The Use Of Circus Elements To Illuminate The Text Within Sophocles' *Antigone*.

Sean Timothy Sewell

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Drama

The University of Huddersfield

January 2018

Abstract

This thesis is presented in conjunction with my production of *Antigone* performed at the University of Huddersfield on the 15th and 16th of June 2017. The production aimed to examine the use of circus elements to illuminate the text within Sophocles' *Antigone*. This was done by training one second year student and six first year students in various circus techniques which were then applied to the ancient Greek drama of *Antigone*.

Sophocles' *Antigone* is an ancient Greek tragedy, set in Thebes, which pits a tyrannical ruler, Creon, and his own niece, Antigone, against one another. Creon threatens death to anyone caught burying Antigone's brother, Polynices. Antigone breaks this law to adhere to the divine laws of the gods and pay respect to her brother. Antigone is caught, Creon convicts her of her crime, which he later pays a heavy price for; the loss of his niece, son and wife.

Using some key aspects from Peta Tait and Katie Lavers' working definition of circus: liveness, risk, extreme physical action, music, lighting, acrobatics, and using the audience's expectations to surprise and excite them (Tait & Lavers, 2016, p.6), the thesis demonstrates where the synergy of circus and *Antigone* was researched to examine where these aspects could illuminate the text.

Observations of the characters Antigone, Creon and The Chorus, and how these observations affected the character development are also included. The findings during the rehearsal process and an analysis of some aspects of the performance are also included in the thesis, examining where the use of circus elements has been effective, particularly, the use of physical acts and clowning.

__Acknowledgements__

I would like to thank my troupe: Jacqui Columbine, Leah Fisher, Kane Gapik, Luke Hickling, Luke Lortie, Katelyn Mackenzie-Pilot and Adam Sherrard for volunteering their time towards the research and production. Your individual skills, input and thoughts were invaluable towards the final performances and the research.

I would also like to thank Dave Calvert for his constant support and thought-provoking questions, which have helped throughout the research process and deepened my understanding of circus.

Contents

Word Count: 14,150.

__Introduction__

The first circus ring was opened in 1756 by Philip Astley (Peacock, 2009, p.41). The circus, as created by Astley, was predominantly a performance of equestrian skills filled in with fairground acts such as rope walking, juggling and clowning to keep the audience entertained during the change-over of acts (Tait & Lavers, 2016). Contemporary circus has begun to shift out of the big top tent and even omit some of its main qualities as described in Peta Tait and Katie Lavers in the *Routledge Circus Studies Reader:* 'Even when contemporary circus aesthetics renounce traditional circus aesthetics including its effortless grace, qualities remain that are unmistakably circus. *The form may change but circus is here to stay*' (Tait & Lavers, 2016, p.10; emphasis in original). If circus is constantly changing, evolving and adapting to meet the needs and hold the attention of audiences, then perhaps there is a place for circus in theatre, besides the use of the stage and auditorium. Some of these qualities include the ability to surprise and excite the audience through the perceived or actual risk of the performer and exceeding the social norms of the public viewing audience. If it is possible to surprise and excite the audience during a production to which they may already know the narrative, then it could add more to the production on an emotional level. Tait and Lavers suggest: "Some relatively simple circus acts gain emotional potency through the expressive power of the body, and additionally with the combination of music, lighting, spatial context and even the use of scripted text" (Tait and Lavers, 2016, p.5). Tait and Lavers offer a working definition, which aims to clarify distinguishing features of circus and recognise that it is a changing art form as opposed to offering a history of circus. The qualities within the definition and how they are relevant (or not) to my research is also assessed. These qualities include liveness, risk, extreme physical action by bodies, surprising and exciting the audience, acrobatics, artistry, lighting and sound effects.

Louise Peacock notes that "[w]hilst most traditional Circuses still tour in the Big Top tradition, some are also beginning to perform in more conventional theatre venues" (2009, p.47). My research began with the question that if the circus had begun to leave its traditional style of Big Top performance and make its way into the theatre, then is there anything preventing its style, or, elements from being introduced into a production in such a manner that they would begin to open new and exciting perspectives on traditional dramatic stories conventionally seen at the theatre? I decided it would be most beneficial to test this idea with a piece of dramatic text and after some thought I chose to use *Antigone*. I wanted to use a piece of text I was already familiar with and one that had no direct links with the circus. For example, a large majority of Shakespearean plays contain a fool which could be tied into clowning giving an 'easy' way in. Sophocles' *Antigone* is a well-known piece of dramatic text and the fact that it's a Greek tragedy presents a simple enough plot for the audience to follow.

There have been multiple interesting and challenging routes to explore how circus elements can be used to illuminate the text. The Chorus was of interest to me as it has such a diverse range of uses in Greek theatre. In *Antigone* they are elders of Thebes who serve Creon and provide responses to events of the play in addition to enlightening the audience of recent events and offering prayers to the God, Dionysus, through choral odes, which in the time these were originally presented, were through song and dance (Easterling, 1997, p.163). These odes became a focal point of exploration for the inclusion of circus elements as circus is traditionally an episodic performance style and so the choral odes seemed like a natural area where the episodic nature of the performances could fit in with the linear narrative of *Antigone*. Moreover, the detailed explanation of what has happened in Thebes provides a solid stimulus for the troupe to work from. The stories within the odes allow for the choreography of a piece of movement that illuminates the text, as opposed to movement just for the sake of movement. The Guard and The Messenger also immediately sprang to mind because of the comic relief

they bring to the play. The Guard was an interesting point of exploration as he has a quick and playful wit, coupled with an uncontrollable mouth in front of an evidently unforgiving king. The Messenger has horrible news to deliver to the queen, yet the descriptive and dramatic language used by The Messenger for the delivery of such news can also create a comic melodramatic story told by The Messenger. A performance of this story was played with, giving rise to a juxtaposition of feeling to the anticipated depressing tone of the scene, allowing for play with the audience between them and The Messenger. Patrick Mahony suggests that Creon goes through a devolution as king (2009). I have noted the process of this devolution in three stages, one of these stages has been through the exploration of the addition of clowning; experimenting with how this can affect his portrayed maturity and the intelligence of his decisions, such as ordering Antigone to be buried alive.

This writing is composed of the research which has been incorporated into my creation of *Antigone* and its links to circus. It begins with the reading most relevant to my research in a literature review. It then explores the major characters in *Antigone* and the key directorial decisions within the play and the reasoning behind such. The final sections include the process of creating Creon the Clown and the acrobatic opening scene, followed by analysis of the standout points in the final performance, including their effectiveness and limitations. The writing concludes with final thoughts and ways in which the circus style techniques truly elevated the text and where else the circus tropes could have been more present within the play.

Literature review

Below are the works I have read towards my research which have been the most useful. It includes my reading surrounding circus, *Antigone*, Greek Tragedy theatrical and tragedy's theatrical links to circus.

Reading towards circus techniques.

The Routledge Circus Studies Reader (2016) is a collection of essays around the circus subject area, edited by Katie Lavers and Peta Tait. It has become an integral part of my research including a working definition of circus:

> Circus is an art form which explores the aesthetic of extreme physical action by bodies (animal, human and post-human) in defiance of cultural identity categories including species, and usually performing live with apparatus in big to small enterprises, often with costuming, music or a sound score, lighting, and technological effects including filmed footage. Audiences have an expectation that circus offers extended muscular action and physical expertise with dynamism that exceeds social norms and is framed in ways that will surprise and excite, and circus is particularly focused on direct engagement with audiences. The skills needed to make circus are a unique blend of acrobatic and artistic and, in its immediacy, its liveness, the circus performer places herself/himself at risk, whether perceived or actual
>
> (Tait and Lavers, 2016, p.6).

This definition is very rich and in some parts unnecessary, or rather, of less importance to my research, for example – I am unable to work with post-human and animal bodies. Further to this, I am subject to a limited budget and so cannot rely on high end stage set, tech, or costume design to create a full circus aesthetic in the show. This is not to say no sound or lighting effects have been used in the show, where suitable the show does make use of these devices during key moments. The latter half of the definition is of high importance to me. It alludes to the expectations of an audience in a circus show which allows for a solid starting point in directing the show through a circus-style lens. I have trained in psycho-physical theatre, providing the experience in precision and focus that I feel provided foundational value in working to achieve the immediacy and liveness of physical expertise that exceeds the social norms that Tait and

Lavers are referring to; helping to create an illusion of risk to a level which will surprise and excite the audience.

Tait has contributed an essay highlighting the importance of risk and perceived risk within a circus act entitled *Risk, danger, and other paradoxes in circus and Circus Oz Parody*: "Contrary to public perception of daring and the way in which the circus promotes itself, circus artists are necessarily focussed on mastery and judgement of safe execution of action" (2016, p.528). Tait later goes on to discuss the actual physical risk of circus performers and the public perception of risk, explaining how the possibility of failure provides the illusion of risk and therefore creates the tense and exciting atmosphere of the circus, offering relief when the performers are successful in their 'risky' action. This tense and exciting environment is one I have explored for my production of *Antigone*. The audience is quickly made aware of the consequences of going against Creon's law and Antigone's intention to defy him, by adding a very real performative risk to the actor using circus style techniques it opens the possibility of intensifying the perceived risk of Antigone's actions in her defiance of Creon's law to the audience.

Antigone has three main themes running through the play; Family versus State, Divine Law versus Human Law, Male versus Female. These themes make appearances consistently throughout the narrative, dialogue and choral odes within the text. Creon asserts: "Worse still, a man who sets a friend or relative above his country doesn't deserve the name of citizen" (Sophocles, 2001, p.34) and then later must deal with his own niece breaking his laws, giving rise to Family versus State. The plot is centred around Antigone breaking Creon's man-made law, to uphold the divine right of passage for the dead, presenting the theme of Divine Law versus Human Law. Finally, Antigone is a woman, in a patriarchal society battling a male leader. There are also references from Creon of the desire to be the man: "if she gets away with

this, she is the man - not I" (Sophocles, 2001, p.47)[1], presenting the theme of Male versus Female. By introducing circus elements drawn from the research, I have experimented with how it has been possible to use different circus elements to help illuminate these themes. *The Routledge Circus Studies Reader* offers a range of works that will help to explore this. For example, Magali Sizorn has written an essay *Female Circus Performers and Art.* Sizorn's essay is, as she describes: "Centred on the transformations of represented identity (both for women and artists)" (Sizorn, 2016, p.500) which has played a part in my casting of female performers within the troupe. Sizorn explains contemporary circus has begun to challenge the "fragile and light" appearance of the women within circus acts, as well as identifying several artistic steps that have been taken which can be associated with the process of gender equality such as no longer artificially hiding the muscles of women; through their clothes, or suggesting lightness and ease in their physical movements (Sizorn, 2016, p.500). Antigone is not a fragile or light woman herself and yet her sister Ismene even refers to themselves as "helpless women" (Sophocles, 2001, p.29). This immediate difference in character presents me with the opportunity to use gender equality (or inequality) to my advantage to further demonstrate the contrast of characteristics between Ismene and Antigone's character. For example, in all of Antigone's movements, she is interrupted during her sequences conveying the struggle for women in the patriarchal society when they rebel. Ismene's movements remain uninterrupted as she conforms to the social order of ancient Thebes.

Serious Play (2009) by Peacock offers solid definitions of the various clowning styles, enabling me to analyse clown types and styles of performance effectively, which was useful to me when adapting the characters of *Antigone* to suit the performance I wish to create. For example, in my production, I chose to use three different actors to represent three different stages of Creon;

---

[1] When using the term "the man," Creon is referring to the one who holds the power, the one in control. As this was written during a Patriarchal time, "the man" would always be the one in control and with power.

Creon the King, Creon the Clown and Creon the Condemned, these roles of Creon will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on *Antigone*. The information from Peacock on the types of clown have been very useful in helping to determine the type of Creon's clown. Peacock gives accounts of personal experience from clown training, she also offers descriptive examples of entrées — quick clown acts in between each circus act relevant to her analysis throughout the book with regards to the techniques and styles of clowning. For example, Peacock discusses the development of the circus clown and presents an account of 'The Spaghetti Entrée' (Peacock, 2009, p.46) whereby Henri — the incompetent clown waiter — makes absolute chaos of an unsuspecting customer's dining experience. Not only have these examples demonstrated small, subtle techniques, such as the flop, complicité and the creation of chaos through ineptitude of the easiest of tasks, these could all be used in *Antigone* to show elements of circus without overpowering the text. They have also been useful by providing an insight to the fluidity and precision that the acts created with my troupe required.

The Moving Body (2002) by Jacques Lecoq has provided excellent information on clowning and methods for training my troupe in clowning, particularly the vulnerability we find in ourselves in order to find our clown. In addition to this I have also been reading *Jacques Lecoq and the British Theatre* (2002) by Franc Chamberlain and Ralph Yarrow; this has provided a collection of essays on Lecoq and his impact on conceptions of theatre today. *Jacques Lecoq* (2003) by Simon Murray also provides some information on Lecoq's teaching methods in actor training as well as offering an analysis on them.

Semiotics at the Circus (2010) by Paul Bouissac discusses the topology of the big top tent in chapter 1, but more importantly for my research; how the performance space available is used to its maximum potential in regards to its semiotic value. Chapter 2 discusses how circus can be understood as signs and notes how information on 'objects' are chosen: "some of these features are deliberate choices by the artist, some belong to the cultural code of circus and to

other cultural institutions such as sport or music" (Bouissac, 2010, p.23). Sport and music is relevant for Bouissac's example in this instance, whereas I am to consider the "other cultural institutions" for my practice as research, which are Ancient Athens, and both original and contemporary performances of *Antigone*.

Another interesting book by Bouissac, *Circus as multimedia discourse* (2012), offers information and analysis on typical circus acts and the meanings they can create for their audiences. Some of the book contains information on circus animals and their uses, which is interesting from a historical development of circus stance, however it is not so useful towards my research. Bouissac does provide a useful definition of what a circus act is, stating: "A circus act is a set of actions, that is, a succession of implemented plans which are ordered according to an overall rhetorical structure" (Bouissac, 2012, p.92). This has been useful in creating the circus acts as it helps the understanding of the importance of maintaining an overall structure during the creation of the movement pieces.

Reading toward *Antigone*

To further grasp an understanding of the cultural institutions of Greek Tragedy I have been reading from *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy,* edited by Pat Easterling which offers a range of essays from multiple scholars. Easterling describes the book to have three main objectives:

> To study the plays in relation to society that created and developed tragic theatre, to make practical use of strategies of interpretation that have yielded interesting results in recent years, and to take note of changing patterns of reception from antiquity to present
> (Easterling, 1997, p.xv).

Through understanding the society which developed tragic theatre and how contemporary performances are received, I have been able to focus on certain aspects of the play which are more relevant to contemporary audiences. For example, the choral odes to The Gods above are

not so necessary in a production in a 21st century theatre as they were for a communion of people at the festival of Dionysus.

The Clash of Irrationalities in Sophocles' Antigone (2009) by Patrick Mahony documents a linguistic analysis of Creon and his mental decline throughout the play. It provided an interesting starting point for the development of the three Creons I have in the production.

Antigone's Remainders: Choral Ruminations and Political Judgment (2016) by Larissa Atkinson reads *Antigone* from the perspective of The Chorus and argues that the evolving position of The Chorus is uniquely apolitical. This has been useful in the development of my production as I have been restricted to a limited cast and so only one member of chorus has been present on stage at any time. This reading has provided insight in to how one member of The Chorus may behave in each instance as they have no political stance during the narrative they are able to simply act as part of the plot rather than trying to sway the audience to side with either Creon or Antigone.

Reading toward directing techniques and practice as research

The Director and the Stage. From Naturalism to Grotowski (1982) by Edward Braun offers "an attempt to describe in some detail the key events that mark the emergence of the modern stage director in Europe, setting them in their context and examining the theories that they exemplify" (Braun, 1982, p.7). In this book, Braun evaluates a 10-year period of Meyerhold's life. My interest in this lay in the development of stylisation, bio-mechanics and pre-acting, adapting texts to serve the cause of the revolution and how Meyerhold handled being confined to an ill-equipped conventional auditorium.

It is also worth noting the information on Grotowski and his opinions on the actor's body:

> Grotowski sees the actor's body as an instrument that must be capable of more than the spectator's. The body must be able to achieve those physical extremes that usually only occur in conditions of emotional excess or trance.
>
> (Braun, 1982, p.194).

As one of the aspects I had been investigating was the "aesthetic potential of extreme physical action by bodies" (Tait and Lavers, 2016, p.6) to add to the circus aesthetic within *Antigone*, I had intended to explore Grotowski's methodology in actor training so that I may find ways of training my troupe toward the physical extremes described for its aesthetic benefits. Finding these extremes and surpassing the capability of the spectators would have been one successful way of the troupe to meet the audience expectation of the performers in circus discussed in Tait and Lavers' definition of circus. Unfortunately, Grotowski has not set a defined methodology for training his actors toward high physical qualities (Braun, 1982) and so I could not rely on these methods as the forefront of training for the troupe. The 'actor training' section in Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre* (2002, p.133-205) offers several different exercises, however, I did not feel they were well suited to the troupe during the early stages of the training; a large portion of the documented training was surrounding vocal warm ups and the physical training which had been documented would be designed to be carried out slowly or require personal motive for every movement. (Grotowski, 2002). Additionally, the training described between the years of 1959 and 1962 demonstrated a typical day of training (Grotowski, p.133, 2002) as opposed to developing the actors' bodies towards the physical extremities I had been interested in.

Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics – Actor training in revolutionary Russia (1996) by Alma Law and Mel Gordon contains a thorough introduction to Meyerhold, biomechanics and Eisenstein, who came to call his work expressive movement. It also contains documents written by several people who have either had workshops with Meyerhold himself, or, in one case a critic denouncing the work of Meyerhold. Most importantly for me, it contains exercises, some

of which have been used in rehearsal process as a starting point for the physical precision and acrobatics.

Play Acting (2005) by Luke Dixon, and *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre* (2010) by Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett have been useful towards the shaping and development of the audition and rehearsal/training process. *Play Acting* gives detailed descriptions of thirty-two different theatre workshop activities, followed by how they are useful in creating performance and which skills they help develop in the performer, such as imagination and awareness of the body. Imagination is a necessity to get the troupe to begin to play, while an awareness of their bodies helps assist them in safely and confidently performing physically demanding tasks. *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre* gives an insight into the creative process of *Frantic Assembly* as well as several workshop activities with detailed description and illustrations to help develop the physical action, precision and physical communication between the actors. A simple example would be the "push hands" exercise (2012, pp.105-106). In pairs, one places one hand on top of the other, the person underneath raises their hand gently to create a pressure between the partners' hands. The person on top is in control and guides the person underneath's movements. It is explicitly said "It is important to stress that this exercise involves two people working together in an attempt to build a physical understanding" (Graham and Hogget, 2009, p.105). It was this physical understanding that would be pertinent to the troupe having the ability to successfully carry out physically demanding and risky tasks when relying on one another which is why I used it as an audition workshop exercise.

Tips and Ideas for Directors (2002) by Jon Jory is full of one-page insights which have proved incredibly useful to me as a novice director. These insights have not only helped me avoid falling into some traps — such as predominantly working with the more talented actors, whilst avoiding the parts which need help — but have also generally helped me to shape my methods

of directing in terms of preparation and how to address a lack of discipline in the students (this was not a reoccurring problem, but as the majority of my troupe were first year students they occasionally began to lose focus, or arrive late; little things which are not so common in the more experienced performer). In addition to this, *Theatre Games* (2010) by Clive Baker has provided me with simple warm up games which have been good for introducing the new troupe to one another.

Jacques Copeau (2006) by Mark Evans includes examples of exercises as well as the areas Copeau explored in his search for a new version of French popular theatre. Evans claims Copeau felt:

> instinctively that some element of what he was looking for was present in the great Ancient Greek dramas, in medieval mystery plays in commedia dell'arte; as well as in music, in the work of family circus acts such as the Fratellini Brothers, and even in the cinema antics of Charlie Chaplin, all of which he understood as in some profound sense linked
>
> (Evans, 2006, p.77).

As Copeau pioneered work on actor training, physical theatre and ensemble acting, it has been useful to read the series of warm ups useful for training in acrobatics, imagination and improvisation.

To help gain an understanding of Practice-as-research, I have read *Practice-as-research and the Problem of Knowledge* (2006) by Robin Nelson, explaining the importance of practice-as-research in disseminating hard to communicate tacit knowledge; using examples from dance, physical theatre and riding a bike. Ben Spatz (2015) has written *What a Body Can Do.* Spatz surmises that the argument of the book is "Technique is knowledge that structures practice" (Spatz, 2015, p.1). Spatz argues that "Not just performance but every moment of practice exceeds our ability to 'capture' or articulate it in words, images or digital information" (Spatz, 2015, p.239). Murray's *Jacques Lecoq* (2003) also includes useful information on the difference between reading information from a book and practically experiencing it. He

explains in his chapter on practical exercises that: "In certain crucial ways this was the most challenging and difficult chapter to write, for it posed a number of awkward questions" (Murray, 2003, p.127). He then goes on to give examples of which questions he struggled with, these were predominantly centralised around the fact that it is difficult to capture the richness of practical experiences, such as those of the teachings of Lecoq in the text, thus supporting my decision to explore the effectiveness of circus techniques within *Antigone* not only theoretically, but also practically so that I may truly experience the possibilities of marrying the text to circus. To do this, I have provided my troupe with a set of physical skills I have been able to safely and confidently teach, some of which have been transferable and could be perceived as risky to the audience to create circus style performances.

<u>*Antigone*</u>

The following section outlines the plot of *Antigone*, the central characters of the play and where they may lend themselves to circus, as a result of my interpretation.

<u>Plot</u>

Antigone, set in Thebes, is the third story in the Oedipus trilogy, but was the first to be written around approximately 442BC (Easterling, 1997, p.352). The play begins after a battle where Polynices and Eteocles, Antigone's brothers, have killed each other in battle fighting for the throne after their father, Oedipus the king, had blinded himself upon discovery of his accidental incestual behaviour. Oedipus later dies during the story *Oedipus at Colonus*, the second story in the trilogy. As the new, self-proclaimed king, Creon decrees that only one of the two brothers, Eteocles, shall receive proper burial. The traitor Polynices who led the army of Argos against Thebes, is left to rot unburied. Any man who goes against this decree is punishable by death. Antigone seeks the help of her sister Ismene to give Polynices proper burial rights but is refused so Antigone proceeds to carry out the ritual on Polynices herself. She is caught and sentenced to die alone in a filled in cave where she eventually kills herself. Creon is warned by Tiresias of the consequences of his actions but, in the time it takes Creon to accept the dangers of his decree, it is too late. Haemon, Creon's son and Antigone's fiancé, kills himself upon finding Antigone's corpse, which leads Eurydice, Creon's wife, to kill herself after hearing the news. In this section of the thesis, the characters: Creon, Antigone and The Chorus are examined in addition to how the use of circus style techniques could lend themselves to the personalities of these characters.

On Creon

Creon is the self-proclaimed king of Thebes and is central to the plot of the play. It is his decree that causes upset to Antigone and the gods, which later leads to the tragic set of events. Mahony states that "in the character of the Theban king, Sophocles provides us with the fascinating evolution — or, better yet, the devolution — of a political figure" (Mahony, 2009, p.470). Mahony presents the devolution of Creon using linguistic analysis to demonstrate Creon's change. Creon, according to Mahony, declines from a king fixated on the hierarchy of power who strives to show himself as a mountain of strength, to a man hiding his internal anxiety and paranoid feelings toward women, and finally, to his mental collapse (Mahony, 2009, p.470). Creon's first moments are as a powerful and patriotic leader, defiant of divine law, not be reckoned with, referred to as Creon the king. He is then confronted by the knowledge that he has been disobeyed by his own family — Antigone. Not only is she a woman but also his niece and future daughter-in-law; this undermines his power and begins to destabilise his authority and self. This Creon was portrayed in my production by a separate actor to Creon the king and I have given this Creon the name Creon the Clown — his decisions are foolish, childish even and his own actions are the ones which defeat him, such is the very nature of some clowns. Maggi Phillips proposes that "Clowns disrupt normalcy in small eddies of activity which often wreak paths of destruction within a tightly ordered range of social formations" (Phillips, 2016, p.107). The norm would be to bury Polynices, however the refusal to do so leads to Creon creating his own path of destruction, this decree was set by Creon during his state as the powerful king but it is the clown who refuses to listen to reason or shift his stance in the face of The Chorus and even his own son, as demonstrated by Haemon's question: "Won't you listen to a thing I'm saying?" (Sophocles, 2001, p.62). Creon the condemned is the final and third Creon I had depicted in my production of *Antigone*, played by a different actor than the previous two as a simple means of confirmation to the audience that the state of this Creon is

different from the previous two they have seen. Creon the condemned is present in the moments in the play after Creon has made his decision and left Antigone to die alone in a cave.

During Creon's first moments on stage he boasts: "Now that they are dead, I hold all the power since I am their closest relative" (Sophocles, 2001, p.34), instantly asserting this power to punish the disloyalty of the traitor Polynices, decreeing that "[h]is corpse will be left unburied, to be torn apart and eaten by dogs and birds" (Sophocles, 2001, p.35). This decree is not only the decree that ultimately leads to Creon's tragic destiny but would also cause a very real and unwanted earthly pollution. This pollution has been represented by use of a live body centre stage allowing for the actor playing this role to arise during any moments he is needed for the circus entrees without the need to enter and exit the performance area constantly.

Creon states: "Worse still, a man who sets a friend or relative above his country doesn't deserve the name of citizen" (Sophocles, 2001, p.34), yet, he is not happy to see his niece as a criminal. Creon asks The Guard who captured her "[a]re you sure you've got it right?" (Sophocles, 2001, p.44) then later searches for an excuse for Antigone: "Now then Antigone, tell me, didn't you know that I had issued a decree forbidding this?" (Sophocles, 2001, p.45). Not only does Creon's mountain of strength begin to crack, manifested by his moments of doubt — perhaps The Guard had the wrong person, perhaps his niece had not heard the decree — but this doubt and disobedience of his law has come from a woman who is part of his family. Mahony emphasizes that Creon sees women as dangerous, stating "[t]he compound danger for Creon is that women, if not dominated, can become castrators, and even become internal and external destructive objects" (Mahony, 2009, p.474). In other words — Mahony explains that Creon's fear of women is a result of fear of emasculation from uncontrolled women and loss of power. Mahony mentions a lack of appreciation for "Creon's self-contradiction" (Mahony, 2009, p.472) in most readings of *Antigone.* This self-contradiction manifests itself in several ways. For example, at one point, Creon speaks of how "[i]t's the stubborn spirit that's more prone to

fall than others; it's the toughest iron that snaps and shatters" (Sophocles, 2001, p.47), he then later demonstrates his own stubborn spirit when he refuses to accept the advice from his own people or his son: "So, am I, leader of the city, in my mature years, in full possession of all my powers, to be taught by an immature boy like you?" (Sophocles, 2001, p.59). Self-contradiction is a moment where a person fails to support their own argument or way of living. By Creon stating that a stubborn spirit is more prone to shatter, it leaves the audience expecting that Creon would know when it is time not to be stubborn. Instead, he fails to do this when necessary and has in his own way failed himself. When speaking about the clown and his flop, Lecoq states that "he cannot flop with just anything, he has to mess up something he knows how to do, that is to say, an exploit" (Lecoq,2002, p.156). This opens the window for the clown to make an entrance as it precedes the start of Creon's self-contradiction, which is to say he has begun to fail himself as the powerful leader he claims to be at the start: "I hold all the power since I am their closest relative" (Sophocles, 2001, p.34).

The first time in the story Creon begins to listen to anyone is when Tiresias warns Creon that he is "once again on the razor's edge" (Sophocles, 2001, p.72). These words should not however fall onto the ears of the clown we have created from Creon so for Creon to understand the severity of Tiresias' warnings the state of Creon the Clown needs to cease. As explained by Peacock, John Wright offers different levels of clowning and explains a clown's bafflement as a state. This is also supported by contemporary clown Angela De Castro: "For De Castro, clowning is a state rather than a character, which coincides with Wright's view" (Peacock, 2009, p.38). Tiresias condemns Creon to an unfortunate fate because of his actions, insulting behaviour and refusal to listen to his wise words. Once Tiresias has left, Creon seeks the help of his elders and follows their instructions to free Antigone and bury Polynices. He finds Antigone dead in the cave then watches as his son takes his own life. His wife, Eurydice, then kills herself upon hearing the awful news. Mahony suggests that it is at this point where Creon

has his mental collapse, exemplified by Creon turning his anger on himself and requesting that he be killed (Mahony, 2009, p.476).

Antigone

Antigone is a head-strong and family-devoted woman stuck in a patriarchal society, challenged by a misogynistic leader[2]. A leader who has dealt her brother, Polynices, and the gods a huge dishonour though denial of burial rights. It is clear, through her first moments on stage with Ismene, her sister, that Antigone's decision to bury Polynices will not change even if she is confronted with death. Antigone acknowledges at the early stages of her discussion with Ismene: "He doesn't take this lightly: anyone defying the proclamation is to be stoned to death" (Sophocles, 2001, p.28). Antigone has no problems in openly defying Creon, when asked to keep her plans a secret she responds "[n]o! go and tell everyone!" (Sophocles, 2001, p.31). Antigone's character does not go through change in the same way that The Chorus or Creon do. Antigone stays true to her decision to adhere to the divine laws over the earthly laws and rule of Creon, therefor, her character and the circus tropes surrounding her remain consistent. Antigone is tasked with dealing with all three stages of Creon and his ungodly rule. She remains defiant in his offerings of escape from her self-sealed fate, which begins to develop an interesting concept of risk as Antigone is aware of the dangers surrounding breaking the law of Creon. In doing so she is also challenging the socio-political expectations of the other characters and begins to blur the boundaries surrounding them. Antigone feels a moral obligation to her brother, consistently demonstrated in her arguments; she states that Creon "has no right to come between my brother and me!" (Sophocles, 2001, p.29). Creon offers a way out by asking if she had not heard of the decree, Ismene offers to at least join her in punishment, but Antigone is stubborn; she has chosen family and the divine law of the gods over that of Creon's decree. This will to bury her brother, even in the face of death, does not change throughout the play. Antigone's strong will and juxtaposing characteristics with Ismene

---

[2] Whilst there are arguments for the control and power of man to be the norm during the time Sophocles wrote *Antigone,* it is implausible to deny that a state of patriarchy could breed misogyny.

have been demonstrated through physical spectacle where her devotion to her family and the burial rights of Polynices are demonstrated through graceful movements during the circus acts. Tait explains "The sequencing of acts within circus and tricks within acts is structured to manipulate audience responses" (Tait, 2016, p.300). Through proper use of these tricks it becomes possible to assist the audience to see and empathise with the moral obligation Antigone feels to bury her brother. An attempt to guide the audience response is demonstrated in one sequence where Antigone is raised – indicating her moral high ground she takes over Creon, before falling off into the arms of Creon. Through the notion of fate, it is possible to use the fact that the audience know that regardless of how far Antigone gets in her mission and regardless of how much support she receives, she will be doomed to be brought back down and face her sentence. Antigone's defiance is conveyed through an increasingly climactic physical sequence, attempting to make the audience forget she is doomed to fail in the future whilst they are caught in the liveness of her lift. The sudden failure which unfolds in front of them aimed to leave them in a state of surprise, reminding them of Antigone's inevitable condemnation because of the risks she undertook by burying Polynices. (To view this sequence, see Video 1)

The Chorus

The Chorus of the play can provide functions for the audience benefit — for example they announce when someone is about to enter the stage, or hint toward what a character may be feeling: "Look, Ismene is coming through the gates weeping for her beloved sister and brothers. Her face is flushed and tears are pouring down her cheeks" (Sophocles, 2001, p.50). This would have been useful for the original audiences of the play as the actors wore masks during the first performances which took place in the amphitheatre, so explanations like this would have conveyed the emotions of characters on stage prior to any dialogue. A Tragic Chorus usually has a group of twelve or fifteen and can speak of itself as one or plural (Easterling, 1997, p.164). This variance in identity allows an array of responses during The Chorus' involvement of the

narrative of the play and can be representative of the attitude of the audience during the different events that take place in the plot. It also allows The Chorus to match the potential of circus "to provoke and challenge public perceptions of norms as well as just entertain" (Allain & Harvie, 2006, p.140). This could be attained through playing with the audience and reacting to the different events of the scenes without the central characters recognising the scene. In doing so, The Chorus invite the audience into its own world to view the action unfolding in their eyes, as well as the action occurring in front of the audience.

The difficulty of marrying the text of *Antigone* to a circus style of performance is that in *Antigone* there is a very linear story with only The Chorus to break up the action between the scenes with the main characters of the play. This means that the episodic nature of circus style performance will struggle to find itself easily fitting into the play. With this difficulty in mind, if we are to focus back onto The Chorus, in particular, their long sections of text (odes) which were originally included for several reasons. One reason, Easterling explains is to:

> participate in ritual actions which seem to invite the audience's endorsement, even though embedded in the fictive action of the play as when they make prayers to the gods for blessings on 'the city', particularly if 'the city' is, or can be identified with, Athens itself
>
> (Easterling, 1997, p.163).

or, sometimes it has the objective to inform the audience of events that have happened during or before the action in the play. For example, if we are to examine the first ode, we can see that it informs us that Argos invaded Thebes and lost the battle: "You made the man who came from Argos flee," (Sophocles, 2001, p.32). It also makes clear reference to and gives supportive prayer regarding the power of the gods, particularly Zeus in this example: "Zeus Brings him down with his lightning bolt" (Sophocles, 2001, p.33). In addition to the above-mentioned examples, the text also sheds light on the fact that this is the battle of seven[3] through mention

---

[3] The battle of Seven was there war between Argos and Thebes depicted in *Seven Against Thebes,* the third in the Oedipal tragedy by Aeschylus. The play won a prize in dramatic contest in 467BC (Easterling, 1997, p.352).

of the seven gates and death of each brother, Polynices and Eteocles (Sophocles, 2001, p.33). The Chorus provide several functions to the narrative of the play. Yet, the odes with the objective of inviting the audience to pray to the gods is not as relevant to 21st century audiences. Thus, The Chorus becomes more suited to informing the audience with background information or acting as the elders of Thebes and representing the passage of time. The choral odes were an interesting area to explore the circus aesthetic and how suited it was to illuminating the text. Because the choral odes had so many original uses, it provided different doorways into exploring how the circus techniques could be useful to each individual purpose of the various odes. For example, an ode which informs the audience of different events, such as the battle of seven would provide very different inspiration to an ode which praises the gods or comments on the happiness of man. A battle could be filled with risk, a loud musical score and acrobatics to create fight scenes, where-as praises to the gods could be presented in a graceful and beautiful movement piece to be representative of the divine.

Process

The following pages recount the more pertinent moments during the practice of synergising of the text to circus techniques. The two main events written about are the creation of Creon the Clown and the process used to teach the troupe physical techniques to create the acrobatic circus skills used and how they contributed to the opening scene.

Creating Creon the Clown.

During the early stages of the research I began to devise the concept of three stages of Creon, with each stage to be performed by a different member of the troupe - the second stage named: 'Creon the Clown.' Jacques Lecoq describes the clown: "The clown is the person who flops, who messes up his turn, and, in so doing, gives his audience a sense of superiority" (Lecoq, 2002, p.156). The concept of the audience feeling superior to the clown is largely what drove the idea behind creating a clown version of Creon. The decision to have a clown Creon during the mid-section of the plot was for several reasons. Firstly, I did not want Creon to only be portrayed as a clown as this would seriously diminish his authority within the play. If Creon's authority was lost in his clown, his early threats of severe punishment for anyone who betrays him, his laws and therefore the state, would run the risk of becoming empty or pathetic in the eyes of the audience viewing a clown and in turn, could reduce the perceived magnitude of Antigone's defiance and the ramifications of her decision to bury her brother. Creon could not be a clown in his final moments of the play as he loses his desire to live through an all too human recognition of his failures. In Joshua Delpech-Ramey's *Sublime Comedy: On the Inhuman Rights of Clowns* he explains "[i]n the clown, what is visible is something so inhumane that it lacks even the ability to be ashamed of its failures" (Delpech-Ramey, 2010, p.134). If the clown does not feel ashamed in the way Creon felt ashamed then it would not be plausible to envisage a clown asking for his life to be ended as seriously as Creon does at the

end of the story. This meant that Creon could not be performed as a clown during the beginning and end of the play leaving a mid-section of the play available to work with to create Creon the Clown.

Before deciding on who to play the clown I allowed for all the troupe to experience some clowning exercises. The first exercise was inspired by Lecoq, in *The Moving Body*, he explains:

> One day I suggested that the students should arrange themselves in a circle – recalling the circus ring – and make us laugh. One after the other, they tumbled, fooled around, tried out puns each one more fanciful than the one before, but in vain! The result was catastrophic. Our throats dried up, our stomachs tensed, it was becoming tragic. When they realised what a failure it was, they stopped improvising and went back to their seats feeling frustrated, confused and embarrassed. It was at that point, when they saw their weaknesses, that everyone burst out laughing
>
> (Lecoq, 2002, p.154).

I had my troupe attempt to do the same exercise and when they had failed at making us laugh, as Lecoq's students had, I asked them take it in turns to share an embarrassing story about themselves. Without fail, every story was met with laughter. By sharing an embarrassing story with one another the students were exposing a weakness of theirs to one another which allowed for the ridiculous side to shine through. This was to teach them Lecoq's idea "[w]e are all clowns, we all think we are beautiful, clever and strong, whereas we all have our weaknesses, our ridiculous side, which can make people laugh when we allow it to express itself" (Lecoq, 2002, p.154). Following this exercise, using Eli Simon's *The Art of Clowning* (2009), I trialled a few exercises to further help the troupe begin to find their clown. The first exercise we attempted was entitled "reinvention" (2009, pp.28-29) where the clown enters, presents an object to the audience and creates a new use for it. To add to the curiosity of their clowns I left several items in the performance space and watched as each clown took it in turns to experiment and play with each item. The reactions to the items brought up some interesting results, most notably was the reaction one student had to the mattress we had out to practice tumbles, falls, flips and rolls with, which all the others had simply hopped on to or not even reacted to its

presence and trampled over it to the items. Jacqui came to this small obstacle, placed just before the performance space, and decided she was unable to cross it. First, she was unable to comprehend the change in level and once that had been established and she could raise her foot on to the mattress, it was very clear her clown did not like soft, cushioned surface beneath her feet. The only way she could cross this obstacle was by forcing the assistance of an audience member (one of the other students). Once she had managed to cross the mattress she sent the audience member back to their seats as if nothing had happened. At the end of the clowning workshops and other physical workshops, I decided on Luke Lortie to be Creon the Clown due to his imaginative and playful mind as well as his consistent physical precision.

Peacock explains:

> the creation and the performance of a clown is a particularly personal process in which the student or performer is encouraged to reveal his or her personal insecurities that are offered to the audience members to give them a sense of being drawn into the performer's world
>
> (Peacock, 2009, p.34).

I didn't want my Creon the Clown, Luke, to create his own clown which was personal to him and his insecurities as this could run the risk of the clown drawing the audience into Luke's clown's chaotic world and not into the world of *Antigone*. Dave Peterson explains how 500 Clown's three clowns Bruce, Shank and Kevin attempt and fail to create a production of Macbeth in *Failure through the Flop and Playful Engagements with Authority in 500 Clown Macbeth:* "In all, very little of *Macbeth* is actually performed, as the show devolves into fights between the performers and interactions with the audience" (Peterson, 2016, p.153). Failure of performance is not my objective; the objective is to examine ways in which circus techniques could illuminate the text rather than draw something completely different with it. The challenge, then, presented itself by giving us the objective to create a clown which was personal and therefore derived from Creon as opposed to creating a clown which then tries to perform

as Creon. To do this, I had Luke create his portrayal of Creon; a paranoid, unforgiving and bitter individual who almost took enjoyment from intimidating Ismene. Following the creation of Creon, we began to create his clown. The first aspect of Creon we worked on was his physicality, particularly, the way in which he walked. Creon was a general of the army of Thebes before he became king, we used this knowledge as a starting point. Luke has had experience in the cadets and demonstrated how they were taught to march. (To view this march, see video 2). I noted the emphasis on movement of the legs and how they behaved during walking, stopping and turning, then asked Luke to attempt the walk without the use of his arms. Following this we played with a few different styles and postures with this cadet style march to come up with an over emphasised lower body march and near static upper body. (To view Creon the Clown's walk, see video 3). Peacock claims that for a performer to discover his or her clown, they must access and reveal all aspects of a clown's personality: fun-loving, childlike, amoral, irresponsible, mercurial, bizarre, destructive, chaotic and anarchic (Peacock, 2009, p.35). Not all of these aspects lend themselves overly well to Luke's creation of a paranoid, unforgiving and bitter individual. For example, it was difficult to find an aspect of Creon which was "fun-loving" as through most of the text he is generally feared and so it was not a trait of his personality originally considered. Instead of finding where the text could reveal a fun-loving Creon, we experimented where a seemingly fun-loving Creon could enhance the text. One area in which it was effective was Creon's first question to Haemon: "Son, did you hear about my decision about your bride? Are you angry with me? Or are we still friends?" (Sophocles, 2001, p.56). The emphasis "friends" and proximity of Creon and Haemon was one way in which I thought Creon seemed a little fun-loving and child-like which, in turn, demonstrated a slightly more humane nature that Creon has towards his son. I felt that by exposing this nature of Creon's attitude toward his son it made his refusal to listen to Haemon's reasoning more impactful during dialogue between Creon and his son. Creon does lend himself

to the chaotic, irresponsible and destructive nature of clowns. Tiresias exemplifies this when he comments on the results of Creon's decisions and their effect on the city: "It is your decree, Creon, that has brought sickness to the city" (Sophocles, 2001, p.73). This destructive nature made it seem as if Creon almost enjoyed sentencing Antigone to her early grave. (See Video 4)

Creon the Clown initially had the purpose of lightening up the mood and feelings of the audience through many gags and flops, however, during the moments we had Creon the Clown present on stage there are two important dialogues between himself, Antigone and Ismene, and himself and Haemon. Thus, it soon became clear that the use of multiple flops could not be the case as when we tried this, it was felt that he was distracting from the importance of the text. I adjusted the original idea from having several gags to only having one gag inspired by the choral ode before Haemons entrance. The final lines in this choral ode are:

> Bad seems good to the mind of him
> Whom the gods would destroy.
> He is happy for only a moment before disaster.
> Happiness is the shortest candle of all:
> Light for one minute, then darkness.
>
> (Sophocles, 2001, p.56)

These lines bear a likeness to the short-lived successes of clowns and the destruction which clowns can cause as described earlier by Phillips (2016, p.107). In this instance, Creon is creating his own path of destruction as he is refusing to listen to the sensible words of Antigone or Haemon. The sequence created occurs during Creon's conversation with Haemon, by using an ode which foretells of Creon's short lived happiness it results in the clowning piece mimicking this foretelling of unhappiness that Creon is about to bring onto himself. (To view this entree, see Video 5).

Acrobatics and physical sequences

I had originally planned to marry the acrobatic spectrum of circus style performance techniques to the choral odes within the dramatic text, however, this became an issue as some of the odes provided more of a stimulus than others. Furthermore, the similarity in odes in rhythm and style meant that the work created was becoming somewhat repetitive and therefore began to enter the realms of the mundane and not the live circus aesthetic I was aiming for; if an audience member views a lift, tumble or flip too many times in a short space of time, that technique loses all sense of its risk, wonder and excitement and the audience won't have any doubt of the ability of the performers skill. When viewing *Super Sunday* by The Race Horse Company at The Lawrence Batley Theatre on June 1st the troupe demonstrated that the same technique could be used in repetition and remain exciting to watch by instigating a challenge to the audience, each time pushing the risk of the stunt. This could be through adding more people to the see-saw or leaping onto it from a greater distance. Each time the troupe did so, they increased the magnitude of the perceived disaster if something went wrong and therefore increased the sense of risk amongst the audience. This technique of holding the audience's attention by using varying degrees of risk with one technique was not very well suited in trying to create movement pieces suited to the text as it would result in the plot of the story becoming stagnant and disjointed. As a result of these issues, I decided to also include sequences which were inspired through the narrative that happens off stage yet is recounted later in the dialogue, for example, The Guard catching Antigone in the act of burying the body is not initially seen by the audience, but it is spoken about in detail by The Guard. This opened a window to create a graceful sequence of Antigone burying the body resulting in her capture by The Guard who brought the message of Polynices' burial to Creon and his fellow guards. Not only does this sequence convey what is happening to the audience within the plot, it also further pushed the audience into sympathising with Antigone's need to bury her brother. The burial sequence was

very simple – Antigone cartwheeled over the body of Polynices before acting out part of the burial ritual. The graceful cartwheels were to demonstrate the sense of good and connection to the divine law of the gods Antigone felt because of her actions. This was contrasted with almost goofy guards sneaking towards her in time to *The Pink Panther* theme song by Henry Mancini to exemplify how oblivious they were to the severity of the capture which has just taken place.

Working with first and second year students who, except for one, have had no training in circus acrobatics, I first had to discover what they were capable of and where their unique skills lay. Jacqui, Katelyn and Leah all have previously had training in dance or gymnastics which were of enormous use to the creation of the physical sequences. Their previous experience in dance and/or gymnastics allowed for the creation of some very effective movement sequences in that each could tell their own story relating to the text and character relationships. I used their skills to choreograph a sequence between Antigone and Ismene, representative of their relationship to one another. The moral high ground Antigone takes from burying her brother and finally Antigone's capture was also demonstrated in this piece. This physical sequence doesn't quite fit into Tait and Lavers definition as it would be hard to qualify the action as "extreme physical action" (Tait and Lavers, 2016, p.6), however, I would argue that this sequence begins to meet the audience expectation of "extended muscular action and physical expertise with dynamism that exceeds social norms" (Tait and Lavers, 2016, p.6), which is also within Tait and Lavers definition. It is also pointed out that "Katie Lavers finds an inherent paradox involved in the process of defining circus because it seems to be an art form that actively resists containment through its elemental process of change" (Tait and Lavers, 2016, p.2). As there is a paradox in creating a definition derived from an art form so inherently involved in the process of change it stands to reason that to then create a singular, rehearsed and unchanging sequence to fit all aspects of that definition would be paradoxical. This meant that rather than making each sequence fit all aspects of the definition it was more efficacious to create sequences which only

involved one or two of the aspects of circus – reverting to a desire of quality over quantity in this instance.

Creating the opening sequence was a long and vigorously rehearsed process. I wanted it to contain and demonstrate as many aspects of circus it could; the liveness, the risk, the dynamic physical skill of the troupe, music and lights; all used to surprise and excite the audience. Additionally, the sequence needed to be relevant to the story about to unfold in front of the audience's eyes.

I started by training the troupe in some basic physical theatre techniques I had learnt throughout my time at the University of Huddersfield. These basic techniques, such as: assisted backflips, counter balances, lifts and rolls, would provide a starting point for the creation of the sequences. (To view Adam Sherrard and Luke Lortie practicing an assisted backflip, see Video 6). Once these techniques had been mastered, the troupe and I began work on the creation of the battle scene. The battle of seven is the battle which takes place prior to *Antigone* but there was enough information in the choral ode to create an exciting battle scene reminiscent of the words. The Chorus describes:

> Seven spearmen for seven gates,
> Matched equal to equal;
> Six won and gave their all-bronze weapons
> To Zeus the trophy-collector,
> While six fell defeated.
> But at the seventh gate the ill-fated brothers,
> Born of one father and one mother,
> Clashed their spears, and
> Both lost, sharing double death.
>
> (Sophocles, 2001, p33)

Meyerhold's system of biomechanics was influential in the creation of the opening sequence but not obviously prominent in the completed piece. When speaking of Meyerhold's études, Jonathon Pitches states "the basic skills developed here are precision, balance, coordination, efficiency, rhythm, expressiveness, responsiveness, discipline and playfulness" (Pitches, 2004,

p.126). These basic skills also provide a strong foundational starting point for circus acrobatics. Braun notes on the études that "many of them derived from traditional circus and *commedia dell'arte* stunts" (Braun, 1982, p.135) this circus influence was not to the taste of one critic, Ippolit Solokov who is said to have denounced "the exercises Meyerhold's students demonstrated as a mishmash of circus acrobatics, plastics movement play and pyramids from Sokol Gymnastics" (Law and Gordon, 1996, p.144). While Solokov's criticism will not provide a quintessential link between circus techniques and biomechanics it is still interesting to see that links have previously been made between circus and Meyerhold.

We did not have the time and in some cases the ability, to practice all the exercises available but one which piqued interest was the exercise "Stab with a Dagger" (1996, p.115-116) detailed in Law and Gordon's *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics. Actor Training in Revolutionary Russia.* The sequence carefully lays out precise instructions of a physical sequence where one of the actors pretends to stab the other with a dagger. "Stab with a Dagger" provided a starting point for the creation of the introduction sequence. I had each member of the troupe practice the "Stab with a Dagger" routine several times and then began adjusting and playing with it to observe what else may arise from these movements. Once the "Stab with a Dagger" was learned by each student, I had each pair create an acrobatic sequence between one another which was required to end with a stab with a dagger to the chest.

It was a coincidence that my cast was seven creating a battle across seven gates, however, having a small cast made it difficult to create a seemingly long and intense battle scene filled with the liveness and risk of extreme physical action seen in circus acts. The interaction of the "Stab with a Dagger" provided a way into creating a total of six exciting and lively interactions between the small cast. It opened the door to liveness as skirmishes would dart from one point on the stage to another as after one member had been stabbed and left dead on the stage it made way for a new set of interactions between another two members of the troupe. The "dead

bodies" scattered (in fact, carefully co-ordinated to very specific locations) on the stage diminished the available space for the performers to work around and gave an increased impression of risk. To add to the intensity and excitement of the action, music was added and the action was then re-styled to fit the rhythm of the music. By flashing the lights in time with the music and the diminished view resulting from the smoke machine it added to the intense circus aesthetic further, which complemented the demonstration of the extreme and harsh natures in a battle field. (The opening battle scene of the performance on the 15th of June 2017 can be viewed on Video 7)

Performance

This next section contains a critical analysis of the performance on both where circus style techniques were useful in illuminating the text and where it may have hindered the importance of the dialogue.

Creon

Creon the king transforms into Creon the Clown using a mimicking silhouette cast on a flat behind the king during his speech against the law-breakers (To view this transition, see Video 8). Then, upon the question "will my death satisfy you?" (Sophocles, 2001, p.47), the silhouette adopts a centrally-low stance with bent, over accentuated legs and replies before coming onto the stage and swiftly changes into the signifier of a purple waistcoat that the king is wearing.

After viewing the show many have said informally that the clown was their favourite part, however, this does not imply the clown was a necessary addition to the piece. The idea behind having Creon the Clown was to demonstrate the child-like naivety of Creon's decisions in ruling: Antigone warns of the gods, The Chorus suggest Polynices' burial could be the doing of the gods, Creon, who refuses to listen silences The Chorus and the audience are aware they are viewing a tragedy so are arriving with an expectation for the story not to end well and so are given the feeling of superiority. For Lecoq a feeling of superiority is one of the ways in which the clown moves us and makes us laugh, however this is only true for simple tasks which the audience know they would be able to accomplish. As Creon is talking to Antigone and Ismene it is interesting to witness the clown beginning to lose control of the bickering occurring between Antigone and Ismene (see Video 9.) In watching the performances, I felt more could have been done using clowning techniques to further demonstrate Creon's loss of control. Perhaps a flop, where Creon could have attempted to instigate a system where one may only talk if they are holding an inanimate object, but fail at his own system and keep talking out of

place to be hushed by Ismene or Antigone, who only pass each other the object. This could be effective as it would bear a likeness to Creon's own struggles he is having with his own law. Lecoq explains that "he [the clown] cannot flop with just anything, he has to mess up something he knows how to do, that is to say an exploit" (Lecoq, 2002, p.156). As a king in a patriarchal society, Creon should absolutely have control over a guilty prisoner and her sister but instead he is caught in the middle of their arguing, unable to talk.

Luke occasionally lost sight of his clown during the performance, which could be largely due to the lack of likeness Luke had toward Creon's clown. For example, during the clowning workshops, it was incredible to witness some of the clown logic the students adapted to and how quickly they were able to find their own inner clown and connect with the audience, but it was difficult for Luke to create a clown from Creon as creating a clown out of an ancient character inevitably loses its uniqueness to the clown actor. Lecoq identifies:

> This discovery of how personal weakness can be transformed into dramatic strength was key to my elaboration of a personal approach to clowning, involving a search for 'one's own clown', which became a fundamental principle of the training
> (Lecoq, 2002, p.154).

This could be a reason for Luke to occasionally lose sight of Creon the Clown. During the creation of Creon the Clown, there was no search for Luke's clown to perform Creon, as discussed earlier, but rather Creon's clown where Creon is performed by Luke. As Creon is not strictly personal to Luke, there lacks the sense of true exposed weakness which would lead to the dramatic strength Lecoq speaks of. For example, upon Ismene's entrance he becomes rather aggressive when he questions Ismene as to whether she shared in the burial of Polynices. (See Video 10). This shifts the audience out of the clown world Creon had begun to create. Clowns can act aggressively at times; however, Luke's aggression was purely focussed onto Ismene and there was no communication with the audience surrounding this and so this aggression seemed to be more like Luke's original interpretation of how the character should be performed

as opposed to an angry clown losing control. One way of combating this could have been to ask Luke to create a clown based on Mahony's devolution of Creon's mental state, revealing a scared Creon who was in fact threatened by the burial as opposed to simply furious at the blatant refusal of his rule.

A large issue we faced with the clown is that clowns, traditionally, do not speak. Simon states that "[a]rticulating what is happening often prevents clowns from fully experiencing the truth in the moment" (Simon, 2009, p.16), and so by having Creon the Clown articulate in his scenes it further diminished him from experiencing the truth Simon is referring to. With this in mind, it would not be plausible for Creon to have such a lengthy and rich debate on how a city should be governed with his son without speech. This is not an entirely new thing to do, there are occasions of clowns in conversation such as Groucho and Chico Marx, but this conversation is filled with gags and plays on polysemy designed to generate a comedic effect. Creon on the other hand does not have his dialogue laid out in such a way that the text naturally lends itself to creating clown like conversation. Instead, by having the clown engage in Creon's set conversation, which is often quite serious, he loses a connection with his audience in an attempt to stay true to the integrity of the text. The connection with the audience is incredibly important aspect of clowning for Lecoq:

> The contact the clown has with the public is immediate, he comes to life by playing with the people who are looking at him. It is not possible to be a clown *for* an audience; you play *with* your audience
> (Lecoq, 2002, p.157; emphasis in original).

As the communication with the audience is so important to the clown and the integrity of the text is important for the story of Sophocles' *Antigone* and for the purposes of the research, this becomes an area which presents itself as a difficulty in connecting the circus style of performance to the dramatic text.

To tackle the issue of lack of play with the audience "The short candle of happiness" sequence was devised to play with the audience during Haemons speech. When Creon steps onto a specific part of the stage, the lights go down, metaphorically expressing his knowledge on the subject they are speaking about. By putting Creon in the dark, it implies that he cannot see the potential repercussions of his actions. This is further emphasised when Haemon steps into the same part of the stage and the light stays up; this indicates Haemon's knowledge on the subject and what the people of Thebes think of Creon's conviction of Antigone, demonstrated when Haemon says: "I, on the other hand, can go about the city unrecognised, and I have heard people weeping for this young woman, saying that the last thing she deserves is to die for an act of great nobility" (Sophocles, 2001, p.58). As Creon has no text to speak for some time while Haemon is speaking it allows Creon to play with the lights and his audience. This was successful in that it allowed for the clown of Creon to shine through a little more – he demonstrated the clown's ability to be bested by a simple trick of the light, which had no effect on his son who was speaking on how and when to listen to the people, thus adding to the belief of the audience that as a ruler Creon is incapable of staying within the light of knowledge and just as The Chorus suggests: his happiness will be the shortest candle of all. Light for one minute, and then darkness. This area was also a section where the circus style technique did not match up to the text overly well. It was difficult to find the right balance between Creon's play with the audience and maintaining the important content of Haemon and Creon's debate.

Complicité

One aspect of the process I noticed Adam, The Guard, struggling with was the notion of complicité and play. Peacock describes: "complicité, at one level, is a silent communication, an unspoken understanding" (Peacock, 2009, p.33). This can occur between actors on stage or actors and audience members. One holding the door open for another person is an example of

successful complicité; there is no need for either person to say anything but there is a clear, unspoken understanding that one is gesturing the other to enter the door.

Whilst it was easy enough to offer silent communication to the audience such as hushing the audience as he slowly sneaks around Creon, (see Video 11) there was arguably a lack of "unspoken understanding". In addition to this there was little or no play with the audience during his period on stage. I struggled, as a director to help Adam reach this. I have since experienced play and complicité to a higher level than I have done before, outside of theatre, which would have been incredibly useful had this happened prior to the beginning of the production. As Murray suggests: "a series of practical exercises articulated in written form within a chapter of a book can never substitute for the lived experience" (Murray, 2003, p.128). I recently travelled to India as a guest of a friend who was to be the groom of an arranged marriage. This was not a tourist area of India and for the children to see a "gora" (white man) in their village and staying in their grandmother's home, was the first time in their lives for most of them. The children spoke little to no English. The easiest way to show a child you mean no harm is to simply play with them. In playing with these children I truly felt a sense of complicité — this unspoken understanding between one another. One of us would spectate, the other would copy or respond how they pleased. They could guide me around this new environment. It became possible for us to devise simple games between one another such as who could pull the uglier face, balancing games, play fights (of course the children would always win) things they did and did not like and — on a very basic point-and-say level — communicate our names (though I eventually just became "bhaji" which translates to brother).

Murray offers the suggestion that "complicité is an outcome of successful play" (Murray, 2003, p.70). Richard Schechner claims "In most kinds of play, in order to play successfully, all the players must agree to play" (Schechner, 2013, p.121). This would assume that there is already an established level of complicité between the agreeing parties about to play, whereas Peacock

ponders the likelihood that "the relationship between the two is symbiotic: complicité leads to play and play leads to complicité" (Peacock, 2009, p.33). Through reading this information and never truly experiencing a sense of complicité and play at once, I had no real way to have a stance on the subject. Since my experiences in India, complicité, for me at least, is constant in all life. Lecoq offers an example of complicité: "Two characters pass, each one meets the other's eye and comes to a stop, and a silent dramatic situation arises from this meeting" (Lecoq, 2002, p.34). Once complicité is established the two parties can agree to play with one another and enhance and strengthen the state of complicité; from this strengthened state they are then able to elevate their level of play and thus begins the symbiotic relationship Peacock suggests.

So how did we come to agree to play so freely and easily with one another? In terms of the production, how could we have firmly established an agreement between the audience, The Guard and Creon? One factor could be the curiosity that the children and I had. They were instantly more drawn into play as an outsider attempted to communicate to them, I was curious as to how the children would respond to my funny faces or odd gestures. The children and I began to react to one another and this developed further into true play, as Lecoq states: "true play can only be founded on one's reaction to another" (Lecoq, 2002, p.30). This sense of wonderment which facilitated true play between the children and myself was unlikely present between the audience and Adam. There was no question raised as to what he or the audience was doing there and so that curiosity catalyst did not occur for them. For Adam, the audience were there to watch a show and the audience could see that Adam was a performer. Perhaps there could have been more to instil a curiosity in the audience, such as making The Guard's presence, that was unbeknown to Creon, known to the audience long before his entrance, as opposed to the short space of time he was given. Additionally, more could have been done to see what The Guard's next retort to Creon's would be during the quick back and forth between

each character as The Guard cannot help but answer Creon back. As there was no real play beginning to develop between the audience and The Guard, the symbiotic relationship Peacock suggests did not have a chance to grow. Occasionally the audience did not react to Adam, or when they did, not enough was done by a way of response from Adam to the audience's reaction to begin a state of play between The Guard and the audience. This also aligns with Lecoq's claim previously stated above.

Another participating factor I felt was present was the number of tasks at hand – the only task between myself and the children in India was to simply play. I did not have any of the responsibilities Adam had during the show in trying to remain true to the text. Instead I could just enjoy the games without any thought to these inhibiting factors leading to the complicité between one another. Additionally, I did not fully comprehend the complex relationship between audience and performer, and performer and performer and how to competently teach my troupe to grasp the sense of play with one another. By reducing the tasks for Adam as The Guard and having a stronger understanding of what complicité means to me, it may have been possible to help Adam more with his struggles during this scene.

Conclusion

I truly underestimated the intensity of the research I was about to undergo when I decided to examine circus aesthetics. Upon finishing this thesis, I still feel as if there is plenty left to explore in the world of circus and how it could lend itself to other forms of theatre. The areas I had the capability of training my troupe in, were unfortunately limited and so there were some difficulties in finding areas in which circus could illuminate Sophocles' *Antigone* in an interesting and positive manner. The areas we did examine, mainly; clowning and acrobatics provided a unique insight into the realms of possibility when linking this performance style to drama.

The final show, presented on the 15th and 16th June 2017, contained several elements of circus which suited the text well; the introductory battle scene presented to the audience in a dark and hazy room with flashes of light, loud music and daring and exciting action was not dissimilar to the liveness of action seen in contemporary circus. The incorporation of a clown provided an interesting view point of the king and made clear to the audience the naivety of his decisions and belief that he is above divine law, however, in having such an important character behave so foolishly, it began to belittle the importance of some of the dialogue between himself and others, regardless of my efforts to reduce this from happening. Perhaps if I were to do it again I would add more clowns to the story, such as The Guard and examine how their interactions with one another can create more for both the unfolding story and the different levels of authority between them during these moments. Would The Guard truly be scared for what may happen if he doesn't return with Antigone? Or would he perhaps get caught up in the sandstorm he speaks of (Sophocles, 2001, p.44), creating a giant sand castle to protect himself from the winds and accidentally bury Polynices in the process? These would be exciting notions to play

with, however, it would also result in beginning to change the narrative of the play as opposed to illuminating the text.

My research has shown me the difficulties in lending the episodic nature of circus to the linear narrative of *Antigone,* however it has been possible to overcome these issues through the removal and/or, adaptation of the choral odes into the circus style acts. I do feel that more could have been done with The Chorus and if I was fortunate enough to have a much larger cast I would have explored the possibilities surrounding them. Choruses traditionally had a much larger group and it would have been interesting to see what could have been created using larger numbers; perhaps the creation of a set through the performers' physical bodies which rapidly changes into the chaotic scenes described during The Messenger's story of Creon's discovery of Haemon and Antigone in the cave. Additionally, I was unable to make use of one student, Katelyn's aerialist hoop skills due to lack of resources where I had been carrying out my practice as research. During the start of the research and hearing of Katelyn's capabilities, I immediately imagined a beautiful sequence reminiscent of Antigone's final few breaths before deciding to take her life by hanging in the cave, followed by Haemons discovery of her body.

Transferring the choral odes into circus acts such as the short candle of happiness and the opening battle scene was effective in illuminating the text as the descriptive nature of The Chorus could provide a useful starting point for the creation of these acts. By using the text as direct stimuli for the circus acts, the acts result in working in conjunction with the text to illuminate it in ways not found in standard dramatic performances of *Antigone.* If I were to further develop the play, I would also use the stories from The Messenger and The Guard to create circus acts, as they are also filled with description which would be useful as a source of stimuli.

While it is not common to immediately connect Greek tragedy with circus style performance, I believe that the two will not struggle to find dramatic uses for one another. If Lecoq is correct when he describes tragedy as "the greatest dramatic territory of all, *but also the greatest theatre that is still open to renewal"* (Lecoq, 2002, p.135; my emphasis) and if circus, as Lavers explains is "an art form that actively resists containment through its elemental process of change" (Tait and Lavers, 2016, p.2), then it seems that the two are inherently able to synergise, a constant state of change of one, providing the renewal for another.

Bibliography

ALLAIN, P. & HARVIE, J. (2006) *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance,* Abingdon: Routledge

ATKISON, L.M. (2016) 'Antigone's Remainders: Choral Ruminations and Political Judgment' *Political Theory,* 44(2), pp. 219-239

BALME, C.B. (2008) *The Cambridge introduction to Theatre studies,* New York: Cambridge University Press

BARKER, C. (2010) *Theatre games: a new approach to drama training,* London: Methuen Drama

BOBRICK, E. (2015) 'Sophocles' Antigone and the Self-Isolation of the Tragic Hero.' *Psychoanalytic Inquiry,* 35(1), pp. 40

BOUISSAC, P. (2010) *Semiotics at the circus,* Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton

BOUISSAC, P. (2012) *Circus as multimodal discourse: performance, meaning, and ritual.* 1 edn, London: Bloomsbury

BRAUN, E. (1982) *The director and the stage: from naturalism to Grotowski,* London: Methuen

COUNSELL, C. & WOLF, L. (2001) *Performance analysis: an introductory course book,* London: Routledge

CHAMBERLAIN, F. & YARROW, R. (2002) *Jacques Lecoq and the British Theatre,* Abingdon: Routledge

DESROCHERS, R. (2013) 'Destabilizing Vaudeville: The Marx Brothers and the Party of the Third Part' *The Journal of Popular Culture,* 46(3), pp. 524-544

DIXON, L. (2005) *Play acting: thirty-two theatre workshop activities that create performance,* New York; London: Routledge

EASTERLING, P.E. (1997) *The Cambridge companion to Greek tragedy,* Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press

EVANS, M. (2006) *Jacques Copeau,* Abingdon: Routledge.

FISCHER-LICHTE, E. (2008) *The transformative power of performance: a new aesthetics,* London: Routledge

GRAHAM, S. & HOGGETT, S. (2012) *The Frantic Assembly: book of devising theatre,* London: Routledge

GROTOWSKI, J & BARBA, E. (2012) *Towards a Poor Theatre,* New York: Routledge Ltd

JORY, J. (2002) *Tips and ides for directors,* USA: Smith and Kraus

LAW, A. & GORDON, M. (1996) *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics. Actor Training in Revolutionary Russia,* USA: McFarland & Company

LECOQ, J., CARASSO, J., LALLIAS, J. & BRADBY, D. (2002) *The moving body: teaching creative theatre,* Rev. edn. London: Methuen

MAHONY, P.J. (2009) 'The clash of irrationalities in Sophocles' Antigone *The Psychoanalytic quarterly,* 78(2), pp. 469

MITCHELL, K. (2008) *The director's craft: a handbook for the theatre.* London: Routledge

MURRAY, S. (2003) *Jacques Lecoq,* London: Routledge

NELSON, R. (2006) 'Practice-as-research and the Problem of Knowledge' *Performance Research,* 11(4), pp. 105-116

PEACOCK, L. (2009) *Serious play: modern clown performance,* Bristol: Intellect

PETERSON, D. (2016) 'Failure through the Flop and Playful Engagements of Authority in 500 Clown Macbeth' *Contemporary Theatre Review,* 26(2), pp. 153-167

PITCHES, J. (2004) *Vsevolod Meyerhold,* London: Routledge

SCHECHNER, R. and BRADY, S. (2013) *Performance studies: an introduction.* 3rd edn. London: Routledge

SIMON, E. (2012) *The Art of Clowning,* GB: Springer Nature.

SMITH, H. & DEAN, R.T. (2009) *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

SOPHOCLES, GIBBONS, R. & SEGAL, C. (2003) *Antigone,* Oxford: Oxford University Press

SOPHOCLES & MCDONALD, M. (2001) *Antigone: Full Text and Introduction (NHB Drama Classics),* London: Nick Hern Books

SPATZ, B. (2015) *What a Body Can Do,* Abingdon: Routledge

TAIT, P. & LAVERS, K. (2016) *The Routledge circus studies reader,* London: Routledge

Opus 7 Circa Tsuica, The Lowry, Manchester, 2nd November 2016.

Super Sunday The Race Horse Company, The Lawrence Batley Theatre, Huddersfield, 1st June 2017.

Appendix

The videos below can be found on the memory stick supplied along-side this Thesis.

Video 1 – Sequence contrasting Antigone and Ismene

Video 2 – Cadets march

Video 3 – Creon the Clown's entrance – example of the clown's walk

Video 4 – Creon the Clown decides Antigone's fate

Video 5 – *The Short Candle of Happiness* Entreé

Video 6 – Luke and Adam practice the assisted backflip

Video 7 – Opening battle scene

Video 8 – Transition of Creon the King to Creon the Clown

Video 9 – Antigone and Ismene argue, ignorant of Creon's presence

Video 10 – Creon's anger toward Ismene

Video 11 – Guard hushes audience.