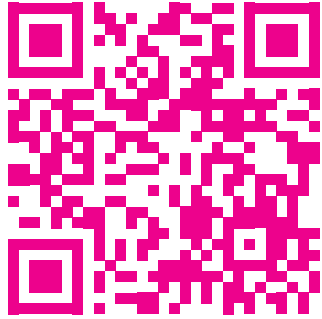


COMPLETE CLOWNFRONTATIONAL TOOLKIT



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CHAPTER 1

ORIGINS & PHILOSOPHY



We are a network of **ACTIVISTS & CLOWNS** who encourage creative, surprising, entertaining and disorienting forms of activism. The core of **N.A.To** lies in a practice of people collectively sharing **know-how**, experience and ideas. We merge different artistic **approaches** and **methods**, including **classical clowning**, **Theatre of the Oppressed**, **Rhythms of Resistance** and **Soundpainting**.

ORIGIN OF N.A.TO

The clown Atlas originally introduced N.A.To as a card game in which anyone could put on a clown nose recycled from waste materials and discuss their plans to change the world. These first N.A.To's already established some important aims, such as devising a ministry of laziness and making an explosion of harmony. Atlas also invented the **Gravity Strike**, a form of poetic protest, which has become a trademark practice in N.A.To's methodology.



ASSEMBLY

N.A.To is organized around people coming together to share ideas, skills and knowledge of various performance methods, as well as planning public activist happenings and actions. We consciously create a radically welcoming space, in which mutual care and support are key. We work with plenums, peer-to-peer support, emotional and caring empowerment. Each assembly has a specific theme and is often connected to current topics that are currently present in climate or social justice movements or specific local or global events.

HOW TO ORGANIZE N.A.TO

N.A.To is an open source project, meaning that you are welcome to propose and organize a gathering. We have some important principles to guide N.A.To organizers in holding such a gathering.

General/Logistics Planning:

- △ **Know your objective** – keep it clear and focused.
- △ **Know your target group** – describe the gathering as concretely as possible in writing.
- △ **Announce early:** Send out an early announcement „Save the Date“ and include clear details about the event, workshops, and schedule.
- △ **Venue selection:** Ensure that the venue has appropriate spaces for workshops, accommodation, and communal dining.
- △ Consider the season and weather when planning. Winter/summer seasons affect the options for the program, schedule and participation.

Program Planning:

- △ Know your goal and offer relevant workshops.
- △ Encourage participants on the first day to form small care groups for mutual support and dedicate time in the program for them to check-in regularly.
- △ Flexible schedule: Keep the program flexible, allowing for changes based on group dynamics and changing information or circumstances.
- △ Define which parts of the program are non-negotiable (locked) and which can be changed (unlocked).
- △ Limit activities to 2–5 per day to avoid overburdening the schedule.
- △ Include a (half) day for rest in the middle of the event.
- △ Dedicate the last day for reflection and check-out. Give everyone a chance to talk out their feelings and opinions.



Space Organization:

- △ Work in smaller groups to reduce the strain of large group interactions.
- △ **Resting/Quiet Room:** Provide a quiet space for participants to unwind.
- △ **Accessibility:** Invite participants to share their access needs and ascertain what changes may need to happen to ensure the maximum safety and comfort.
- △ **Defined roles:** Assign day managers, timekeepers, and meeting facilitators at least a day before and provide clear instructions as to the responsibilities of their roles.

Daily Routine:

Daily routines help create an environment in which participants develop a sense of familiarity and safety, which supports them in determining and achieving their shared goals.

Practical Tips:

- △ Daily check-ins: Include a 30-minute optional parallel check-ins for care groups.
- △ Day manager rotation: Rotate day managers and timekeepers daily to share responsibility.
- △ End-of-day reflection: Quick 5-minute check-out of the whole group before dinner to wrap up the day.
- △ Send out an information pack with daily schedules ahead of time.
- △ Printed schedules: Provide printed schedules for all participants and make sure they are clearly visible at the venue.
- △ Drinking water, snacks and trash bins: Ensure water and food are available and recycling bins are in place.
- △ Sound signals: Use a gong, bell, or fun alternatives to signal group transitions.



Rhythms of Resistance (RoR) is an international network of percussion protest bands that play at demonstrations and festivals focusing on social and climate justice movements. They criticize and confront any form of domination, exploitation, discrimination or oppression, using tactical frivolity, Carnival celebration and other forms of creative protest to channel their rage and indignation. As a white-led group offering workshops and activities attended primarily by white participants, we are continuously educating ourselves in whiteness and white supremacist practices so that we can consciously enact an anti-racist approach in our work

RHYTHMS OF RESISTANCE

The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) emerged from the global anti-capitalist movement in the UK at the end of 2003. CIRCA aimed for a new creative methodology of civil disobedience, merging the ancient art of clowning with contemporary tactics of nonviolent direct action and consequently popularized rebel clowning as a form of protest.

CIRCA

- △ Costuming – what type of mask, nose, costume we are using? What social groups and contexts are considered funny and how is social location reflected in or expressed by our costuming?
- △ Behavior – what approaches do we use in interaction- who feels safe in which public interactions? What kind of humor do we use? How do we reconfirm given structures and what kind of society do we sustain with the behaviors we display in a clown role?

We feel it is important to consider:



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THEATRE OF THE OPRESSED (TO)

Theatre of the Oppressed was developed by Augusto Boal in Brazil in the 1960s. TO's guiding methodology was Paulo Freire's work The Pedagogy of the Oppressed. The method aims to find ways for individuals or communities to actively and creatively resist the imbalance caused by the oppressor-oppressed relationship.

The integration of Rebel Clowning and the Theatre of Oppressed is a rich and transformative approach through which we have explored new dimensions of resistance and creative expression. This integration allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of "oppression", and "its manifestations and counter-manifestations" as Boals says. How to organize N.A.To.

Using the queering perspective, we can ask ourselves these questions:

- △ Don't overload the program, plan a radical resting day and stick with it.
- △ Transparency of organizational structure (paid and unpaid work; responsibilities).
- △ Summer camp or malleable organizing of time.
- △ Whether through its clown's goggles or a kaleidoscope, a clown sees and perceives the world differently. Clowns are queer. They challenge social norms, binary divisions and all forms of so called success. They disturb dominant power structures and celebrate in their own ways.
- △ Who/what is present/absent, in/visible, not/welcome, not/safe?
- △ What is the dominant standard body, the dominant aesthetic in this space?
- △ How do we move/act in this space?
- △ How do we 'use' this space 'correctly'?
- △ Who is responsible for the space?
- △ Who cleans the space?

CLOWNING IS QUEER

CLOWNING AS A TOOL TO CREATE A MOTHERFUL WORLD

Discovering the practice of mothering while creating N.A.To.

- △ Care for yourself and each other, create a space of mutual respect and open-mindedness.
- △ Reflection before, during and after a N.A.To. on how the presence of children and other beings is possible.
- △ Value invisibilized work and the people doing it, care for their comfort and dignity.
- △ Who holds decision making power? Where, when will the event happen and how does this affect who has access? What is the cultural makeup of the organizers and participants? Who is missing?
- △ Consider that time and space and care are needed to deal with emotions and create a space in which this space is dedicated and care is a leading force.
- △ Possible tools: check-in and check-out, plenum, facilitation of plenum, daily manager and awareness person/care manager, daily reflection in small groups in the evening, cooking and cleaning together, flexibility of spaces.

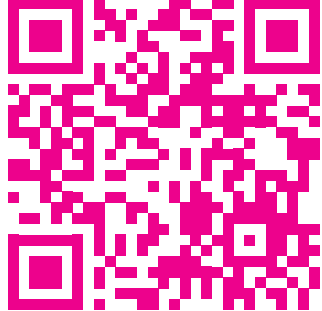
SOUNDPAINTING

Soundpainting is a universal multi-disciplinary sign language for many kinds of artists (musicians, actors, dancers, visual artists, et. al.) and used as a tool for live-composing group improvisations. Since its creation in New York in 1974 by Walter Thompson, it has been constantly evolving and spread to a world-wide network of practitioners.

For clown interventions, Soundpainting can help structure and define the specific steps and group actions. Soundpainting can be used to compose instant performance pieces to communicate ideas nonverbally during actions.



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CHAPTER 3 REBEL CLOWN EXERCISES



GRAVITY STRIKE CIRCLE

To build your clown's imagination, developing new personal Gravity Strikes can be helpful.

In a supportive clown circle (with noses), one by one:

- △ Go to the center of the circle.
- △ Using your voice or body or both, illustrate an issue that is currently pulling you down. The clowns in the circle support you by following your movements and tuning in to your physical and emotional state.
- △ Experiment together to find a suitable Gravity Strike that would counter this pressure.

Some specific Gravity Strikes we have developed:

- △ Shaking off the pressure of stress.
- △ To deal with overwhelm and lack of focus, do the octopus-dance in honey.
- △ To fight back against "rechts(d)ruck" (right-wing pressure), go to the left.
- △ To overcome the fear of death, do the worm dance.

△ ... make up your own!

ORCHESTRA

Everyone stands in line two by two. The first two clowns in line start playing an imaginary instrument (for instance, a trumpet) while marching. The rest of the line follows and becomes an orchestra of trumpets. After a couple of minutes, the clowns in the front move to the back and the next people in line decide on a new instrument that the orchestra plays while marching. In the advanced variation, each of the two clowns in the front play a different instrument, for example all the clowns on the left play the violin while all the clowns on the right play the drums.

This exercise works well with bigger groups of clowns on the street because their synchronized movements and sounds draw bypassers' attention.

SHERIFF

The Sheriff exercise is used when a row of police officers stands or blocks a space at a demonstration. The best and safest is when cops are bored and have nothing to do. One clown takes on the role of a police officer — the Sheriff. The Sheriff gives orders to the actual police unit such as "Smile!", "Be serious!", or "Cry!". The Sheriff's goal is to elicit an emotional reaction from the police, who are mandated to maintain their poker faces. The Sheriff may overpraise the police reactions. The exercise works best when a row of clowns can join the police and follow the Sheriff's instructions. The exercise can ease tension and bring a human feeling to the interaction between policemen and demonstrators.

SWARM

In this exercise, a group of clowns band closely together like a swarm of bees, moving as one organism. A clown imitated by all the other clowns. The clown in the front can introduce several movements (always paying attention not to be abrupt so that the other clowns can follow). When the clown turns around (90°/180°/360°), the initiative is passed to the clown who is now in front, who then directs the next group movement. This exercise works well with bigger groups of clowns on the street because their synchronized movements draw bypassers' attention.

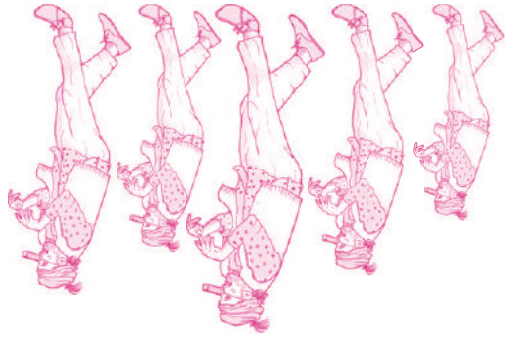
REISSVERSCHLUSS/ZIPPER

In this exercise, a group of clowns slowly approach a police officer or line of police, visibly falling in love with the police (or another positive emotion of choice) with every step. They may bring a flower or another gift. The group waits for the police reaction. It is important to sustain the romantic tension between the clowns and police.

Variant: Standing in a line, they move like a zipper, one clown in the back moving to the front without ever losing touch with the other clowns. They embody a desire for an emotional reaction from the officer. They have an intensive focus on one specific police officer, maintaining eye contact.

Normally, if a police officer reacts, it is a negative reaction or denial. At that moment, the whole group switches to crying and leaves in sadness (or other negative emotions), moving again like a zipper. After a moment, they can repeat and try to approach another police officer. It is important to keep big emotions in these exercises and sharp switches between them.

The exercise brings unexpected emotion to the demonstration – love and admiration. It underlies the contrast between the force of the police and the fragility of human beings.



POSSIBLE CLOWNING ACTIONS

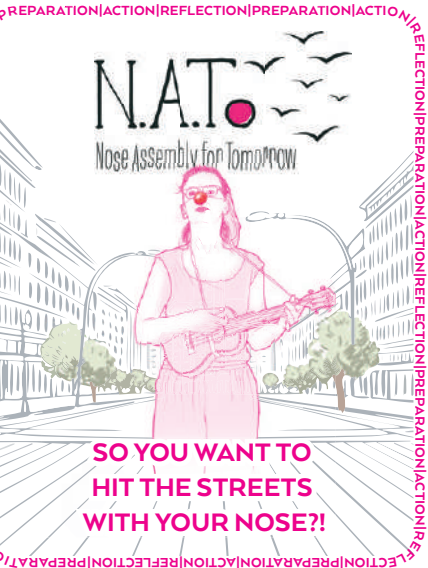
- △ Spontaneous dance clowning party (Tanzstille statt Tankstelle).
- △ Singing a personalized song to an audience member.
- △ Creating living statues symbolizing a particular social situation.
- △ Imitating everyday social roles (conductor, police officer).



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SOME GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING ON THE STREET

- △ Organize clowns in a group, in which **each person feels safe**.
- △ Prepare well to allow for spontaneity and forgetting during the action.
- △ Organize big groups to emphasize concrete topics to the public.
- △ Use **interactive activities**: dancing, drawing with chalk, soap bubbles.
- △ Actively engage with passersby, ask them concrete questions, giving them gifts or exchanging nonsense objects.
- △ Do a group choreography, even simple synchronized movement.
- △ Play subtle movement games signaling through eye contact or not at all (for instance, changing seats in public transport).
- △ Ask people in public for solutions or support for absurd problems.



REFLECTION

When reflecting upon the action, we ask ourselves:

- △ After every action, we debrief together. We intend to hold a safe space in which we can reflect upon our emotions, experiences and insights. Both smaller affinity group and whole group reflection sessions are important. Some topics are more easily addressed in smaller groups, others in bigger groups.
- △ What worked for me/ the group and what didn't?
- △ How did I feel?
- △ What can I take from the action for future performances?

SPACE

Before the action, checking the space may help your performance. It may be useful to research:

- ▽ Who feels at home in this space.
- ▽ Who holds power in this space.
- ▽ How other beings use this space.
- ▽ Whether there any dangerous spots (high traffic, crowds etc.).
- ▽ Which spots would be good for performing.
- ▽ A possible location as the group's meeting point.
- ▽ Possible locations for resting and safe houses close by.

PREPARATION FOR ACTION

Whether performing in a group or alone, we try to prepare for different potential scenarios on the street. Having a backup for performers helps create a safer environment. Before the action, we aim to:

- ▽ Make sure we **try on our costumes** and agree on the character of the performance.
- ▽ Build **mutual trust and awareness** among the performers by spending time together,

ACTION

- △ During our actions, time flows differently and may feel both long and short. These general principles work for us: Continuously discover, play with and hone our clown character during rehearsals.
- △ Start the performance with a **group ritual**.
- △ Be **respectful and non-aggressive** to other people on the street.
- △ **Show skills** in your act like juggling, acrobatics or singing that let the public know you are an artist.
- △ **Observe** the people we meet and give them our attention.
- △ Balance personal impulses, staying connected to and focused on the group.
- △ Be aware of situation changes around us.
- △ Take off our noses when there is an emergency.
- △ Keep performances short and sweet.
- △ Continuously play with and rediscover our clowns during rehearsals.

tuning into each other with exercises and establishing group rituals.

- ▽ Use a **buddy system** when performing in crowded areas. Buddies go everywhere together, look out for each other and decide when to finish the performance.
- ▽ Establish a **code-word** and back up plan in case of emergency/danger.
- ▽ Establish gesture / voice **signal to call in the whole group** — we meet, take off our noses and assess the situation.
- ▽ Keep a **civilian (non-clown) with us** to help with props or carry clowns' personal belongings, observe, keep the timing and ensure everyone's safety. They also may communicate with bystanders or authorities when necessary and intervene in moments of conflict.
- ▽ Determine a time and place at which the action will end.
- ▽ Determine a time and place for **debriefing**.
- ▽ Have a **list of actions** to remind us of our options for performing in the public space.