

## **Medical Clowning and Performance Theory**

The emergence of medical clowning as a new profession brings up questions about our traditional conceptions of clowning, sickness, healing and recovery. Ostensibly, there is an inconsistency between the solemn air of Western "White Coat Medicine" and the frivolity of "Red Nose Clowning". In many indigenous cultures, however, clowning and medicine complement one another. The Wape of Papua New Guinea celebrate their main curing festival – the *Niyel* - in a series of crude comedic songs and dances, in which kinship and sex reversal acts dominate. Among the Arizona and New Mexico Zuni people, members of the *Newekwe* clown society function both as jesters and as healers, and the Canadian Dakotas believe the clown to be the most powerful of shamans, for he is said to derive his curing ability from the guardian spirit, "Clown". This presentation applies ethnographic methods used to describe clown-healers of indigenous cultures for the description of the work of four medical clowns at the Ha'Emek Hospital in Afulah, Israel. The analysis of their performance highlights the aspects of Interaction, Paradox, Parody, Playfulness, Reversal of Order, Fantasy and Vulnerability. Examined as a whole, it seems that Transformation - somewhat similar to that which occurs in rites of passage – is the key to the dynamics of the medical clowns' work.

### About The Author

**Atay Citron** is senior lecturer at Haifa University's Theatre Department. During his tenure as chair of that Department (2004-2009), he launched a pioneering academic and training program for medical clowns. Citron is also the artistic director of the Bat-Yam International Street Theatre Festival. From 2001 to 2004, he was artistic director of the Acco Festival of Alternative Israeli Theatre, and prior to that, he served as director of the School of Visual Theatre, Jerusalem. His stage work was seen in the U.S., Canada, France and Israel. He holds a Ph.D. from the Department of Performance Studies, New York University (1989). He was twice a Fulbright fellow, the recipient of the Best Production Award in the Street Theatre Competition of the 1987 Israel Festival and the 2005 Rosenblum Award for Excellence in the Performing Arts. His main academic interest is ritual performance and its relation to the avant-garde. His writings have been published in professional journals and anthologies.