

Impressions from the Born to be Clown course with Ashwath Bhatt, at TuT Hannover, April 2025 Leah Wewoda

Basic course, Level I

Advanced course, Level II – Focus: Taboos

Clowns are masters of acceptance.

With the audience, for the audience

‘With the audience, for the audience’ is a key phrase that comes up again and again in the workshop. This presupposes a close relationship between the performer and the audience, the ‘connection’, another word that is often heard and internalised in Ashwath's course.

Connecting, first with what is going on inside, then with the outside. Easy to say – but how?

This honest connection is essential in order to share the experience on stage honestly with the audience. Then the performers and the audience become accomplices, connected through the action on stage. When this succeeds, magical moments happen – you can feel them directly, they are clear, unmistakable.

There is plenty of room to explore these moments in the workshop, which alternates between individual and group work. Personal feedback is highly valued, and at the same time there is an opportunity for everyone to see and observe each other in the game, thus learning from each other and sharpening their own viewing habits. And so we also focus on the audience's role – when you sit there, you want only one thing: for the clown to find a way out of their predicament – so that they can slide into the next one.

Unstable terrain welcome

Unlike in real life, slippery moments are expressive here.

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Unlike in real life, moments of slipping are expressly desired here. Moments of imbalance, when the terrain is unstable and uneven, when you are literally moving on the balls of your feet.

They are worth their weight in gold for clowning, as they offer the greatest potential for play. Where it is open as to what comes next, it comes alive. Perhaps a door will open that we did not expect to find there – and in the course there is room to take steps through unexpected doors, to dare to try new things, under the benevolent, encouraging gaze of Ashwath and the group.

A challenge you can set yourself – to search for, recognise and understand your own patterns in play, and thus begin to play with them. To consciously ask the question: when do I act out of habit, and when do I actually act on impulse?

When you take a step onto unfamiliar ground, it's good to know that you have tools you can fall back on at any time. ‘Rules and Tools’, as Ashwath calls them, are an essential part of the course.

To be in contact with the audience, to allow for emptiness on stage, and to be alert, ready and attentive to impulses in improvisation.

Learning to trust the here and now

Not planning anything in advance once you step onto the stage can feel unfamiliar and daunting – which makes it all the more wonderful to know that working with different energies, rhythms and turning points is preparation for learning to trust the moment, the here and now. And thus to refine one's own play, to discover new perspectives for oneself and one's own clown, to approach them in a protected setting. To track down contradictions

in one's own clown character and connect them in play, perhaps falling down, failing, getting up again, and daring to continue.

Focus in the advanced course: taboos

Taboos are fodder for acting on stage – especially topics that are generally considered taboo, forgotten or repressed in society and in private life.

This workshop focuses on them, examines them closely and explores their potential for the stage. Because playing with taboos develops depth, their poetry comes to the fore, and space is created for what connects us as human beings.

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