

Revival of Cabaret Theatre traditions in Modern Art of Clowning by Vyacheslav Polunin

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the phenomenon of Russian cabaret, which developed rapidly from 1908 to 1917. A hypothesis is put forward, according to which not all cabarets can be attributed to cabaret theatres. Unlike cabarets, cabaret theatres emerged not in the conditions of art crisis, but at the peak of theatre art development, as a professional actor subculture, which the author proposes to call actor's laughter communities. For the first time, the famous Russian cabaret theatre ‘The Bat’ is considered as a carnival recreation that laid the foundations of the modern informal carnival tradition in Russian theatre art, which combined dramatic art with the art of clowning and street theatre. The revival of cabaret theatre traditions is examined on the example of Vyacheslav Polunin's pedagogical work with students on the practical study of clowning and street theatre within the framework of the project ‘Fools on the Volga’ in 2003.

Keywords: cabaret, Russian cabaret theatre, carnival recreation, Vyacheslav Polunin, clowning.

1. Introduction

The central theme of this paper is the Russian cabarets of the early twentieth century, which existed for a decade from 1908 to 1917. After the 1917 revolution, they continued their march around the world in the form of touring, enterprise, *divertissement* and stationary cabarets. Despite the fact that some eyewitnesses and the theatre critics called what was happening in the walls of the cabaret ‘jokes of the gods’, others considered it crude *epatage*, Russian cabarets played a significant role in the development of theatre culture in Russia and beyond, in understanding that cabaret can be not politicised, but pure humour art. However renewed application to the phenomenon of Russian cabaret has its basis. It is still difficult to answer why, having experienced dizzying popularity, the Russian cabaret faded into oblivion, revived again not in the theatre, but in modern clowning?

Obstacle to answering these and other questions are the points of view on cabaret, which need clarification and correction. The etymology and chronology of the spread of cabaret around the world do not cause disagreement among researchers. The word cabaret from French means “wine cellar or cabaret” (Appignanesi, 2010: 9). “The ‘drinking tavern’ was a common ancestor to both Parisian Cabaret, which ‘inherits its name from the French wine cellar or tavern’, and British Music Hall, ‘emerged from a primeval swamp of tavern singing’” (Paolini, 2024: 4). Cabaret, however, is a young phenomenon. It’s dates back to 1881, when the first cabaret ‘Black Cat’ was opened in France, after which cabarets appeared in the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Russia, Czech Republic, Great Britain, Switzerland, Canada, Australia etc.

While the etymology of cabaret is more or less clear, its definitions are not so clear-cut. The views on cabaret are not just different, but sometimes diametrically opposed, as are the theoretical concepts by which its social, political and artistic functions are explained. Moreover, the historical and cultural conditions in which cabarets have developed have left such a mark on them that it is difficult to find universal features in them. In one case, the cabaret is understood as the dwelling place of the emerging *avant-garde*, the entertainment of intellectuals, artists, writers, actors (De Villiers, 2022: 22). We find such cabarets in France and Germany, where the cabaret was a creative laboratory for young artists and a satirical stage on which, like a crooked mirror, all the vices of society, culture and art were reflected. In the cabaret artists gathered not only to read and show their new works, but also to hone their satirical style, to ridicule bourgeois and bourgeois views and values as effectively as possible. In particular, H. Segel believes that all cabarets have always emerged from the wreckage of unviable, outdated art forms (Segel, 1987). A classic example of this type of cabaret is the Parisian cabaret “The nimble rabbit” (*Au Lapin*

Agile), which “served as both a theatre and a club for artists”, where daring ideas were born and hilarious pranks were conceived. The same function was fulfilled by the Russian “Bat” (Letuchaya mysh'), “Stray Dog” (Brodyachaya sobaka) cabarets.

In another case, cabaret is understood as rough entertainment, similar to music hall, which entertainment combines “the performance of various numbers - vocal, dance, speech, clown-circus or stage miniatures of humorous entertainment character not in a theatre, but in the space of “café-restaurant” (Slutskaya, 2021: 2). This is roughly what Russian cabaret looked like during the period of emigration. In particular, L. Senelik writes about Russian cabaret in Paris and Berlin: “interludes in bright ‘peasant’ colours with actors stylized as if figures from the lubok or folk print and the painted Palekh boxes” (Senelik, 2019: 46).

According to the third point of view, cabaret is a “civilized protest” expressed in the form of intellectual and art activity. In particular, the German cabaret during the Nazi period was famous for its implacable, angry satire of the Nazi regime (Andrew, 2023: 4). In this interpretation, cabaret is treated as an artistic expression of social position with elements of satire and humor. K. De Villiers considers cabaret as a peculiar form of new journalism, reflecting the peculiarities of modern culture in anarchy and subversion (de Villiers, 2022: 29). The French cabarets “The Black Cat”, “Au Lapin Agile”, etc. were permeated by the street atmosphere and led their offensive in the direction from the periphery to the center. In particular, the founder of the first cabaret “Black Cat”, opened in 1881 in Montmartre, R. Sali was driven by the idea ‘to bring a satirical stream into the cult of naturalism’ (Appignanesi, 2010: 19). It was there, in the cabaret “Black Cat”, for the first time “rabble and bohemians ... merged into a single community” (Ibid: 20). In addition, the “Black Cat” attracted artists precariats. Even the cabaret signs were made in the street manner. For example, on the door of the Black Cat Cabaret, which opened in Paris in 1881, hung a sign that read, “‘Passerby, stop!....’ This building, patronized by the Black Cat, is dedicated to muses and pleasures. Passer-by, be a modern man!” (Ibid: 26). If there were such street signs in Russian cabaret theatres, they were performed as part of ‘kapustniks’, and served only as an invitation to play for their own. For example, at one of the kapustniks held at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1911, ‘in the lower foyer arranged “Russian tavern and ”Comic farces of merchant Kozeev’, in 1912 in the large side foyer on one side was placed folk theatre of famous fakirs with a sign at the entrance: ‘Tour of two spirits. There were cases of death’, on the other side - “The tavern of black-armed bandits” with wine barrels, long tables and all sorts of horrors: skulls, instruments of torture, etc.’ (Tikhvinskaya 1995). Unlike the ‘Black Cat’ cabaret, the Russian cabaret theatre ‘Die Fledermaus’ consisted not of unemployed artists, but of actors from the Moscow Art Theatre, who were constantly employed in the theatre's repertoire. This position of the Russian cabaret was very accurately explained words of the

Russian philosopher and literary scholar G.D. Gachev, who noted that "Russian theatre ... always wanted to go to the square', but "it never went to the square, but invented itself as a chamber theatre of people living in rooms, flats and dachas (Chekhov and the Moscow Art Theatre)" (Gachev, 1968: 208). We can assume that he did break through to the street. He broke through not through the cabaret, but through the actor's recreation itself, the potential of which, having reached its peak, burst beyond its limits. Therefore, the Russian cabaret theatre owes its breakthrough not as much to the European cabaret, which is the ideological mouthpiece of the street, but to the development of the Russian dramatic school.

However, looking at cabaret as a child of decadence, a crude entertainment for the people or a place where the class struggle is being waged will not bring us closer to understanding the specifics of Russian cabaret. Not in all Russian cabarets we can find signs of restaurant art, recognize the organic fusion of audience and actors, hear the voices of the rough street, peacefully coexisting with salon refinement and aristocracy, notice the political and satirical orientation.

From all Russian cabarets we have chosen the Moscow cabaret 'Bat' by actors of the Moscow Art Theatre, which, from our point of view, can be called a cabaret theatre. The peculiarity of this cabaret theatre is seen in the fact that it was not created by rejected romantic poets, outcasts, seeking to assert themselves by opposing their creativity to the generally accepted canons of art. The first Russian cabaret was opened by actors of the Moscow Art Theatre, which at the beginning of the 20th century was at the peak of its development. In 'Bat' was no hint of spiritual decay, the idea of cultural degeneration (Martynova, 2023: 177) or the political satire. The Russian actors and directors who were very involved in the art life of the cabaret also had no desire to literally transpose a real street to a cabaret scene or to use the cabaret to make their way onto a big dramatic stage, as Reinhard had. Unlike the German director M. Reinhardt, the creator of the cabaret 'Noise and Smoke', for whom this cabaret was a launching pad for the creation of his own theatre, for the outstanding Russian directors N. Evreinov and V.E. Meyerhold the work in the cabaret, with all its failures and upsurges, had value in itself. As the researchers note, "Reinhardt and his associates quite pragmatically expected to last only a couple of years in the cabaret, preparing the ground for an aesthetic revolution" (Yakubova, 2019: 137-138). For M. Reinhardt, the cabaret was a door through which one could "enter the real, big history of theatre in the mask of a jester" (Ibid: 140) in a comic, parodic form.

Unsuccessful experiments in the transfer of the spirit of the street and its rough style by Russian directors were often found in the theatre. However, they also happened in the cabaret. However, these were private cases. It seems that one of the reasons for such failures to

reconstruct comic forms on stage is related to the fact that even when theatrical figures turned with special enthusiasm to the element of laughter of medieval carnival or sought to transfer the atmosphere of a balaganza or street “from the fairground square ... to the stage of the theatre of the future” (Uvarova, 2018: 37), they did not always observe the main law of non-seriousness in comic play. In particular, V.E. Meyerhold, N.N. Evreinov, S.E. Radlov, A.R. Kugel used the forms of travelling theatre, balagan, circus, play, fair, cabaret, and clowning not only as comic for comic's sake, but as a form of educating the masses during the revolutionary events. As we know, excessive aestheticisation or politicisation of folk and laughter forms led to the fact that the ‘carnival’ fever was replaced by disappointment and cooling of theatrical figures towards laughter forms. Even V.E. Meyerhold, who gave a lot of effort to the creation in the theatre of the balagan-plaza cabaret repertoire, repeatedly met serious criticism in his address (Tikhvinskaya, 1995: 41). Cabaret theatres ‘Lukomorje’ and ‘House of Intermedia’, organized by V.E. Meyerhold were not popular not only with the public, but also with his colleagues in the theatrical profession.

In order to break through the skepticism in assessments of Russian cabaret period from 1908 to 1917, which is assessed as a fiasco cabaret due to revolutionary events (Appignanesi, 2010: 120), and his emigrant period after 1920, in which, as is commonly believed, “Cabarets promulgated a vision of a fairy-tale, toy-box Russia, akin to the pictures on Palekh boxes” (Senelick, 2019: 44)?, we will have to get out from under the hypnosis of memoir narratives, because this view of Russian cabaret lacks the ability to see the phenomenon in its evolutionary dynamics, to define it not only in theatrical categories and genre definitions. The conceptual disadvantage of such a view is the attitude to Russian cabaret theatre as a phenomenon combining propaganda, publicity and comic. Dispelling these misconceptions will help philosophical, metasemantic theories of humor that consider the aesthetics and semiotics of the comic through its biological roots will help us to do so. The science of comedy and laughter offers an opportunity to pose questions differently than they are usually posed in theatre discourse. Instead of narrowly biographical questioning about who and whom was ridiculed by name in the cabaret and at whom the satire was directed, the science of laughter allows us to explain its pan-cultural humor nature and answer the questions about why the cabaret became most popular among the actors of the Moscow Art Theatre, who followed the laws of the psychological school of play of K. S. Stanislavsky?; what is the originality and uniqueness of Russian cabaret, which does not fit into the definition of cabaret as a form of socio-political protest?; why did the form of actor's cabaret theatre become popular in the Russian clown art of V.I. Polunin, which defines street theatre as theatre without boundaries, as theatre that gives an ordinary person the opportunity to feel a taste for his or her own theatrical creativity?

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundations of the work were the works on play by J. Huisinga, G. Bateson, humor studies by W. Fry, D.E. Berlyne, metasemantic theory of humour by A.G. Kozintsev (Kozintsev, 2013) give grounds to formulate the hypothesis of the study is that Russian cabaret theatres were a legitimate laughter acting communities, which are predictors preventing possible negative scenarios in the development of theatre culture by carnivalising rigid images of actor identity. However, such communities acted not according to the usual genre pattern of mocking parody, but in the logic of humorous self-reflection used to maintain the actor's creative hygiene. The laws of laughter play described by these researchers allow us to take into account that the game emerged much earlier than man had a childhood, we can understand why the etymology of the game is connected with zoomorphic images (Huisinga, 1950), which are saturated with the names of cabaret 'Black Cat', "Four Cats", 'Nimble Rabbit', 'Bat', 'Four Cats', 'Stray Dog', etc., acting as images of group identification. Zoocentrism in the form of pranks and pranks is most often found in children's comic games and clowning. Following biologists and ethologists, A.G. Kozintsev defines laughter as a metacommunicative signal of play observed in animals and humans. A.G. Kozintsev's theory of laughter based on ethological research and M.M. Bakhtin's philosophical concept of carnivalization, appears to be a link between studies of the nature and culture of human laughter. Most researchers believe that primate laughter, as a metacommunicative signal of play and friendliness, is somehow connected to the origin of humor. Kozintsev takes into account the strangeness of laughter in terms of biology, as well as the actions it provokes and is evoked by. Kozintsev's theory makes it possible to explain why K.S. Stanislavsky spoke disparagingly about the actor's play of the future leader of the Russian cabaret "The Bat", the outstanding comedian N. Baliyev, calling his performance a farce. Maybe that Stanislavsky is intuitively felt that humour could compete with psychological play. Considering that humans, like chimpanzees, belong to the group of primates for whom laughter is an organic reaction to lack of freedom, and may be well as a reaction of aggression in a situation when a person or one of their relatives laughs at them (Bateson, et al: 1952), we can assume two possible lines of development of cabaret: humorous and non-playful (aggression).

From our point of view, the cabaret of actors of the Moscow Drama Theater represents the first variant, when the lack of freedom arising from the restriction of the canon of psychological play of the Moscow Art Theater. In the first case, when something is labeled as "not serious," more responses are inhibited than when it is labeled as "unreal." When we see Hamlet and Laertes fighting on stage, we refrain from many of the actions that would occur if we were to

witness something similar on the street. We do not, for example, call the police or step between the fighting men. But we may still indulge in tormenting fears for their safety, melancholy feelings, and solemn reflections on the human condition. However, when we see two clowns hitting each other in a circus, not only preventive actions but even concern and sympathy are excluded (Berlyne, 1972: 55).

Since humour, as anthropologists point out, is the human species, which in the process of evolution has developed such a wasteful attribute of adaptation, we would venture to suggest that the reason for the popularity of cabaret throughout the world was not the commercial interest of the cabaret organizers, but the infectiousness (Fry 1994: 113; Berlyne, 1972) of the excitement that engulfed the community involved in the creative process a consequence, if we take into account ethologists' observations that chimpanzees in captivity manifest what in humans is called a playful state, humour and laughter, then the most prolific Russian cabaret theatres represented legitimate laughter acting communities, which are predictors preventing possible negative scenarios in the development of theatre culture by carnivalising rigid images of actor identity. In doing so, it is important to note that these communities of actors were trendsetters not for ridicule, but for the creation of carnival recreations to maintain the actor's creative hygiene. Our view of cabaret theatres as laughter communities contradicts the opinion of Sh. Shahadat, according to whom, laughter communities represent "a group of people who create and bring to the stage a laughter world in the form of texts or actions. In relation to the official and serious world, this laughter world acts as an alternative, which should be thought of as a counter-dictatorial or as a contrarian" (Shahadat, 2017). The assertion of the contradictoriness of the picture of the world created by the laughter community allows the author to refer to laughter communities the laughter culture of Ivan IV, Peter the Great's all-night cathedral in the 18th century, the literary society *Arzamas*, *Alexei Remizov's Monkey Order*, the cabaret *Stray Dog*. Unlike the laughter communities noted by Shahadat, the Russian cabaret 'Bat' was conceived "as an intimate circle, as a cosy place for mutual amusement and amusement of the actors of the Art Theatre in the post-performance hours" (Efros, 1918). Since, as N.E. Efros noted, "the actors of this theatre have ... a great love of humour" (Ibid).

3. Methodology

3.1. Material: Russian cabaret theatres *Bat*, *Krivoje zercalo*, *Brodyachaya sobaka*, *Lukomorje*, *Balaganchik*, *Prival Comediantov*, *Veselyj teatr dlya pozhilyh lyudej*, *Dom Intermedij Doktora Dapertutto* in memoirs of actors and directors, notes in magazines and newspapers, brief reviews of theatre critics.

3.2. Methods: Studying traditional forms of theatrical art and cabaret was based on the historical, chronological, cross culture method, the method of reconstruction and retrospective analysis. The ontological approach was applied for exploring objective factors in the development of cabaret in Russia. The synchronicity method was used for considering cabaret enabled its carnival-play constants to be established. Evolution and metasemantic approach was used to the study of laughter and humour in cabaret theatre. The autoethnographic approach was used to study of Vyacheslav Polunin's pedagogical work with students on the practical study of clowning and street theatre within the framework of the project 'Fools on the Volga' in 2003.

4. Results

In the light of theories about the biological origin of humor, the comment that Russian cabaret was “an attempt to extend the actors' kapustniki that were traditionally staged in the theatre on the eve of Lent” (Appignanesi 2010: 212) is a key to understanding the evolutionary nature of Russian cabaret, which traces its origins to carnival recreation, in which actors parodied their own game. The actors' parody of their own performance fulfilled not a working function, but a compensatory function, which in the science of laughter is performed by humorous reflection. The highest degree of interactive jocularly combined with intellectual artistry (Tedrick, 2006) was a distinctive feature of Russian cabaret theatres, bringing them closer to A.S. Pushkin's 'Arzamas', in which the parodies of community members had a light character and did not ridicule specific historical events, scientific phenomena, etc.

The presence of zoomorphic semantics in the name of the Russian cabaret theatre 'The Bat' is a kind of zoocentrism, which was used not in the interests of anthropocentric ideologies, in which, for example, a person playing the role of a dog is not actually defending the rights of the dog. Zoocentrism in Russian cabaret theatre is humour play, in which human defend the right to self-expression through comic creativity, in which zoocentrism equates man with the animal in its playfulness. If in the first case the actor uses zoomorphic images as a way of earning money, playing on the audience's empathy for animals, following the path of forced identification, then in the second case (in Russian cabaret theatre "The Bat"), the actor shows not zoocentrism not literally, but as an adequate way to realize the need for humorous self-reflection of professional identification. We assume that humour zoocentrism in cabaret theatre could have allowed the actor to move to the status of a clown. The process of expansion of cabaret theatres from closed carnival laboratories to street theatre culminated almost a century later in street theatre and the art of clowning, which today accumulate the carnival potential of theatre culture. It seems to us not accidental that Polunin chose the form of rehearsals, which he called 'Vsyaki Byaki',

because the most important thing in cabaret theatres is laughter directed by the actor at himself. The higher the level of acting skill, - the higher the spiritual aspirations of the actor as a person, the richer was his laughter world. In connection with the above, we can assume that the Russian cabaret was on the way to street theatre, because in Russia in Polunin's work the theatricalisation of life in the form of street theatre clowning was revived with new vigour in the first decade of this century.

V.I. Polunin can be called the main ideologist of the creation of carnival recreations for clown artists in our country and in the world. He realized a huge number of practical, educational, cultural projects in the field of clown art, street theatre, carnival, and circus.

The project “The 20th Century through the Eyes of a Clown” within the framework of the Third World Theatre Olympics in Moscow brought together the greatest clowns of our time: J. Edwards (initiator of the Festival of Fools in Amsterdam), who believed that “the only thing that a cheerful person needed was freedom and honesty” (The Third World Theater Olympics in Moscow. IV International Chekhov Festival, 2001); the hereditary juggler, ferocious provocateur, clown-anarchist L. Bassi; B. Polivka; D. Shiner. Polunin, on the one hand, plunged the viewer into the individual worlds of clowns, on the other hand, united all of them in a single multi-faced carnival.

Against the background of Polunin's numerous initiatives, the 2003 project “Fools on the Volga” is little known to the general public. Meanwhile, this project comprises a serious attempt by Polunin to create an analogue of carnival recreation with students. The “Fools on the Volga” project arose as a result of the failed course of clowning at the Russian University of Theatre Arts (GITIS). The students who passed the qualifying rounds took part in V.I. Polunin's project “Fools on the Volga”. For a month, the students sailed on the ship “Don” along the Volga. Every day various master classes, and film screenings were organized with the participation of the world's great comedians. Themes for evening improvisations involved Natasha Rostova's ball, Gogol painting, Tolstoy left home. And all these characters had to be clownish. Kharms' anecdotes were the thematic staple of the cabaret in which the students took part. A month before the departure, the students were assigned to read a certain amount of literature. There was a costume room on the ship. The most interesting characters, plots born during improvisations on the ship were tried out in public. Sometimes, the characters invaded cities and tried to take passers-by out of the rhythm of everyday existence, using the principle of art intervening in the infrastructure of the city.

The basis for training students in the atmosphere of daily carnival was the “Vsyaki-Byaki” rehearsal system, in which holiday life was the formula for rehearsing in a holiday atmosphere.

Every day on the ship was festive. They celebrated 29 different holidays, one holiday per day, from New Year to Ivan Kupala.

The similarity of the system of clown education with the system of Russian cabaret consists in the closedness, selection of participants, humorous tone of communication of the project participants, concentration of creative activity in a limited space and time, where “the spirit of artistic competition, ... the excitement of merry rivalry” reigns (Tikhvinskaya, 1995: 23.). “Light improvisations – the companions of actors’ parties and feasts – not designed for strangers were preferable there. Here, everyone – or almost everyone – did not think about their own performance, even a second before it, since they were electrified by the previous performer. They shot up to a stage slightly raised above the floor, and later, after their improvisation, they returned to the common table” (Ibid).

Polunin's cabaret within the “Fools on the Volga” project and the Russian cabaret of actors of the Moscow Art Theatre in the system of preparation and demonstration of acting etudes, which were not prepared, but improvised. The whole point of the performances consisted in the spontaneity of their appearance and demonstration. *Vsyaki Byaki* – Polunin's rehearsal technique, a creative celebration of ideas, puns, various improvisational themes.

Yu.A. Berladin, the artistic director of Theatre-EX, one of the teachers of acting and stage movement, was invited to the “Fools on the Volga” project. He sees in Polunin's rehearsal system a similarity with preparing performances of the provincial enterprise theater of the late 19th – early 20th century. The immersion of students in the daily carnival, implying existing at the peak of their creative abilities, finding sources of inspiration in the conditions of everyday “holiday routine”, turns into a serious test, which actors of enterprise theatres were subjected to more than a century ago. On the one hand, the actors acutely felt the lack of new dramatic material. On the other hand, they were in dire need of techniques that help them work under the conditions of the game race. We are talking about an impeccable mastery of the technique of theatrical cliché, as an integral competence of an actor of an enterprise theatre. “Gilyarovsky wrote about how the wise master sends a promising actor to work in the provinces for several years, ... After serving for about three years in a provincial enterprise theatre (playing about 200 premieres a year), the young actor returned to the capital and conquered it” (Berladin, 2018: 359).

On the ship, students were offered themes for carnival improvisations, based on the works of Russian classics A.S. Pushkin, N.V. Gogol, F.M. Dostoevsky, L.N. Tolstoy and the representation of their images in the anecdotes of D. Kharms. Particular attention was paid to the principle of “not to make laugh, but to live”; to the difference between a dramatic clown and an eccentric; to the concept of a “joyful soul”. On the ship, students watched video recordings of

performances “Dreamers”, “Churdaki”, “Asisyai-Review”, “Catastrophe”, “Show 01”, “Snow Show”, silent comedies of Ch. Chaplin, H. Lloyd, H. Langdon and others.

The skill of the clown was examined on the examples of commedia de l'arte, traditional oriental theater Kabuki, White pantomime by J. Debuoro, Christmas pantomime by Grimaldi, and technique by M. Chekhov. Students attended classes on the stage movement. Participants got acquainted with the techniques of R. Laban, M. Feldenkrais, the system of F. Delsarte, the pantomime of E. Decroux, the technique of Wushu, Hatha Yoga, biomechanics of V.E. Meyerhold, and others. Aspects of the medieval theatre, fairs, show booths, and carnival were theoretically sanctified.

This closed structure of carnival recreation is a model of carnival for the self, which combines the function of laughter, agonal and puerility recreation. The carnival form of immersion of actors in searching for a character outside the presence of the spectator as such absorbs the mumming principle, featuring evening or night gatherings, which became the centre of the carnival anti-world.

The puerilist function of this recreation was manifested in the use of the clown's education system “Vsyaki Byaki”, formed by V.I. Polunin in the late nineties of the 20th century. This system was built on the attempt of the actor-clown to realize his childhood dream, creating a beautiful story (fairy tale), childlike quality of surprise (the first experiences of traveling under the bed, in the closet, in the attic), multiplied by the theatricalization of life and a joyful worldview. The similarity of the clown's education system with a child's game of disorder lies in the humorous tone of communication, the concentration of creative activity in a limited space and time, where the “spirit ... of merry rivalry” reigns (Tikhvinskaya 1995: 23). V.I. Polunin himself created this system in order to find a child in an adult.

The practical experience of immersion in multi-day carnival acting practice showed the need for students to have significant intellectual, creative potential, which is the building material of carnival creativity. The lack of professional knowledge and skills of individual students prevented them from holding the necessary level of inclusion in the carnival, educational process. The agonal function in this carnival structure was significantly deformed. As soon as students began seriously competing to see who was funnier, the agonal function left each of them. The agonality was predominantly of a friendly nature, since the participants in the project were not professional comedians, but representatives of a wide variety of fields: musicians, street actors, directors, circus performers, artists, theatre teachers, and others. This is proof that carnival does not tolerate the presence of serious competition.

This project is a legend in the street theatre environment, which has been passed down of actors from mouth to mouth for twenty years. It is largely due to this project that the professional continuity of clown artists and street actors of the older and younger generations is realized.

The participants of the “Fools on the Volga” project became a kind of living totems of street theatre. *The historical and cultural function* of this project lies in its a prolonged carnival effect, which manifested itself in a radical restructuring of consciousness that occurred in the studio members after being on the ship at the peak of their creative abilities. Some students subsequently initiated the creation of their own street theaters, with clowning as the main expressive means.

V.I. Polunin was able to transform the tradition of Russian cabaret theatres into an educational, creative, laboratory method of educating the modern clown and street actor. Today the cabaret form continues to exist in Russian street theatres and the art of clowning as an informal style of professional intragroup communication and creative activity.

Conclusion

Russian cabaret theatres established the tradition of carnival acting recreations, in which human reproduction of cultural memory is carried out in the forms of activity that best meet the human need for laughter. This form has become in demand today, when juvenile tendencies are growing in society, when the art of kidult is in demand, when young people openly declare their desire to elevate children's games into a profession. Today such laughter acting communities, which more than 100 years ago in the theatre was the Russian cabaret theatre ‘The Bat’, are representatives of street theatre culture, creating an informal laughter space that diagnoses the canons of official theatre culture. We can summarize that the Russian actor's cabaret went into the subsystem of theatre culture, continuing to give ‘side shoots’ (Tikhvinskaya 1995: 382) in the form of the emergence of laughter recreations in the space of modern street theatre and the art of clowning.

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