd encounter between the physical and the fantastic. In my perspective, based on my observation, this can be felt, in frequency, as well as in our deeper conscious connections, perhaps the most primary of human connections.

One great sadness in life is that I can never see myself, meet myself, sit and have a coffee and hold a conversation with this social being my friends call by my name. But I can sit with another person. I can be witness to another human experiencing familiar or not so familiar challenges. And in this encounter, I can see myself, I can know myself, I have a relationship with the deeper self. And during such a profound and stupid experience as this, I come to recall that I am in fact, somehow, related to the individual I am watching; I have a sense that we are all part of one greater thing. The experience invokes my sense of oneness with humans everywhere, regardless of race, gender, age, culture.

Playing in particular styles or contexts can be useful for getting us to this space, the space between the rule of society and the fable of life itself. Using specific jokes, referencing familiar societal details can be useful for organizing attention and can bridge us to this space.

When we experience extreme surprise, empathy, revelation, we laugh. It is a reassuring reflex, a celebration, a flash of fullness, of joy, anima rushing through our veins. The clown has the capacity to touch this space in each of us.

The expression of the self, radiating through this space between us, reminds us that in fact there is no distance between us, we are somehow deeply connected. And so, when things do not resonate we feel disconnected or perhaps distant. In this we can be confounded as audience or critics. The challenge in this work, in my view, is not to set out with the artificial objective to make an audience laugh but rather to tap into the collective consciousness, to enter that deeper state of consciousness where the line between "realities" no longer exists. In this space the universe answers, comes alive for us...our foibles are transparent, we see them clearly and yet they inspire us. And when we are in that quantum space, heart, mind and spirit align. There is no effort. It is a dream. Absurd and logical. There is a profound indescribable power. It feels divine, cosmic, joyful. Really we have not yet discovered in English the words to describe it. It is ineffable. And so we pursue that. It unites us, erases conflict, it restores love and harmony. It is so lovely. However, just celebrating the ego and its social success, in terms of performance and achievements or opinions or ideas of what is this and what is that somehow is like putting up a barrier, a defense from this occurrence.

We communicate on so many levels, of this I am more than certain, beyond sight and sound and label and idea. For me concentrating so much energy so far away from this very real and primary foundation and then trying to convince people that "real clowning" requires some specific approach to displaying "traditional" skills or attitudes is not totally productive, particularly if in that mission we ignore the personal and the inter-personal journey.

We are living in an epoch of genius. There is an exponential expression of creative consciousness in the world. Personally, I find great value in observing how people reason and experience, how impulse and reflex are expressed and blocked. In general I find that people are living in a space between, trapped between the irreconcilable reality of everyday life and their fundamental intuition. In this space, the clown lives and breathes for me. Getting to it, learning how to return and express and play from this space, without fear, to be the translucent being, in my opinion, is the master key.”

Jef Johnson (2015)