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Scholarship through Performance - Part Two

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When I started to think about a play, I never imagined how hard it would be. To write/perform a play to bring my clown--a new entity--into existence, is a lot of work. I have a theater director working with me and he tells me to think from my body. We talk so much about bodies but we are so often consumed by our brains and mind.

My Brazilian teacher, Luis Louis, tells me repeatedly: "Cláudio, you think too much! Do something first, then you can think." Oh, this process is literally painful. I asked my teacher to be patient with me as I will struggle through this process of learning.

I am learning with my teacher that I have to feel what is within me gaining form and shape, life and spirit! I have my clown living within me, but I must give birth to it! In order to do that I have to play with the movements of the body, with images, and with objects, clothes, hats, etc. And my teacher asks me many questions: How does this clown act alive on stage? Does he speak, and if so, in what language? Does he have repetitive body movements? Does your clown have large or small gestures? What is the heart of the clown composed of and what makes the clown alive? My teacher said:

You bringing your clown to life is like your clown throwing a bucket of water into a world on

fire, believing that you will be successful. Everybody knows that this is impossible, even ridiculous, but your clown does not know that. He wholeheartedly believes he can do it and will do it, no matter what! That is his gift to the world.

The portion below shows my thinking process in engaging different forms of knowing, doing, teaching, and performing. This is how the play started to get a form and shape.

Main Theme

A clown called Pachamama discovers that the Gaia, the earth, is hurting, and goes around the world feeling its pain and struggling with climate disasters. He then discovers that he is Gaia and a part of it.

The show is made of several skits that compose a story and a trajectory (still undefined). Everything is yet to be fully developed and needs to go through the test of practice. In each scene I want the clown moving with death and life, disaster and possibilities, sadness and joy, responding to everything with its usual clumsiness, stupidity, awkwardness, sincerity, naiveté, joy, beauty, etc. With this show, I want to help people find courage to go deep into climate disasters and find agency, hope, and faith in the midst of it all, rather than running away from it. In the end I will honor Prof. James Cone and Union Seminary, who shaped me in so many ways.

Major Influences

My father, Charles Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, Emmet Kelly, and Slava's Snow Show

A Metaphor

Emmet Kelly carrying a bucket of water in a circus on fire.

"Seventy-two years ago today, in Hartford, Connecticut, someone photographed a clown carrying a bucket of water toward a fire. It's a surreal image, haunting in the old black-and-white way. The clown is stepping through an arid landscape littered with what appear to be wooden crates, a lone railroad car, and the suggestion of bleachers. As clowns go, he's the sad tramp kind, a pained grimace on his face. In front of him, to the left, someone is exiting the frame—a portion of a leg is visible—and the clown follows, gripping his bucket, exuding dread. He's heading toward something unseen and tragic, something almost ghostly." - William Browning



This show is precisely this: the show is about a clown carrying a bucket of water to help the earth that is already on fire.

Place

This is a theater play to be performed at Union Theological Seminary in NYC. The chapel has no fixed seating so I hope to have people sitting on two sides of the chapel (or in a U shape) with the play happening in the middle. The space has some lightning that I can use. Here is a picture of the space.

How is this all going to be and happen? I have no idea. One thing, and one thing only, I know: this is much bigger than me. It scares me so much! I hope that with practice anxiety will turn into a certain trust and that as my clown starts to move, I will feel more confident.

I will let you know how it goes.

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