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Chicago's 500 Clown Theater:
Physical Action, Impulse and Narrative in Play

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ABSTRACT

Chicago's 500 Clown Theater:
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This dissertation articulates the practice of clown theater by a Chicago-based company

called 500 Clown in order to provoke further investigation and definition of this hybrid theatrical

form, which, though increasingly popular as a practice, has yet to be theorized or historicized.

This study addresses clown theater's relationships with other performance forms as well as how

the form intersects with critical theater and performance concepts such as narrative structure,

action, play, improvisation, spectatorship, risk, liveness and presence.

Generally speaking, clown theater incorporates elements from both clown and dramatic

theater. Clown offers a direct and immediate relationship with the audience, the privileging of

spontaneous play over predetermined and complex narratives, and the unique presence of an

individual performer as opposed to that of a fictional character. Dramatic theater offers, among

other things, structures to sustain full-length productions and numerous conventions, which,

though culturally specific, address fictional coherence, role of the audience, and repeatability of

the event. Clown theater gets its dynamic not from a facile and complementary give and take of

elements and conventions, but rather from tensions inherent in the interaction between clown and

dramatic theater.

This dissertation's methodology relies variously on participant observation,

autoethnography, oral history, and the synthesis of secondary sources in order to create a detailed

account of clown theater as developed and practiced by 500 Clown. This investigation of clown

theater practice is framed by an examination of the particulars of creating and sustaining a

theater company, a move that reflects my experience that artistic practice is in constant negotiation, conflict and cohabitation with business practice. In service to that, the opening and closing chapters explore how the form and content of artistic practice as well as the economics of sustaining that form are shaped by their context inclusive of colleagues, cost of living, availability of space, broader trends in the use-value of the arts and the more ineffable culture of a city.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

PREFACE

Northwestern University's Department of Performance Studies engages "performance as both an object of study -- something to be documented, analyzed, theorized -- and as a living art form -- something to be experienced, practiced, enacted. The unique and defining characteristic of the department is its commitment to both theory and practice, the analytical and the artistic" (Northwestern University). Nonetheless, when I decided to write this dissertation about my own theater company's artistic practice, I suspected I would enter into an uneasy and often fraught relationship between theory and practice.

By fall of 2003, I had completed two years of research on what was then my dissertation topic: the history of performance at Minneapolis' Walker Art Center and the implications of live performance in what is essentially a visual arts museum. While working on that topic, I was divided into what felt like two discrete parts of myself: scholar and artist. As a scholar, I was heading up to Minneapolis from Chicago regularly to research in the archives. As an artist, I was directing and co-creating productions with 500 Clown. Increasingly I and other 500 Clown company members were teaching theater students and professional actors, and in those classes we were regularly being asked, "What is clown? What is clown theater?" My answers were frustratingly limited to the training I had received, varied experiences in rehearsing and performance, and an occasional book I had read on the topic. To be the teacher I wanted to be, I knew I needed to dedicate time to developing a breadth of knowledge about the form of clown theater, which I knew would also broaden the vocabulary and imagination I had as a director. In addition, I was coming to realize that though I was interested in the Walker Art Center, that area of study was not going to be my area of expertise as either scholar or artist. Clown and clown

theater were. Gradually I grew determined to switch topics in order to fully develop and deepen what were clearly growing to be my primary interests.

I hesitated for several reasons. Firstly, I was reluctant to theorize my artistic practice, nervous of deadening it through analysis. Secondly, I was insecure about the validity of the topic. I was confident that clown theater warranted investigation and analysis, but feared that approaching it through personal practice was indulgent and not rigorous enough for an academic readership. The first of these concerns was indeed a challenge. There were times when I grew frustrated searching for the correct words to describe spontaneous and impulsive play, judging the endeavor to be a futile waste of time. In the company of clown teachers and performers, I would actually feel ashamed at being so analytical, serious and intellectual about clowning. I have been a student of clown teachers who keep talking in their studio classes (on their part and the part of their students) to a minimum, wanting to create different pathways of knowing outside of verbal language.

Yet I was emboldened by my graduate department's commitment to engage theory and practice and to confront the awkwardness of that endeavor. One of my professors at Northwestern, director, playwright and scholar Mary Zimmerman, wrote her dissertation for the same department in 1994, entitled: "The Archaeology of Performance: A Study of Ensemble Process and Development in the Lookingglass Production of *The Arabian Nights*." In her introduction she writes about her dual position as performance-maker and theorist:

> To create theatrical performances and to write and think about performance theory feel like very different processes. Although it may be argued that the performance practitioner and theorist are equally embedded in time and circumstance and equally informed by political or psychological influences,

nevertheless the physical differences between writing and rehearsing are great. Writing about and contemplating the intricate complexities of post-structuralism requires solitude, whereas the actual practice of making performance is furiously opposed to such solitude. Performance is the antithesis of privacy. It is chaotic, riotous; it provides very few moments for reflection, time seems to charge away uncontrollably towards the opening night. Written thought unrolls sequentially, while the great moments of rehearsal are moments of simultaneity – where five or six people suddenly arrive at the same conclusion, when pieces of a puzzle which seem unrelated suddenly conjoin. Writing appears to have already happened, while rehearsal and performance is constantly happening. For me, there has always been rather a miserable co-existence between making performance and talking about how performances create meaning. (30-31)

Admittedly, to read Zimmerman's last sentence provides comfort; co-existence between practice and theory does not have to be easy or happy even if it is encouraged. Indeed, much of what Zimmerman writes does speak to my experience, yet it also invites me to probe my own discomfort.

For me, the conundrum lies in clown's privileging of the not knowing and always discovering mind, which often requires an undoing of years of knowledge built-up. Clown takes an active stance towards the world that privileges not knowing and, relatedly, not directing how things will turn out. As a director of clown theater and theater more generally, I have been working on not knowing, risking beginning with an inquiry without knowing the end-point. This entails teaching myself to be open to the actors, designers and other collaborators and practicing what I claim to be the core action of directing: to create an environment in which others generate

material. My job is to work with that raw material as an editor, crafter and storyteller. My task is to be open to seeing the material, and in particular, the unexpected accidents that happen when an actor pursues objectives. I need to perceive what is actually happening in the rehearsal as opposed to clouding it with preconceptions and planned outcomes.

Sitting at my computer writing this dissertation has been a process of constructing knowledge. I revisit and interpret past experiences in order to understand what they teach about the form of clown theater. My mind does somersaults trying to construct knowledge out of a practice of not knowing. But indeed there are some straightforward correlations between scholarly research and artistic research: Both begin with inquiries and remain open to discoveries. Scholarly writing edits, crafts and tells stories. For a long time I only felt ready to write once I knew what I would write and, of course, have discovered that writing itself is an investigation. I experiment with words to find and convey meaning, just as I experiment with the look of a particular light, a glance between actors, or the rhythm of crossing the stage in order to find and convey meaning. Yet, although scholarship and artistic practice theoretically share a process of discovery, I personally have not found in writing a zone of not knowing through play and openness that compares with the one I have cultivated over years of directing.

I have also encountered another aspect of writing clown practice. As I hoped it would, theorizing and analyzing clown theater have helped me develop a language to describe practice, which has been exceedingly useful in teaching, audience discussions, and rehearsals. As for the classroom, as much as I admire those clown teachers who opt to stay away from words, I, as a student, have always thrived on the synthesis of analysis and practice. I am that kind of learner, which is why I ended up being a theater director in a doctoral program in the first place. There are certainly other students out there like myself who benefit from the conversation between

analysis and art, between theory and practice. Interestingly, that conversation mirrors 500 Clown's practice, wherein company members spend months discussing, analyzing, and articulating compelling issues in literature. Only after that highly verbal and also passionate and emotional analytical stage, does the company begin rehearsals. From there, the process moves between studio and table excavating and creating connections between physical, emotional and intellectual discoveries.

As for the second concern about approaching my topic through personal practice, doubts have surfaced about the methodology of this project. I am writing about my own theater company, and therefore have struggled to distinguish when personal anecdotes are useful to the detailed descriptions I seek and when they are merely indulgent. When writing about 500 Clown productions, I have tried to analyze moments, narrative structure and relationship with audiences in order to elucidate clown theater and not to provide promotional writing on the company. My partners in 500 Clown – Molly Brennan, Adrian Danzig and Paul Kalina -- are people with whom I have invested my time, trust, financial well-being, friendship, and colleagueship. In a meeting several years ago we decided that we would commit to 500 Clown, meaning that the company would be our professional priority. On a practical level that meant we would not take other work if it conflicted with 500 Clown work. It has also proven to mean that we do a great deal of emotional housecleaning. We speak aloud when there is conflict and have sat at countless tables painfully confronting differences until we have found a way to move forward. Our commitment to each other encompasses artistic pursuits as well as a willingness to sit in the muck of intimate challenging relationships in which we share success, failure, vulnerability, fear and dreams. On top of that, I am married to Adrian Danzig, a relationship that, though it predates the formation of 500 Clown by five years, has matured and deepened through our

shared experience training in clown, applying that training to theater-making, and founding

500 Clown. I have interviewed Danzig, Brennan and Kalina several times for this dissertation.

Danzig, as the producing artistic director of 500 Clown, is the public voice and face of the

company. His role is to articulate what the company is and does to producers, presenters, press,

company associates and audience members. Consequently, his voice is noticeably dominant in

this study. Given my own active role in the company as well as my close relationships with

fellow company members, I have been vigilant about the trap of familiarity and have tried to

distinguish what serves the project of conveying information about clown theater and what, at its

worst, is self-congratulatory.

Taking the Leap

In summer of 1995, in a clown course with master teacher Philippe Gaulier at his school

then in London, now in Paris, the day's assignment was to go on stage and keep the audience

(the rest of the class) interested. Whoever was bored was to raise his or her hand to signal the

end of that student's time, and Gaulier kept a stopwatch to track each student's duration. The

average was seven seconds. Antonio from Spain pulled off a whopping fifty-two seconds

because he got embroiled in some wonderful play with a plastic sword. In that course, at times

I'd be on stage utterly lost, and the room would weigh down in dismal boredom. At other times

I'd be on stage utterly lost, and the room would shake with laughter and glee. At Ecole Philippe

Gaulier and my other training ground Ecole Jacques Lecoq, the bathrooms are often full of

distraught students pulling out their hair, trying to get a handle on how clowning works when the

only one who seems to know what's going on is the viewer, not the performer. These classes are

less geared towards analytical understanding of clown and theater; rather they create for the

student an accrual of experiences that eventually (perhaps in the class itself, more likely in years

afterwards in front of audiences) help performers find how they are funny – where their humor lies -- on stage and perhaps off-stage as well. It is a cultivation of practice through practice, not through analysis of oneself and one's humor. And so it is with humility towards a form that has eschewed analysis that I begin my analysis with the hope that understanding will not kill the funny, but rather will productively co-exist, even if not always seeing eye to eye.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

In spring of 2001, Adrian Danzig – an actor and clown – produced a three-week City of

Fools Festival at Chicago's Chopin Theater. The packed schedule included over thirty clown

performances, a clown theater institute, cabarets, a workshop on the history of clown by The Big

Apple Circus' Dominic Jando, and a late-night clown jam with all the festival clowns. Danzig

produced the festival in order to celebrate the vitality of Chicago's clown activity. By putting

many incarnations of clown side by side, the festival intended to generate discussions among

audiences, artists and students about what clown is, particularly when it is *not* clowning in the

style of Bozo or Ringling Brothers, clown forms most familiar to American audiences.

Questions circulated: What is clown? A clown turn? Traditional clowning? Post-modern

clowning? A female clown? What's relevant about clown today? Does clown belong in a

circus, on a street, in a theater? What is clown versus clown theater?

This dissertation is about clown theater as practiced by a Chicago-based company called

500 Clown, which I co-founded with Adrian Danzig and Paul Kalina and which was one of the

participating companies in the City of Fools Festival. Clowns and theater have frequently shared

company, especially when clown characters are written into play scripts. Prime examples are

Shakespeare's Launce and Lear's Fool, categorized as theater clowns by clown historian John

Towsen. But clown theater has not yet been theorized or historicized by scholars, nor has it

surfaced with any regularity in scholarly or popular discourse.

Yet, the practices are out there, evidenced in part by the growing number of companies,

training programs and festivals that bring clown and theater together. To offer just a few

examples, theater conservatories at Brown University, Yale University and New York University

all have or have had faculty members who specialize in clown or offer clown as part of a broader physical theater curriculum, namely Christopher Bayes (formerly at Brown and now at Yale), Stephen Buescher (Brown), Hovey Burgess (NYU) and Jim Calder (NYU). Naropa University in partnership with the London International School of the Performing Arts now offers an MFA in Lecoq-based actor-created theater in which clown is part of the core curriculum. The Dell 'Arte International School of Physical Theater in Blue Lake, California recently became accredited as an MFA conservatory, offering another program in which clown is part of the core curriculum.

On New York City stages, well-known performer and director Bill Irwin's work has been instrumental in expanding the public's imagination about how clown and theater can intersect. *Fool Moon*, a series of clown turns created and performed by Irwin and David Shiner, opened on Broadway at the Richard Rodgers Theater in 1993, and returned to the Ambassador Theater in 1995, and to the Brooks Atkinson Theatre in 1998. At the St. James Theatre in 1989, Irwin's *Largely New York* gave a dramatic frame to a series of clown turns. Moliere's *Scapin* at Roundabout Theater Company in 1997, directed by and starring Irwin, incorporated his clowning and physical skills into the staging of an existing script. Irwin's Tony-award winning performance as George in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* in 2005 clearly demonstrated Irwin's broad range but also how physical expertise, an aspect of clowning, can be put in service to dramatic theater without any of the trappings of clown. On a smaller production scale, in September 2006, Brooklyn's Brick Theater hosted a clown festival, which it called the first to happen in twenty years, perhaps harkening back to "The First New York Festival of Clown-Theatre," which took place at Theatre Guinevere, June 7 – July 10, 1983, featuring performances and workshops by Avner the Eccentric, John Towsen, Peterhoff, and Ronlin

Foreman among others. In all these sites of training and performance, clown is being

recognized as part of a broader theatrical vocabulary.

Clown theater is not easily defined. As with other emergent performance forms during

their early years, for example Futurism, whose first manifesto was published in 1909, and

Fluxus, which emerged in the 1950s to early 1960s, battles are waged to determine the rightful

leaders, places of origin, and definitive characteristics   It is often out of these debates that the

defining energy and features of an art form messily emerge.   This dissertation will attempt to

articulate the dimensions of one company's practice of clown theater as a means of provoking

further investigation and definition. In doing so, I provide detailed descriptions of 500 Clown's

productions, classroom exercises, philosophies of individual artists, and the company's

relationships to other artistic practices and theories. In doing so, I aim to address clown theater's

relationships with other performance forms as well as how the form intersects with critical

theater concepts such as narrative structure, liveness and presence. Following the example of my

subject beyond its more typical and limited associations with the legacies of circus, court jesters

and fools, I intend to carve out a well-deserved space for clown theater in contemporary

performance theory, and, through this scholarship, to deepen my own and hopefully others'

practical engagement in the form.

At first glance, a definition of clown theater is simple. It is, as its name suggests, a

combination of clown and theater.   But to go any further "clown" and "theater" need

clarification, thereby complicating the endeavor. Each term is unwieldy. Moving towards a

definition of clown is a chapter in and of itself, and the term theater, of course, gives rise to an

almost infinite number of approaches and definitions. Generally speaking, clown theater

incorporates elements from both clown and dramatic theater, a term I discuss in Chapter 4.

Clown offers a direct and immediate relationship with the audience, the privileging of

spontaneous play over predetermined and complex narratives, and the unique presence of an

individual performer as opposed to that of a fictional character. Dramatic theater offers, among

other things, structures to sustain full-length productions and numerous conventions, which,

though culturally specific, address fictional coherence, role of the audience, and repeatability of

the event. Importantly, clown and dramatic theater each bring its own set of practices to the

relationship, and when the two come into contact, conventions of both forms are put into play in

surprising ways. Thus clown theater gets its dynamic not from a facile and complementary give

and take of elements and conventions, but rather from tensions inherent in the interaction

between clown and dramatic theater.

One significant tension emerges when clown casts theater as an authority figure. Clown

exists in relation to authority -- the court jester speaking truth to the king and able to do so

because of his non-threatening low status; the fool transgressing mores and inverting status

relations as described by Bakhtin and others; Chaplin turning the mechanization of society on its

head in *Modern Times*. 500 Clown, which creates productions to be seen in theaters, has found

that theater itself provides a rich and multi-dimensional authority for the clown. Or perhaps it is

more accurate to say that popular cultural knowledge of theater provides that authority.

Spectators enter the theater with expectations of what a theatrical production is and what their

role is. 500 Clown plays with those expectations. Straightforward examples include breaking

the fourth wall, encouraging the audience to drop the etiquette of quiet attentiveness, and

pointing a finger at the stage manager in her booth when light and sound cues get in the way of

what the clowns want to do. The most significant way that 500 Clown plays with and against

theater is in its attempt to forge, rather than take for granted, theater's liveness through playing

spontaneously with individual audience members as well as following emotional and physical impulses that are triggered by the unique energy of each performance's audience.

Though writing about the form of clown theater makes up the bulk of this study, I have framed that investigation with the particulars of creating and sustaining a theater company. The project of this dissertation is to write academically about artistic practice, and my experience is that artistic practice is in constant negotiation, conflict and cohabitation with business practice. Yet often in scholarly writing about performance history and theory, artistic content and form are extracted from the business practices that enable the artistic events to occur. Though theatrical productions are often described in specific social contexts, rarely is information provided about the mundane details of how the artists financially found the time and space in which to create the work. In this dissertation, I aim to demonstrate how the form and content of artistic practice as well as the economics of sustaining that form are shaped by their context inclusive of colleagues, cost of living, availability of space, broader trends in the use value of the arts and the more ineffable culture of a city. Though I have not interwoven writing about both the artistic and business aspects of theater-making, I have dedicated chapters to each in the hope that their proximity will communicate their kinship and interdependence.

A Company of Individuals

In 2000, Danzig, performers Paul Kalina and David Engel, fellow director Jon Sherman, set designer Dan Reilly, and I created *500 Clown Macbeth,* which premiered at Charybdis, a bowling alley turned art space on the Northwest side of Chicago. Six people attended opening night including Molly Brennan, an actress and improviser in town. Three weeks later – after no advertising but plenty of word of mouth -- over one hundred people filed into the space. In its second incarnation in spring of 2001, Engel opted out to pursue other theatrical interests and

Brennan joined the cast and the company. Sherman continued to help craft the narrative throughline of the show through 2002. Seven years after its debut, *500 Clown Macbeth* has toured to a variety of venues outside Chicago, had its seventh run in Chicago in summer of 2007 at the Steppenwolf Upstairs Theater as part of Steppenwolf's Visiting Company Initiative, and will continue to tour nationally and perhaps internationally from there. In 2003, 500 Clown created a second production, *500 Clown Frankenstein,* which also played multiple runs in and outside Chicago, played in repertory with *500 Clown Macbeth* at Steppenwolf and, later in 2007, will go to New York City's Performance Space 122. In 2005, 500 Clown premiered its third production, *500 Clown (sings) Christmas Carol(s),* simplified to *500 Clown Christmas* in 2006, which played for two seasons in Chicago and will travel with *Frankenstein* to Performance Space 122 in 2007. In 2007-08, the company will continue development of *500 Clown A Man's A Man*, based on Bertolt Brecht's play, as part of its three-year residency as Presidential Fellows in the Arts at University of Chicago. (See Appendix I for Production History.)

500 Clown uses action-based performance, improvisation and what it calls rough-style acrobatics to produce theater that catapults the performers into extreme physical and emotional risk, and the audience into an active and influential role. The company aims to create a charged environment that celebrates the unpredictable power of the moment. Whereas company members Brennan, Danzig, Kalina and I agree on that purpose, we failed to agree on a fixed definition of clown when we first began working together in 2000-2001. Each of us came to the form with different vocabularies and understanding derived from varied training and performance backgrounds including: studying with master clown teachers Philippe Gaulier, Ronlin Foreman, Joe Dieffenbacher and Jacques Lecoq; performing on the street in Canada and the United States; and encountering clown through improvisation, circus arts, and other theater

vocabularies. Company members found that verbal debates on clown stymied creative collaboration, but when translated into the physical activity of performing, the different views have led to energetic and complex productions.

When company members teach, they primarily *do*, rather than talk; yet inevitably students ask for definitions of clown theater. Understandably students want to develop conceptual frameworks in addition to their newly acquired practical skills. Journalists and critics ask what the form is. In post-show discussions, audience members ask what clown theater is or volunteer their own definitions as they try to make sense of what they have seen. 500 Clown company members do not mask their differences. They participate together in interviews and discussions. They teach in groups of three and four, alternating leading within a class, thereby giving students the experience of their different approaches. In other words, they teach what they have found to be true in rehearsals: The collision of viewpoints on what clown is gives rise to 500 Clown's brand of clown theater. In this dissertation I attempt to synthesize the collision into a coherent definition. Defining, of course, is a limiting act, yet I hope one that gives shape and parameters while maintaining the unruliness of practice.

Methodology

My methodology relies variously on participant observation, autoethnography, oral history, and the synthesis of secondary sources in order to create a detailed account of clown theater as developed and practiced by 500 Clown. My initial understanding of clown theater comes from my training first in dramatic-text-based theater and later in physical theater and clown with master teachers Jacques Lecoq, Philippe Gaulier and Ronlin Foreman, where I spent as much time observing pedagogical approaches as engaging in exercises as a clown student. Next are my roles in 500 Clown as director, teacher, and administrator. My engagement in

clown theater is continually deepening through rehearsing, watching performances, leading audience discussions, participating in marketing meetings, writing grant applications, speaking with journalists, creating course curriculum, and engaging in relationships with students, colleagues, producers, audience members and critics. I add to this my role as a scholar, which allows me to investigate clown theater's relationship to theater and performance history and theory. I interview teachers and colleagues in my dual role as artist and scholar, and hope that I will be able to translate our conversations into academic writing that does justice to this mostly non-verbal art form.

Scope and Limitation

To be clear, I am not arguing that what 500 Clown does defines clown theater in general; analogously, I do not think there is any fixed definition of the form transcendent of particular artistic practices. Furthermore, just as artistic practices are contingent on the contexts in which they are made, so too is writing about artistic practice. The act of translating theatrical practice into words happens in and for a particular context. Phillip Zarrilli, editor of *Acting (Re)Considered*, writes in his introduction "Theories of and Meditations on Acting":

> How are we to think and talk about acting if we cannot make 'truth' claims about acting …? First, we can begin by understanding that *all* languages of acting are highly metaphorical. We should not mistake a discourse *about* acting as a representation of the thing that the discourse attempts to describe – the practice of acting. Second, given the impossibility of ever fully describing acting, all languages of acting are necessarily inadequate and therefore provisional. Thus, all languages of acting need to be constantly (re)considered in relation to the particular context of their use and the degree to which a language can help us to

> make sense of the complexities of the bodymind's relationship to action/acting,
>
> and to the ideology implicit in any kind of acting. (16)

Zarrilli's provocation to continually re-consider the languages of acting in relation to the context and use of language prompts me to consider the context or purpose for this act of describing clown theater. This dissertation's discourse is intended to articulate a particular practice as a means towards participating in and generating further conversation about the form. Because little has been written about the form, perhaps this language can provide a backboard with and against which other approaches can be described and dialogues begun. Though I hope this writing will feed back into artistic practice, I also know that it occupies a place outside practice and will therefore traffic in the terrain of provisional languages on clowning and clown theater.

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two, "500 Clown in Chicago," charts the emergence and development of 500 Clown specifically in Chicago in a context of colleagues, theaters and the City of Chicago itself. Rather than introducing the company as a series of biographies, timelines and production history, I aim to describe a multitude of factors that determine a company's growth outside of artistic vision alone.

Chapter Three, "Defining Clown," moves towards a definition of clown as a practice consisting of eight actions. It concludes with a recognition that clown exists in a specific context, which leads to chapters four, five and six, each of which addresses specific aspects of theater as a context for clowning. Chapter Four, "Theater as Context: A Practice of Play in Action," examines how play and action function in clown theater. Chapter Five, "Audience as Player: A Practice of Spectatorship," investigates the role of the audience in clown theater and how the form provokes a particular practice of spectatorship. Chapter Six, "Clown Theater

Discourse: Narrative Through Disruption," examines storytelling in clown theater with a focus

on how disruption, a core element of clowning, shapes its narrative discourse.

I conclude with Chapter Seven, "Turning Artistic Practice into Business," in which I

return to 500 Clown as a company. I address 500 Clown's goal of becoming a viable business

by focusing on the economics of theater-making in early-twenty-first-century United States, the

company's transition from being a forprofit to a nonprofit organization, and the codification of

artistic practice. Lastly, I return to considerations of theory and practice, analytic and artistic.

Reading Tips

As noted already, 500 Clown is Molly Brennan, Adrian Danzig, Paul Kalina, and I. I

refer to company members, excluding myself, by their last names. In the context of describing

productions I often refer to Brennan, Danzig and Kalina by their clown character names, which

are the same in all 500 Clown productions to date. Brennan chose the name Kevin after sharing

an experience with Danzig and Kalina in *Macbeth* rehearsals. She was in a bar. A guy was

trying to pick her up. She expressed her disinterest in various ways but to no avail. The guy

asked her name, and she replied, "Kevin," to which he replied, "But that's a guy's name." And

she said, "Yeah." He left. Clearly her name plays with gender and expectation, though not in

any simple clear way, which characterizes Brennan's performance presence. She prefers not to

be classifiable as any gender type, but rather just herself, which is tough, vulnerable, amicable

and monstrous. Danzig plays Bruce, inspired by the subversive and maverick comedian Lenny

Bruce. Kalina plays Shank. Kalina was last to come upon his name, not finding it until the

show's second run in spring of 2001. After trying out different names with none of them

sticking, Brennan and Danzig decided to name him at load-in to the Chopin Theater, two days

before opening night. Kalina resisted, thrown into a tizzy that he was going to be named, and

Danzig said something like, "You're acting like you have a shank in your head." Kalina heard

the word "shank" and knew that was his name, appropriately meaning stubborn and functional.

Though their names are consistent in the productions, the relationships between

performers (Brennan, Danzig and Kalina) and their clowns (Kevin, Bruce and Shank) are

slippery. Just like an actor is both himself and his character, always constituting a double

presence on stage, so it is true for the relationship between performer and his clown character.

However, whereas the double presence of actor and character can be somewhat easily broken

down into the actor and character that has been written by a playwright, the divisions in clown

theater are not as clear. In clown theater, the characters are not written by a playwright but rather

generated by the double presence of the performer's non-clowning and clowning selves, a topic I

address in Chapter Three. My choices to use the performer or clown's name are determined by

the particulars of each discussion.

Regarding the productions themselves, for the most part I provide examples and

descriptions of *500 Clown Macbeth* and *500 Clown Frankenstein,* hereafter sometimes referred

to as simply *Macbeth* and *Frankenstein.* At times I make quick reference to *500 Clown*

Christmas, but have chosen not to focus on that production since its form is more clown-concert

and clown-holiday-party than clown theater. In Chapter Three, I address this distinction further

when I look at the significance of clowning's different contexts.

Chapter Six focuses on the narrative structure of *500 Clown Macbeth* and *Frankenstein*,

yet because I refer to the productions frequently prior to that chapter, I will provide each

production's storyline here to anchor those references. In *Macbeth*, three clowns descend upon

the stage to tell the story of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In doing so, they are thwarted by their own

ambition to get the crown, which makes an entrance about a quarter of the way through the

show. The crown is just out of reach. Initially, the three clowns pool their resources and try to reach the crown, working cooperatively. Their efforts are hampered by miscommunication, misunderstanding, and mishaps of all kinds. As the clowns get closer and closer to the crown, tension builds and eventually fractures their cohesiveness, until each clown, covered in blood, stands alone, disconnected from his or her partners. When the clowns speak their final word, "Macbeth," the stage collapses, engulfing two of the clowns. One remains alone on stage with the crown high above him or her.

In *Frankenstein,* three clowns enter to tell the story of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. As in *Macbeth,* the clowns are thwarted by a host of problems: Shelley's novel is missing, the candle by which they read blows out, the designated reader is illiterate, the laboratory table's unpredictable behavior makes it monstrous to the clowns, and, perhaps most significantly, they do not have anyone to play the dead body out of which the doctor will create life. The clowns solve this last problem by forcing one of their own – Shank – to play the creature. Bruce and Kevin relentlessly abuse him in order to have him retaliate against his creator, thereby enacting Shelley's story. Shank does retaliate and, in the ensuing struggle, Bruce dies. Shank desperately tries to revive Bruce, but Kevin coaches him to exit and set himself on fire, as written in the novel. She closes the book and says "Blackout."

CHAPTER TWO
500 CLOWN IN CHICAGO

500 Clown was born and raised in Chicago. Though two of its founders were in New York City practicing theater for years before coming to Chicago –my spouse Adrian Danzig and me -- 500 Clown did not happen there. Chicago in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is a specific context for this company. 500 Clown's productions happened in certain venues because of particular networks of artists, companies, universities and presenters. The artistic inquiry that drives 500 Clown was born amongst other artistic inquiries. The physical scale and long-term development process of 500 Clown's work was enabled by the availability of space and time particular to Chicago's economy. Mapping 500 Clown's development in Chicago tells a particular story of Chicago as a theater town, and 500 Clown, as a Chicago theater company.

Origins are tricky. When does this story of 500 Clown in Chicago begin? 500 Clown was born out of a few individuals' aspirations formed over the course of many years. Though there are some revelatory moments when one has a vision of what one should do, even those moments (and they tend to be few) are culminations of years of training, practice, inspirations and experiences. The revelations are not points of origins themselves. Given that the focus of this chapter is specifically on 500 Clown in Chicago, I choose as my point of departure the arrival of two of 500 Clown's founding members – Danzig and me -- in Chicago in summer of 1996. Our move from New York City was motivated by a merit scholarship Danzig received for MFA studies in the Performance Department of The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Danzig and I arrived in Chicago with, totaled between us, approximately thirty-six years of theater training and experiences that included conventional approaches to text-based theater

as well as physical theater, gymnastics, mask and clown. I received my core training in acting at Herbert Berghof Studio in New York City, playwrighting with Paula Vogel at Brown University, physical theater at Ecole Jacques Lecoq in Paris, and clown with Philippe Gaulier in London. Danzig's training included acting at New York City's High School of Performing Arts, gymnastics with The Big Apple Circus, and clowning with Ctibor Turba and Philippe Gaulier, among others. "As a young person, I didn't have a particularly good connection to emotion, to exposing an emotional life on stage, but I was told that I had a powerful physical presence on stage, and the clown has come from a series of 'yeses' I found I could say to what I can do" (Danzig, 6 June 2006).

Danzig and I also brought with us to Chicago an inquiry: how to effectively integrate clown and theater. Two months prior to our arrival in Chicago, Danzig and I created and performed our first attempt at a hybrid form of clown theater -- a twenty-minute two-clown show based on Dante's *Inferno* at New York City's downtown avant-garde performance center, Performance Space 122. Danzig told PS 122's then artistic director Mark Russell that he would develop a full-evening clown theater piece, to which Russell replied clown couldn't sustain such a show. Danzig decided to take on that challenge.

Early Chicago Encounters

Upon arrival in Chicago, Danzig and I quickly encountered the city's well-known homegrown grassroots theater movement. By homegrown I refer to a vast array of theater companies started by Chicagoans, often recent graduates of colleges and universities in or near Chicago, who make theater in storefronts, basements, gymnasiums, churches, and sometimes apartments. Richard Christensen, former theater critic with the *Chicago Tribune*, finds it noteworthy how many theater artists choose to remain in or return to Chicago as their careers

develop. "The artistic directors of the city's top three theaters – Robert Falls at Goodman, Martha Lavey at Steppenwolf, and Barbara Gaines at Chicago Shakespeare Theater – all started their careers in Chicago and worked their way up to their top positions in the 1980s and 1990s" (288-289).

In Chicago's off-loop theaters, located outside the loop circumscribed by elevated train racks around Chicago's downtown business district, Danzig and I encountered a world of devised theater, often non-text-based theater. I remember first encountering the term "devised theater" in 1993, when taking a course with Gaulier entitled "Writing and Directing," which comes almost at the end of a year-long curriculum including Le Jeu (Play), Neutral Mask, Greek Tragedy, Bouffons, Melodrama, Mask Play, Characters, Shakespeare-Chekhov, and Clowns. Though there is no course specifically entitled "Devised Theater," it was a general term used at the school.

"Devised theater" refers to theater that is created by actors, director, designers and anyone on the production team who, as the word devise suggests, form an idea and figure out how to translate that idea into a theatrical language. Conception happens in rehearsals with all the players, not by a playwright or creator outside the rehearsal studio. Devised theater describes a working method but not a show itself, and thus rarely carries over to marketing language. Often the term used to describe both process and product is "physical theater," broadly defined as theater that uses the body as its main source of communication and expression rather than the written, and in performance, spoken word.

In September 2006, Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs hosted a panel on physical theater to kick off a season of physical theater productions in its theaters -- The Storefront Theater, The Studio Theater and The Claudia Cassidy Theater -- all located downtown in and

near the Chicago Cultural Center. The five panelists from Chicago theater companies, along with audience members, many of whom were fellow theater artists, debated the pros and cons of using the term physical theater as well as its possible definitions. Does the fact that all theater is physical render the term meaningless? Jon Sherman, an early collaborator with 500 Clown who later founded his own company called sprung, prefers to call his work "movement theater" because not all theater uses movement to tell stories. Larry Distasi of The Lookingglass Theatre Company and The Actors Gymnasium described the relation of physical theater's choreography to three-dimensional space as similar to the relation of poetry to the written page. David Catlin, also of Lookingglass, described physical theater as having the power to impart meaning and understanding through image and metaphor rather than through spoken language. But all seemed to agree that what was loosely being called physical theater shared an actor-based process of collaborative development to mold scripts through physical bodies in motion.

Beginning in 1996, Danzig and I quickly sought out theater companies devising original work whose performance languages combined circus, dance, visual storytelling, puppetry, improvisation and spoken language. Companies and artists were investigating not only theatrical form, but also long-term processes of development, company structure, and relationships with communities, neighborhoods and audiences. One of the first companies we encountered was Redmoon Theater. Danzig had worked with the company in 1989, when it was founded by Blair Thomas, who attended Oberlin College with Danzig. Thomas resigned in 1998 to pursue other theatrical projects; his co-artistic director Jim Lasko became and continues to be sole artistic director. But even without Danzig's personal connection with Thomas, Redmoon was and continues to be a relatively accessible company to get involved with, in large part because it needs a lot of manpower for its large-scale outdoor spectacle performances. Consequently,

Redmoon serves as a meeting ground for theater and visual artists in Chicago. In brief, the company creates theatrical spectacles that aim to forge relationships between audience members, the productions themselves and the environments in which they take place, which sometimes are theaters but more often are parks, lakes, streets, or public squares. Redmoon, as part of its vision, describes that it "speak[s] a universal, highly visual language accessible to all (regardless of age, education and culture) and grounded in the dynamic elements of spectacle: hand-crafted objects, aggressive physical movement, whimsical mechanical devices, masks, puppets, and live music" (Redmoon).

Figure 2-1. *All Hallow's Ritual Eve Celebration.* **Photo: Redmoon Theater**

Redmoon's annual production calendar has changed over the years as its headquarters and therefore neighborhood community have changed. According to its mission statement in the mid-nineties, its community outreach was specifically connected to its local neighborhood, Logan Square, where it ran two children's art programs and developed ways for the local community to participate in its annual spectacles. In the mid-1990s, and for several years thereafter, Redmoon's annual offerings included three non-narrative spectacle productions -- the *All Hallows' Eve Ritual Celebration,* a Halloween parade and show; the *Winter Pageant,* an indoor event celebrating the winter solstice and changing of seasons; and an outdoor summer event -- as well as an indoor production that told a story using spectacle and other theatrical vocabularies. These productions relied on a large group of performers to devise and perform characters, choreography and performance acts as well as lead community participants in the performances. Largely it was volunteer or minimally paid work and consequently attracted young performers and artists, either in or recently out of college, interested in learning about large-scale spectacle theater, community organizing, and mentoring children as well as acquiring skills in stilt-walking, fire-eating, and puppetry. As important was the desire to meet like-minded peers. A small core of people from its early days have remained with Redmoon, eventually moving into paid positions administrating and running artistic programs. Many have moved on to other theater ventures, often collaborating with former Redmoon colleagues.

Another early encounter was with an ensemble-based theater called The Lookingglass Theatre Company (LTC), founded by graduates of Northwestern University in 1989. Ensemble member and former artistic director Laura Eason describes the ensemble's initial vision "to bring theater to a more visual place" (Eason). According to Eason, the ensemble was inspired by artists such as Robert Wilson, Pina Bausch and Laurie Anderson, who are known for their

visually spectacular works that create meaning not through text alone, but through intersections of text, dance, video, visual art, rock 'n' roll and opera among other elements. Eason observed that the kind of theater Lookingglass was doing could be read as a retaliation to the predominant Chicago aesthetic of realist meat and potatoes performance championed by one of Chicago's most renowned companies, Steppenwolf Theater Company, and I would add to that, one of Chicago's most renowned playwrights, David Mamet. Eason remembers that in the early days of envisioning Lookingglass' mission, the visual and physical work that inspired the company members was not based in Chicago, though might have passed through town thanks to The International Theater Festival of Chicago, which lasted from 1986 to 1996, and Performing Arts Chicago, which was founded in 1959 and closed its doors in 2005.

In addition to the two companies that Danzig and I quickly encountered were a variety of individual shows and companies pursuing hybrid forms of physical and verbal improvisation, circus arts, puppetry, and visual spectacle. Defiant Theater (1993-2004) was known for its muscular approaches to text-based plays. Plasticene was and still is innovating its own physical vocabulary and process based on working with a single resource like doors or chalkboards. *Illustrious Bloodspill* created by Bryn Magnus and an ensemble of performers (from Redmoon and Plasticene, among others) was a long-running show in 1996-1997, with a live rock band and choreography derived from movie action scenes. Goat Island, which is now working on its final production before terminating, engaged in long-term development of original physical performance pieces, using a church as its home-base. This list is by no means comprehensive, but rather includes the companies and shows that introduced Danzig and me to the physically-based homegrown Chicago theater scene.

The significance of these early encounters for the development of 500 Clown is both intangible and tangible. On one level there was the important but elusive consequence of being part of a community of artists and a context of artistic inquiry that fueled our own aesthetic ideas, which predictably are developed through conversations and in reaction to others' experimentation. Visions of company structures are developed in reaction to experiencing and watching the successes and failures of other models of organization. Additionally there were the tangible outcomes like meeting David Engel through Redmoon who would be part of the first production of *500 Clown Macbeth*, and meeting Meghan Strell in *Illustrious Bloodspill* and John Musial, a Lookingglass ensemble member, who shared an over-sized loft that would be 500 Clown's first rehearsal space. The other tangible outcome was participating in productions that combined circus arts and theater at Lookingglass and the Midnight Circus.

Theater and Circus Collide

In 1993, Lookingglass was introduced to circus while devising its production of *Master and Margherita*, adapted by Heidi Stillman and directed by Stillman and David Catlin. Jeff Jenkins, the production's clowning workshop leader, recommended that Sylvia Hernandez be brought onto the production team to choreograph an aerial act and teach the requisite skills. Hernandez had grown up in a circus family performing a world-renowned teeterboard act. Her first exposure to theater was choreographing an aerial act for *The Ice Wolf* at Chicago's DePaul Theater School, a job gotten through a fluke of a friend of a friend overhearing a conversation in the school cafeteria about needing an aerialist for a show. Eason describes the impact of circus on Lookingglass as adding a new dimension to what the company could do. Rather than limit their imaginations to visual images created on the floor, they could now move into the air to tell their stories (Eason). LTC's rehearsal space on 16th street became a workout space for

Hernandez, LTC company members, and partners Jenkins, a Chicago-based clown, and Julie

Greenberg, an actress. Together, Jenkins and Greenberg went on to continue their training and

teach at Circus Smirkus, a youth-based circus in Vermont.

Prior to this time, Chicago journalist Tony Adler interviewed a group of LTC ensemble

members about the remounting of *The Arabian Nights*. In that interview, ensemble members

"talked about their dreams of having an 'Actors Gymnasium,' where they could take classes all

day before rehearsals and performances at night. It would be a place to study dance, music,

puppetry, voice, mime, acting, clowning and more. A place where you could work out all of

your 'actors' muscles,' not just your biceps and calves" (Distasi). Two years later at an Evanston

Arts Council meeting, Adler learned about an available space in Evanston's Noyes Cultural Arts

Center and called LTC with the news that he had found a possible site for the gymnasium. LTC

was not in a position to start such an organization, but Distasi and Hernandez (they would later

be married) were, and with Adler and another Chicago actor named Carlyle Coash, they began

The Actors Gymnasium in 1995. Adler's intent "was to create a 'safe haven' where (a) selected

theater artists would have the time, money, and space to experiment and (b) cross-fertilization

could occur between those selected artists and the physical theater skills we were teaching. In

my vision of it, resident artists would be free to steal a few licks from an acrobatics class or

borrow students to take part in their explorations. Early on I wanted to call the place ACTEX, an

abbreviation for American Center for Theatrical Experimentation. So the classes weren't just a

means to an end – they were part of the concept. What wasn't part of the concept were the

CHILDREN'S classes that turned out to be our best revenue stream. Unable to get funding for

the core mission, we went with what worked" (Adler 18 September 2007). Adler left The Actors

Gymnasium in 2003. Over the years, The Actors Gymnasium has regularly produced showcases

for students and faculty, and more recently, it has produced its own Flying Griffin Circus and developed a program in which adult students can propose projects that, if accepted, the gymnasium will co-produce.

The Actors Gymnasium, as its name indicates, serves as a training base for theater professionals as well as for the general public including adults and children. Classes are offered in circus arts, gymnastics, stage combat, juggling, acro-dance, puppetry, magic, mime, clown, and voice. The physical space (25-foot ceiling at its apex, sprung floor, and rigging) has enabled Lookingglass to create and rehearse circus acts for its shows. Danzig played the title role in LTC's *Baron of the Trees* in 1999, and remembers workshops at The Actors Gymnasium. "Working on an Equity contract gives you no time to discover and develop circus acts, so they made workshops that were not mandatory in which we developed the choreography. … The choreographer was the trainer [Sylvia Hernandez-Distasi].… She had to find out what we could do and be able to perform a hundred percent of the time when the show was running" (Danzig, 11 January 2007).

Two years after The Actors Gymnasium was founded, Chicago became home to another company combining circus and theater, The Midnight Circus, founded by Greenberg and Jenkins, who trained alongside Hernandez at the 16th Street Lookingglass rehearsal space. Though Greenberg and Jenkins found ample space with Lookingglass and eventually The Actors Gymnasium to continue training, they discovered that Chicago fell flat in terms of offering performance opportunities for their newly developing circus act. So Jenkins and Greenberg took matters in their own hands and that effort resulted in *When Circus and Theater Collide*, of which Danzig was a part. The show opened in 1997, and ran for almost a year, first at the National Pastime Theater and then at the now closed Ivanhoe Theater. *When Circus and Theater Collide*

launched the company Midnight Circus, which has since developed into an active performing, touring, and teaching company with its high-profile annual Midnight Circus Chicago Halloween circus spectacle in downtown Chicago.

In 1998, *PerformInk*, Chicago's trade paper for theater, ran a story titled "Chicago: Circustown USA?" It opened with the following statement: "Circus training in Chicago: 10 years ago that would have been an oxymoron. But in the past five years, with the success of training centers such as The Actors Gymnasium and what might have been the most influential show in Chicago last year, *The Midnight Circus,* all that has changed. Actors and non-actors can now study a variety of acrobatic and trapeze arts, as well as clowning, at various locations throughout town" (Long). Both The Actors Gymnasium and the Midnight Circus provided the means to bring actual circus skills into the theater including high-wire and slack-wire, web, trapeze, and acrobatics. And their presence and work broke down a mystique around circus, a barrier, which was actually quite real. Greenberg attributes the experimentation in theater and circus to something farther-reaching than Chicago's local scene. As the walls around Eastern-block nations literally and figuratively fell, circus artists from those nations began arriving in the United States seeking performance and teaching opportunities. The availability of circus arts teachers made accessible a formerly inaccessible art form. According to Greenberg, historically, "skills passed from family to family, it was a closed thing. And if you weren't in the family, you couldn't get them" (Greenberg). Now several international circus arts performers and teachers have made Chicago their home and workplace. Nourbol Meirmanov runs Meirmanov SportsAcro and coaches a variety of performance projects, Gloria and Julio Gaona run the Flying Gaonas Gym -- a flying trapeze and circus arts school -- and Nyangar Batbaatar of Mongolia is the lead acrobatics instructor of the Midnight Circus.

Integrating theater and circus requires time to train and substantial square footage and ceiling height, which Danzig and I found to be available resources in Chicago. "The original Midnight Circus was basically a theater artist, circus performer and circus trainer getting together and making something happen, and that was the kind of thing that would have taken thousands of dollars in New York.… Because space is so expensive in New York, people don't have as much time because they're spending more time making money" (Danzig 11 January 2007). In 1996, when Danzig and I arrived in Chicago from New York City, we were able to rent for approximately $1200 per month a 1300-square foot storefront work/live space on the outskirts of Wicker Park, which included 900-square feet of open space with 13-foot ceilings. It was a far cry from our $800/month 600-square foot apartment in New York City's East Village (which itself was quite a deal). Our storefront was able to accommodate a red scaffold, which Danzig had kept in storage for six years. This scaffold was later to become the central set piece and driving force of physical action for *500 Clown Macbeth.*

500 Clown Macbeth is Born

In the midst of these various collaborations, Danzig began to develop the idea of a circus-based *Macbeth.* The original idea actually belonged to Danzig's colleague Michael Goldberg, which he shared with Danzig, Greenberg and Jenkins. Greenberg and Jenkins worked on a *Macbeth* production with Defiant Theater. Danzig spun the idea in his own direction. Referring to that community of artists in the late 1990s, he remembers, "that was the caldron in which the concept [of *500 Clown Macbeth*] came into existence and that's important because what you had there were theater artists who were stretching themselves to become viable circus artists and doing a pretty good job of it, being able to imagine things that people couldn't imagine otherwise. Being in a context of those people is when you start to really have good ideas"

(Danzig 11 January 2007). The other and much larger caldron out of which *500 Clown Macbeth* emerged holds the legions of adaptations and transformations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* or "modern Shakespeare offshoots" to borrow Ruby Cohn's umbrella term. Cohn calls these *Macbeth* offshoots "*e*xpressions of a particular enthusiasm. These expressions form a discontinuous history of modern theater, and that history begins on December 10, 1896, with the first performance of *Ubu Roi"* (62).

Danzig's first idea for *500 Clown Macbeth* was to have five clowns saying, "When shall we three meet again?" what he calls a "stupid idea." Danzig was following his clown teacher Philippe Gaulier's advice, whom he remembers as saying, "to make a clown show you need one very stupid idea. And so that was the idea" (Danzig 11 January 2007). Then there were the auxiliary ideas, including playing with the well-known theater superstition that saying the word "Macbeth" in a theater will result in bad luck and accidents. "The idea of superstition was to have something majorly collapse every time the word 'Macbeth' was said.… More than the circus arts actor stuff, it's the circus arts rigging: things could fall in a really controlled way, things could collapse, somebody could ride a piece of set to the ground from the ceiling, hold a moving motorcycle in the air.… You can think different things" (Danzig 11 January 2007). The predominant mode of developing the vision for *500 Clown Macbeth* was conversation between Danzig, former Redmoon colleague David Engel and me. In January 1999, Danzig and Engel met Paul Kalina at an audition for Big Apple Circus Clown Care, held at The Actors Gymnasium. Clown Care is a community program founded in 1986 by Michael Christiansen and run by New York City's Big Apple Circus. The program brings clowns into children's hospitals. Clowns are paid and become part of a highly structured team that undergoes orientation, on-going training, and therapy to help deal with the intensity of the work. In

addition, clowns participate in annual retreats that bring together the seventeen teams from around the country for socializing and ongoing training with master clown teachers.

Kalina was at the Clown Care audition after having recently moved back to Chicago. In his training at Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre in 1996-1997, he found that clown and physical theater practice allowed him to become more emotionally available as a performer, less locked up, less introverted and less stuck in his head. Based in San Francisco for a couple of years after training at Dell'Arte, Kalina founded Le Pamplemousse with former Dell'Arte student and circus equestrian Annie Dugan. Le Pamplemousse was a street clown act. Kalina credits his street performing with teaching him how to play with audiences and turning on his passion for trafficking in the uncertainty of that relationship: Who is going to play? Who is not going to play? In 1999, Kalina chose to return to Chicago, where he had been doing theater and stunt work prior to his sojourn out West.

Kalina and Danzig's meeting at the Clown Care audition led to increasingly lengthy late night phone conversations riffing on a clown version of *Macbeth*; months later they launched *500 Clown Macbeth* with $3000 out of Danzig's personal bank account, which has since been paid back by the company. Rehearsals were in fellow artists Meghan Strell and John Musial's 4000-square foot loft in the South Loop. Charybdis was chosen to be the performance space, a 14,000 square foot multi-arts complex run by Gregor Mortis. The former bowling alley turned performance, exhibition and rehearsal space was located on the northwest side of Chicago. *500 Clown Macbeth* was a performer-centered production, in the sense that it was conceived by the performers and rehearsed often without a director in the room. I came to an early rehearsal, not holding the title of director, but rather as outside eye and collaborator. I brought in woodcut images accompanying an edition of *Macbeth* to provoke physical improvisations. The opening

of the show then and now is physically embodying the heath, an action derived from one of those woodcut-inspired improvisations. Jon Sherman, who arrived in Chicago in summer of 2000 after completing the training program at the Lecoq School, joined me as outside eye.

Another collaborator on the show in addition to Danzig, Kalina, Engel, Sherman and me was designer Dan Reilly, a former Redmoon designer. Danzig would go over to Reilly's house to teach him about clown and essentially empower him to construct a design that could support the clown theater form. The goal was for Reilly to make a playground for clown. Danzig and Reilly's early discussions lead to a masterfully engineered scaffold (the formerly mentioned red scaffold) and a series of platforms that collapse at different times and in various ways during the show creating uncertainty in the performers and audience.

When *500 Clown Macbeth* opened in October 2000, the massive Charybdis space still held remnants from "Recess! The Playground For Adults." The space had been transformed into a playground complete with treehouse, skee-ball, video games, cargo climbing nets (which the clowns climbed down for their entrance), slot-car racing, swings, slide, and half-pipe for skateboarders. On closing night, November 4, 2000, *500 Clown Macbeth* was absorbed into the next Charybdis event, "Hell Ain't a Bad Place to Be," a Halloween extravaganza featuring bands, performers, and interactive exhibitions. Charybdis was ousted from its space in 2002, after ongoing clashes with the ward's alderman. Charybdis, itinerant to the present day, still maintains an active website that documents the Public Zoning Hearings leading to its ouster.

After *500 Clown Macbeth* closed at Charybdis, Danzig and Kalina wanted to keep working on the show. Engel opted to pursue other theater work, leaving an opening in the cast. In the audience on opening night at Charybdis was Molly Brennan, another recent addition to Big Apple Circus Clown Care's Chicago team. At that time, Brennan was making her living

acting with the Factory Theater; teaching part-time with Barrel of Monkeys, a theater company that performs plays written by grade school children in their in-school playwriting programs; and doing short-form improvisation at Navy Pier, a lakefront entertainment center and boardwalk with rides, shops, restaurants, theaters, exhibition halls and museum. Big Apple Circus' Clown Care exposed Brennan to a world of theatrical clowning different from more familiar circus and birthday party clowning, and led her to understand the clowning components already inherent in her improvisational work.   When Brennan saw *500 Clown Macbeth*, she recognized in it the kind of work she wanted to be doing, jumped at the chance to audition when Engel left, and was invited to join the company.

City of Fools: Showcasing Clown theater

500 Clown Macbeth's second incarnation with Danzig, Kalina and Brennan took place in March through April 2001, as part of the City of Fools Clown Theater Festival produced by Danzig at the Chopin Theater in Wicker Park. City of Fools was an effort on Danzig's part to celebrate what he identified as uniquely strong and vibrant clown theater activity in Chicago, evidenced by five resident clown theaters at the time. Danzig's vision as he described it in the festival's press release was "to develop Chicago's sense of what clowning is and help each company get a sense of its unique energy." Danzig sought to engage artists and audiences in the exploration of the question, "What is clown theater?" through an array of clown theater performances and classes.

In addition to presenting *500 Clown Macbeth*, festival activities included performances by Asylum 137, a 4-person all-male ensemble that used a flexible scenario and close attention to audience reaction to structure the show. The company eventually dissolved in part because one member went to work with Cirque du Soleil and another with Blue Man Group. Also on the

roster was Theatre Corps, a short-lived company founded and directed by former Lecoq

student Blake Montgomery, who worked with Jon Sherman (of sprung) and Redmoon, and later

founded his own theater space called The Building Stage. Danzig invited two performers with

solo shows from Toronto, who came with their clown teacher and director Sue Morrison, then

artistic director of Toronto's Theatre Resource Centre. There were also late night cabarets, a

clown jam in the form of a public improvisation by all the participating performers, classes

taught by Morrison, and a class and discussion on clown led by clown historian Dominique

Jando, then Associate Artistic Director of The Big Apple Circus. (See Appendix II for Festival

Schedule).

Danzig's goals were twofold. Firstly, Danzig wanted to give artists working in clown

theater a chance to develop their work in the context of their colleagues in Chicago and beyond,

thereby being "challenged by each other to become better" (Goddu, PerformInk). Secondly,

Danzig wanted to develop larger audiences for clown theater. "I'm convinced there is a big

enough audience out there for all of us and that the more the audience sees, the more discerning

they will get and our work will become better because they (the audiences) will need it to be"

(Goddu, PerformInk). In the press release for the festival, Danzig credited Chicago as a site for

the festival, writing "City of Fools is indebted to Chicago which has provided us with the time,

space and audience needed to develop this emerging genre."

Reflecting back six years later on what 500 Clown learned from participating in City of

Fools, Danzig finds two critical new ideas for the company. One was that there was an audience,

and it included a broader age range than what the company initially expected after its debut at

Charybdis. The anecdote the company remembers is that a sixty-year old woman celebrated her

birthday with friends by coming to the show, a demographic 500 Clown did not expect.

Secondly, Danzig grew aware that *500 Clown Macbeth* was significantly different from the other clown theater shows that the Festival hosted. The more typical clown theater show is a short or evening-length introduction of a clown character to an audience, where the character is the subject of the performance. *500 Clown Macbeth* had a narrative arc that emerged from what the clown characters do; that arc becomes the subject of the show, not the clown characters themselves. Noticing this distinction factored into the company's decision to continue working.

After the City of Fools Festival, 500 Clown decided to independently produce *500 Clown Macbeth,* returning to the Chopin Theater for a run in spring of 2002, and then at Pulaski Park Auditorium, a Chicago Park District building, in fall of 2002. As 500 Clown became a known entity among its artistic peers, and as *500 Clown Macbeth* proved its ongoing appeal with returning and new audiences, the company was invited to enter into presenting and co-production agreements that marked a transition from producing independently.

PAC/Edge Festival: Reflecting and Manufacturing a Hub

In spring of 2002, Susan Lipman, director of Performing Arts Chicago (PAC) invited 500 Clown and eight other companies to participate in the first annual PAC/edge Festival in late winter of 2003. 500 Clown was just beginning work on its second production, *500 Clown Frankenstein*, and decided to premiere the work in the festival, thereby entering into a presenting agreement with PAC. PAC was established in 1959, and was known as a presenter of chamber music until it expanded its mission in 1992 to present a broader array of contemporary performing arts and bring national and international companies to Chicago. Alongside PAC was The International Theater Festival of Chicago, which closed in 1996. The Museum of Contemporary Art's performance program, which began when the museum opened in 1967, continues today under the direction of Peter Taub, who came on board in 1996, when the new

MCA building opened housing a 300-seat theater. Taub was formerly curator at Randolph

Street Gallery, an artist-run venue for and presenter of performance and visual art, in operation

from 1979 through 1998. The Columbia Dance Center is an active presenter of dance, and the

intimate Links Hall, which used to primarily present dance, is now presenting a wider range of

non-text-based performance, under the leadership of CJ Mitchell, formerly manager of Goat

Island. Additionally, Chicago Shakespeare Theater has been bringing in international theater

artists. Its 2007-08 season includes James Thiérrée who creates visually spectacular works and

the legendary director Peter Brook.

Lipman, in the 2003 PAC/edge program, writes that the festival was conceived "in

response to a groundswell of brilliant work being created within Chicago and the perception of a

local audience prepared to embrace these works." The most prominent part of PAC/edge was the

performance festival held at Chicago's Athenaeum Theater, a complex in Chicago's Lakeview

neighborhood. The complex houses three blackbox theaters, a large auditorium (seating almost

1000), bar and lounge, and over-sized stairwells and hallway spaces, all of which the festival

used for performances, site-specific installations and visual arts exhibitions. Additionally, the

Athenaeum provides low-cost office space to arts organizations including Lookingglass;

Redmoon had an office there before it relocated to its own headquarters, appropriately called

Redmoon Central, in Chicago's West Town neighborhood. Other components of the PAC/Edge

Festival included helping to build networks between artists, between artists and arts-in-education

programs, and between Chicago artists and national and international presenters. PAC also had a

partnership with the School of the Art Institute, which was a co-presenter of the Festival.

The invited companies to the six-week festival included 500 Clown, Curious Theater

Branch (producer of *Illustrious Bloodspill*), Plasticene, Blair Thomas (who by then had left

Redmoon to begin Blair Thomas & Company), Lucky Pierre (a multi-disciplinary art-making

performance collective), Oobleck (a theater company adamant about not having a director and

offering sliding scale ticket prices determined by the ticket buyer), David Kodeski (a writer and

performer who creates shows based on oral history, memory, diaries and photographs), and

Albany Park Theater (a multi-ethnic ensemble of teenagers creating original theater out of the

real-life stories of Chicago's immigrant, working-class Albany Park neighborhood). I was also

invited as an independent artist and created DOG, a theater company, which created

performances for each of the three Pac/edge Festivals. Meghan Strell (who had the loft in which

500 Clown first rehearsed) ran a company called Local Infinities, which was a later invitee to the

festival. PAC/edge served as a meeting place for theater companies that Lipman identified as

working on the edge of a theatrical language. Companies negotiated shared theater spaces and

light plots, complicated rehearsal schedules, and informal promotion of each other's events.

Participating artists hiked up stairways hauling set pieces and props for each other, borrowed and

loaned ladders and other equipment, and stumbled upon each other rehearsing in out-of-the-way

corners. Some compared it to summer camp. PAC/edge ran for three years, 2003 to 2005, a year

that also marked the end of PAC.

500 Clown brought *500 Clown Frankenstein*, in different stages of development, to the

first two festivals. Just as Danzig hoped the City of Fools would help each participating

company to get a better sense of its unique energy in relation to other companies, so being in the

context of other companies in PAC/edge helped 500 Clown to know itself better. As to what was

learned, Danzig observes that firstly, 500 Clown recognized the value of not being a nonprofit

organization. 500 Clown was financially dependent on the number of people who came to see

the show. It was not, however, a simple financial equation. All profits from all the shows were

pooled together and then equally divided among companies. 500 Clown noticed how hard it worked to attract audiences and began to observe the ways in which that hustle to fill seats was different from what companies were doing that also received grants and donations from foundations and individuals. Danzig says, "that's the game of theater for us.…We're assuming the work is good.…What we have to do is get people to come to it.… This is connected to the perspective of clown on stage. The focus is does the audience enjoy this? Are they interested? If they are, that makes me happy" (23 February 2007). Participating in PAC/edge marked a transition for 500 Clown from independently producing itself to being presented and partially produced by other institutions.

Allying with Companies

A year and a half after the 2003 PAC/edge Festival, The Lookingglass Theatre Company produced *500 Clown Macbeth* in its 2004 summer slot in its new state-of-the-art home located in Chicago's chic and vibrant shopping district known as The Magnificent Mile. Lookingglass had moved into the landmark building that was formerly a pumping station in 2002, ending fifteen years of itinerancy. In the summer of 2007, 500 Clown once again ran *500 Clown Macbeth* in repertory with *500 Clown Frankenstein,* as part of Steppenwolf Theater Company's Visiting Company Initiative. This title was given to an already existing programming initiative that aimed to demonstrate a core value of citizenship as well as to recognize that the talent Steppenwolf uses comes out of Chicago's vital storefront theater scene. The initiative allows Steppenwolf to share its resources of space and staff, to foster the work of younger artists, and to build bridges with other companies through repeat visits. Both Lookingglass and Redmoon, before they moved into their own homes, appeared at Steppenwolf multiple times. The arrangement is neither outright rental nor donation, but a financial agreement aimed to benefit

both parties. The production budget includes visiting company costs as well as Steppenwolf's

administrative and production costs for the production. After these costs are met, profits, if there

are any, are divided between the two companies.

In these two cases, Lookingglass and Steppenwolf occupy a presenter/producer role for

the smaller company, 500 Clown, thereby providing several benefits. One is that by attaching

their names to 500 Clown's work, these hosting companies are essentially recommending 500

Clown to their audiences, many of whom are loyal subscribers. "It's like introducing somebody

to a good friend.... I think you'll really like each other" (Danzig, 23 February 2007). Secondly,

producers and presenters from out of town will travel to Chicago to see the show because of the

name recognition of the larger theater organization. Additionally, presenters look to the websites

of well-known theaters like Steppenwolf to develop their own programming ideas. They see 500

Clown listed and potentially get interested.

Allying with the City

In addition to these alliances with other theater companies, an alliance with the City of

Chicago has been integral to 500 Clown's development as a company. For any presenter or

producer of public events, contact with city government is inevitable. The city's zoning

regulations and fire and handicapped accessibility codes dictate what legally can and cannot

happen. Because 500 Clown does not run its own space, the company has dealt only indirectly

with the City on this level. The only noticeable impact on 500 Clown was having to replace the

exploding firecrackers in *500 Clown Macbeth* with an exploding hot water bottle (and later an

exploding balloon), a switch made for Lookingglass and again for Steppenwolf, and having to

use a battery-run candle in lieu of open flame in *500 Clown Frankenstein.*

Figure 2-2. "Ahhhh!!!" screams Bruce (Danzig) as firecrackers strapped to his crotch explode in *500 Clown Macbeth*. Photo: Steven Schapiro

Figure 2-3. "Make it stop!" pleads Bruce (Danzig) in *500 Clown Macbeth*.
Photo: Michael Brosilow

The out-of-the-way theater spaces in which 500 Clown began have been affected considerably

by Chicago's history of easing and tightening theater building codes. The 1903 Iroquois Theater

fire on Chicago's Randolph Street, which resulted in the greatest loss of life by a building fire in

the nation's history, set a course for theaters with newly written and better enforced building codes including lighted exit signs, "panic bars" for exit doors that opened out, and use of fire-proof materials in scenery. "Years later a new generation of theater artists that had set up shop in small basements, lofts, and second-story spaces was faced with the impossible task of complying with regulations that had been written with large auditoriums and proscenium-arch stages in mind" (Christensen 43).

Christensen picks up the thread of the impact of codes on Chicago theater-making in 1969, when, almost seven decades after the Iroquois fire, the Reverend James "Jim" Shiflett, director of the Community Arts Foundation (CAF), bought a rundown Lincoln Avenue storefront building as a center for CAF. It housed theater innovator Paul Sill's newly called Story Theater (a well-chronicled contribution to Chicago theater), William Russo's Free Theater, a rent-paying saloon, the Oxford Pub and other art activities. When Shiflett was faced with being closed down for building code violations, Shiflett and others rallied and

> organized a letter-writing campaign, and, through the advocacy writing of *Sun-Times* theater reviewer Glenna Syse, got significant support for the community art being produced at the Body Politic. 'When we had a meeting with Mayor [Richard J.] Daley about amending the building codes for the new, small theaters we were developing,' Shiflett says, 'he reached into a desk drawer and pulled out a piece of paper that turned out to be the basis for an ordinance that took care of our problems.' The ordinance, with new electrical and fire code provisions tailored for the small, nonproscenium spaces that were beginning to open, was voted into law by the City Council. After that, it became a little easier for storefront theaters to exist in Chicago. (152)

Fast-forwarding to 2005, colleague Blake Montgomery (participant in the City of Fools festival) directly confronted city codes and licensing procedures when he opened The Building Stage in 2005**,** whose purpose is "to support a working process that draws heavily on the physical theater tradition and its concept of the Actor-Creator" (Montgomery). When Montgomery chose to lease the space, formerly a warehouse in the West Loop's Kinzie industrial corridor, he opted to abide by all city regulations in order to make it a legitimate theater venue. His story provides insightful glimpses into the City of Chicago's regulatory culture. Firstly, Montgomery discovered an incongruity between artistic vision and legal compliance.

> One of my main goals for The Building Stage was to make this totally flexible space that could be an open workshop, a production facility … wanting to not have firm barriers between work area and stage, not wanting to have any fixed audience seating .… There's no real consideration of that in the building code.… So much of how it is done is codified.… If you're doing it this way, you have to do x, y, and z … like placement of exit signs in a space that can change around.… The simplest thing would be to make battery operating exit signs or put plugs on them and move them to wherever the exit is.… But they have to be hardwired … The code is about how to make a safe theater.… You don't have a conversation with anyone about what you're trying to do; all you have are pieces of paper that you give to a person at a desk and they say yes or no.… The City has learned that there is a thing called a blackbox theater that changes around, and you can apply for a different occupancy certificate for every set up you have… and that would take six weeks and each new one costs more money and takes time in a schedule

you can't foresee. So we applied for three different permits and then have to do that yearly.… To be legal is one thing and to be legal and support a vision that is not mainstream becomes really tough.

Secondly, Montgomery was at the mercy of a long timetable.

The city works on its own time frame.… First you have to apply to use this space that's not zoned for a theater … then a month later they say that's unacceptable (which you know will happen).… It's an appeal process -- you have to spend a month to get turned down before you can begin to appeal even though you know you'll have to do it. … We got that approval – that took four months and $15k in legal fees.… The city is trying to save money so the guy who is head of the zoning board of appeals, who is some prominent attorney or judge on his own time, does this one day a month.… So then in those four months the alderman gives you letter of support.… In the official zoning meeting, we get the verdict we're good but the guy in charge has been cut off having any secretarial support, so we wait 'til this guy types it up himself – another six weeks, and in that time we have our blueprints to turn into the building department to get the building permit but they won't accept the blueprints 'til they have the paper of the zoning approval.… Literally the two offices are next door to each other but they don't talk, and no one will process the paperwork until everything is there so that's another month and a half (and paying rent through this whole process). So we can start building now or we can wait 'til we get approved, but that can be six months, and everyone said you have to go ahead and build and hope you don't get major

changes requested once you get the building permit. So you build illegally,

then the permit comes and we find out we have to do extra work.

Montgomery goes on to describe how it takes two to three weeks to schedule an appointment

each time a change has to be made so that the architect can sit across a table from a city official

who says yes or no. "It leads to a bad design process … by the end you just get this weird

conglomeration of random fixes." Having been through the system as head of a theater venue,

Montgomery notices a significant change in his perspective, placing audience safety on a par

with, if not above, artistic interest.

Opting not to run its own theater space, 500 Clown has had direct contact with the City of

Chicago through use of city-run spaces. The company's first relationship with city space was

through the Chicago Parks Department (CPD). In a promotional statement on CPD's website,

the department's superintendent and Chief Executive Officer Timothy J. Mitchell writes, "We

are dedicated to providing high quality, affordable cultural programming to patrons throughout

the city."   A quick scan of park district programming includes performing arts, writing, visual

arts, outdoor and environmental education, clubs and games, early childhood recreation, and

fitness. Regarding the CPD's relationship with artists, the department offers a program called

Arts Partners in Residence, in which arts organizations use CPD space in exchange for offering

classes to community members. Additionally, CPD rents out rehearsal and performing spaces at

reasonable costs, which attracted 500 Clown to the Pulaski Park field house, constructed in 1914.

In fall of 2002, 500 Clown presented *500 Clown Macbeth* in the building's auditorium. Lights,

sound equipment, and box office staff were not provided. 500 Clown's audiences waited on long

lines to pay cash to a company friend working the ticket table, and then proceeded to make

themselves at home on metal fold-up chairs.

In the following summer of 2003, *500 Clown Macbeth* returned to another CPD building, Theater on the Lake (TOTL), a city-run theater complete with equipment and staff. TOTL, a partially out-of-doors venue located directly on Lake Michigan at Fullerton Avenue on Chicago's North side, began in 1952 as a summer theater presenting a season of hits from the past year's season at Chicago-area theaters. Selected companies transfer their shows to the theater for a week, in exchange for a flat fee, technical support, house management, box office services, and exposure to the theater's subscription and single-ticket buyers. *500 Clown Frankenstein* appeared at Theater on the Lake in summer of 2004.

500 Clown's next alliance with the City of Chicago occurred as part of the city's revitalization of the loop's theater district, an initiative described by Christensen in a chapter entitled "The New Theater Capital of the United States." The 1990's initiative, led by Mayor Richard Daley and his wife Maggie Daley, an avid arts supporter, resulted in a noticeable revitalization of Randolph Street, former home to the legendary Rice's Theatre in 1847, and now anchor of the newly dubbed "Downtown Theatre District." The District includes the reopened 1926 Oriental theatre at 24 West Randolph, currently home to the long-running Broadway show *Wicked,* the Palace at 171 West Randolph Street, and the relocation of the Goodman Theater to the corner of Randolph and Dearborn from its former home adjacent to the School of the Art Institute on Columbus Avenue. "In all, the city government put in nearly $60 million for the new/old Randolph Street theaters, plus about $7.7 million more for street decoration and signage heralding the new district" (Christensen 272). Additionally, hundreds of millions of private and public dollars were poured into Millennium Park just South of Randolph Street and West of Michigan Avenue, which houses the Harris Theater of New Music and Dance and a Frank Gehry designed band shell.

On the South side of Randolph Street between Wabash Street and Michigan Avenue is

Chicago's Cultural Center, which houses the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA). According

to Claire Geall Sutton, the DCA's Director of Theater, the DCA in most American cities is a

granting department. Chicago's DCA runs a physical building that it was handed in 1977,

turning the DCA into an arts programmer and presenter as well as a granting department. The

breadth of the DCA's programming and stature attracts cultural leaders like Chicago's current

Commissioner of Cultural Affairs, Lois Weisberg, as well as making it a player in cultural

tourism and a partner to downtown urban developers. Consequently, when small local theater

companies like 500 Clown work in DCA-run spaces, these companies by extension play a role in

Chicago's cultural tourism.

500 Clown entered this new relationship with the City of Chicago in fall of 2004, when it

presented *500 Clown Frankenstein* at the DCA-run Loop Theater. The Loop Theater was a

short-lived venue in a retail building on Randolph Street, two blocks west of the Cultural Center.

The Randolph Street building was slated for demolition to make way for luxury condominiums,

part of an effort to increase residential living in downtown Chicago. In the two years between

shop closings and demolition, the building's storefront was converted into a theater and its

upstairs space into rehearsal rooms. Marketing materials noted that the building's temporary

conversion echoed its origins as a Telenews Theater when the building first opened in December

1939. In 1953, it was renamed the Loop Theater, a venue for feature-length films, until turning

into retail space three decades later. The return of the Loop Theater (this time for live

performance) was a partnership between the DCA, Chicago Department of Planning and

Development, and five of Chicago's off-loop theater companies. The goal as outlined in

promotional materials was to create a theater complex in downtown Chicago by maximizing city

resources and making interim use of unused space. The plan included providing a venue and marketing support to theater companies for free, encouraging the growth of new creative talent, exposing downtown audiences to cutting edge performances of high artistic merit, keeping ticket prices affordable, and providing day and evening rehearsal space to emerging theater companies at an inexpensive rate**.**

As the plan intended, 500 Clown received the 99-seat space free of charge for approximately six weeks, a box office phone number, and advertising in provided brochures. Though the demolition team had not yet arrived, the walls were literally crumbling; each physical impact, however minimal, shed more paint and plaster. Because 500 Clown had the space entirely to itself, it brought in a graffiti artist associated with another city-run arts program, Gallery 37, who worked with his students to decorate the makeshift lobby. 500 Clown gave a late-night slot to aforementioned theater-maker Blake Montgomery who had created a new clown piece with former 500 Clown students. On off-nights 500 Clown taught an advanced clown theater class that culminated in a public showing.

After its tenure at the Loop Theater, Sutton, then Public Programs Manager with the DCA, encouraged 500 Clown to propose a show for another DCA-run theater space, The Storefront Theater. The Storefront Theater is a permanent space, also on Randolph Street located in the Gallery 37 Arts Building just across the street from the Cultural Center. 500 Clown proposed its newly conceived Christmas show for December 2005. When the proposal was accepted, 500 Clown was given the deadline it needed to start work in earnest. In stark contrast to the Loop Theater (demolished in 2005), the Storefront is a polished, well-maintained space complete with security staff, café, lounge, technical director and building shop. The arrangement provides the 99-seat house for free. The city takes 15% of box office, leaving 85%

for the company. Front of house staff, box office services, technical director, and publicist are provided, as well as marketing in brochures and postcards. In exchange, the company provides a show, liability insurance, production staff and eighty complementary tickets for Gallery 37 students. In 2005, the ticket price was capped at fifteen dollars. When 500 Clown returned to the Storefront Theater with its Christmas show in 2006, the ticket price had been raised to twenty dollars, still an affordable price. 500 Clown cannot be presented in a DCA-run space until 2009, because of a rule that DCA can only present a company three times in five years.

In December 2005, when *500 Clown Christmas* was playing at the Storefront Theater, 500 Clown stumbled (partly by accident and partly by design) into a more direct role as cultural ambassador. In Danzig's frequent visits to the DCA's office as producing director of 500 Clown, he became aware that an adjacent office housed Chicago's Sister Cities program. On a whim, he entered the office and had an impromptu meeting with Karen Tinta, who was then running the Sister Cities program in Birmingham, England. Luck would have it that Tinta was preparing for a meeting to begin programming a week-long Sister Cities event in Birmingham for June 2006. Danzig invited Tinta to *500 Clown Christmas*. Tinta came to the performance with her colleagues, found it compelling and entertaining, and invited 500 Clown to be one of the representatives of Chicago culture on this largely business-focused trip. Six months later, 500 Clown was on route to Birmingham with *500 Clown Frankenstein,* making its European debut. Travel, lodging, touring crate and flat fee were provided by the City of Chicago. In exchange 500 Clown performed the show, did walkabout entertainment in the city center, visited the Birmingham Children's Hospital to share with its staff their experiences working in children's hospitals, and provided entertainment at the children's library. The visit enabled 500 Clown to make contact with international presenters, a break-through for future international touring.

Regarding 500 Clown's relationship with the City of Chicago, Danzig observes that "what seems striking is that the city programs theater, and so the city is aware of its brand. Chicago is a city in which there is a really active vital storefront theater scene and the city is trying to showcase that [aspect] downtown where other legitimate theater is seen, making it tourist friendly" (Danzig, 23 February 2007). Danzig sees himself as trying to sell to the City of Chicago the idea of 500 Clown and more broadly physical theater as a Chicago export. Danzig's frequent conversations with Sutton about devised physical theater in Chicago were in part responsible for Sutton's decision to present a season of physical theater at the DCA theaters in fall of 2006, whose kick-off event was the panel on physical theater described earlier. In 2007, Danzig met with Commissioner of Cultural Affairs Lois Weisberg to share with her that Chicago is a vital and powerful center of physical theater, because, according to Danzig, it is an affordable city and therefore can support the long-term development of devised theater pieces, which need more space and time than conventional four- to five-week rehearsal processes allow. His conversation with the commissioner was open-ended, without a particular goal, but by the end, Weisberg wanted to know what kinds of spaces were needed and desired by companies. What might the city provide?

Conclusion: Chicago Theater Culture(s)

It is difficult to provide evidence for what amounts to the feeling of a city and its theater scene. In conversation, observations and anecdotes flow freely and easily. In writing, especially in academic form, they become unfounded, too detailed and minor to be pageworthy. And yet the development of 500 Clown is in the details, in daily occurrences. It happens through random conversations turned into opportunities; through friendship and collegiality developed across aisles, over footlights, and in workout sessions; and through passing on names and numbers.

Danzig describes Chicago as a town in which people pick up their phones. Danzig wandered

into Karen Tinta's office. He called Martha Lavey, artistic director of Steppenwolf, directly, and

before sharing with her that he wanted to talk about the possibility of 500 Clown performing at

Steppenwolf, she pre-empted him, asking, are you going to ask me if 500 Clown can perform at

Steppenwolf? He sent an e-mail to Commissioner Lois Weisberg, and two weeks later, her

assistant replied to set up a meeting. A week later he was in her office for almost two hours.

Places have particular cultures, and 500 Clown has grown in a particular way within the

culture(s) of Chicago. "Culture," Raymond Williams writes, "is one of the two or three most

complicated words in the English language … it is the range and overlap of meanings that is

significant. The complex of senses indicates a complex argument about the relations between

general human development and a particular way of life, and between both and the works and

practices of art and intelligence" (*The Sociology of Culture* 87-91). The story of 500 Clown in

Chicago chronicles the general development of a company intricately tied to particular ways of

living in Chicago, including cost of living and community networks. And still there is another

significant aspect to making theater in Chicago. Christensen describes Chicago as a town in

which people do their work, rather than waiting for the next big thing. He quotes Steppenwolf

ensemble member Amy Morton saying, "You're not going to become famous here, and you're

not going to become rich, so you might as well do good work. Hone your craft. You don't have

anything to worry about except doing the work" (291). I began this chapter writing, "500 Clown

was born and raised in Chicago," meaning it found the space and time to do its work and grow

relationships that furthered the work in various ways. In Chicago, 500 Clown developed its

particular way of practicing clown theater. The work itself makes up the body of this

dissertation. In the seventh and final chapter, I return to a discussion of 500 Clown as a

company focusing on developing a viable business model out of almost seven years of artistic

practice.

CHAPTER THREE
DEFINING CLOWN

In 2006, a year of increased opportunity and visibility for 500 Clown, company members debated whether to change the company's name from 500 Clown to something else, for the sole purpose of losing "clown" in the title. Why? Because 500 Clown company members have found that in the United States clown carries some unwanted baggage. Americans have preconceptions of what clown means, how a clown dresses, how a clown behaves, and what a clown performance might be like. These preconceptions are rooted in early encounters with clowns through the popular Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey three-ring circus, Bozo the Clown, the Ronald McDonald clown, shopping malls, and birthday parties. What do these associations conjure? "When I think of clowns I see pies in the face, seltzer bottles, big floppy shoes, and balloon animals.... I was expecting to see them fart and fall down or run around in over or under sized costumes with a fire hose; maybe get out of a car" (Kroup). "A clown wears big shoes, suspenders, baggy pants and has a brightly painted broad smile under a small bulbous red nose right?" (Goddu, PerformInk).

Given these associations, working in clown often involves rerouting the image of clown. Clowns and those involved in clowning name and deflect the above set of expectations and then attempt to replace them with new understandings of the form. The effort to redefine or reimagine clown is often centered on losing the thick make up that masks honesty, truth, and vulnerability. Jonathan Taylor of Asylum 137 says, "You want to know who they [the clowns] are, but they're covered in makeup and none of their skin is showing. They scare me.… We try to pull the personal clown out from within, rather than trying to be funny or a wacky character" (Jepsen). Danzig's negative associations with clown stem from the obvious fakeness of the clown, "the sad

alcoholic, who pretends to be happy" (Danzig 6 June 2006). In <u>The Onion</u> review of Asylum

137 at the City of Fools Festival, the critic counters the typical image of clown, describing instead

how "they were funny, with solid characters that actually relate to each other and the audience

with honesty you don't get to see everyday, even in real life" (Kroup).

      500 Clown's debate as to whether to hold onto its name of six years or replace it at the

risk of losing momentum and continuity was prompted by a genuine concern that clown in the

name was standing in the way of many people even giving the company a chance. How many

potential audience members was the company losing because the name was an impenetrable

wall? The number is impossible to calculate, but potentially with real consequences for the

success of the company. Additionally, 500 Clown found that as it described itself in

conversation and in promotional materials, it consistently began in a negative vein, defining its

clown as not the clown you expect or might have grown up with. 500 Clown asked itself

whether this qualification and denial at the outset of encounters paved the way for meaningful

conversation or confused and distracted from what the company actually is doing.

      During that debate, Danzig did an informal tally of companies, artists and shows that

work in the clown form, however broadly construed, which do not use clown in their names. His

list included, among others, the previously described commercial hit *Fool Moon*; *Slava's Snow*

Show, a compilation of clown turns created and performed by Slava Polunin and an ensemble of

performers, which has toured throughout the United States and abroad; Blue Man Group, which

began as a three-man performance art piece and now has live stage shows playing in eight cities

worldwide and variety of projects touring nationally and internationally; Washington's Umo

Ensemble, which has been creating physical theater pieces since 1987; Minneapolis' Theatre de

la Jeune Lune founded by Lecoq graduates in 1978; The Dell'Arte Company, the performance

branch of the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre; the San Francisco Mime

troupe, a collective that has created satirical and popular theater since 1970; London-based

Theatre de Complicité, some of whose members are Lecoq and Gaulier-trained; Canada's Mump

and Smoot, named after the clown characters of Michael Kennard and John Turner; New York

City's Parallel Exit, which clearly calls itself physical theatre; Avner the Eccentric, who is the

comic performer Avner Eisenberg; the Flying Karamozov Brothers, sometimes referred to as

masters of juggling and hilarity; and solo performer Tomás Kubínek, who calls himself

"Certified Lunatic and Master of the Impossible." Granted, many of these artists and companies

combine clown with other performance forms such as acrobatics, juggling, circus arts and

dramatic theater, as does 500 Clown. Nonetheless, "clown" is not included in their first point of

contact with the public – their names – and often not in tag lines or lengthier descriptions.

After extensive discussion, 500 Clown decided to hold onto its name, and even took on a

vehement and proud mission to reclaim clown. The passionate debate that took place mostly in

e-mail exchanges invoked calls to action that are almost humorous in the earnestness with which

the company assigned itself the task of redefining and taking ownership of a misused,

misunderstood form.

> I want to reiterate the idea of actively taking on the education of a nation - to take
>
> back the term clown. Remember take back the night! There's an ecumenical
>
> priest named Matthew Fox who called for taking back Eros from the
>
> pornographers, bitch has been re-appropriated too. Lenny Bruce (my character's
>
> namesake after all) was into this in comedy way back in the 50's -- challenging
>
> people to re-think the value they give to words - and using words to do it. (Danzig
>
> 22 May 2006)

In another e-mail, Kalina defended his choice to hold onto clown:

> By using clown we are going against convention.... I do not want to back away
> from clown because it has a cultural stigma. The form has given me too much,
> and I respect it and love it and it does not have enough champions who are willing
> to stand up and say, what we do and what we are is clown and look at it, it is not
> horrific, it is real and what we do is clown and that other shit is shit. (26 April
> 2005)

The decision to hold onto clown in the company's name was coupled with a mission to redefine it. Rather than ignoring the negative reactions the word clown triggers, the company decided to use those initial responses as openings to dialogue about what clown is. For Danzig, this decision requires strategies. When asked about the name 500 Clown, Danzig usually says, "Think Buster Keaton, not Bozo," and that gets him into a conversation about Keaton. When Keaton is unknown, as is sometimes the case, the conversation begins with Charlie Chaplin.

Conversation about clown, and more broadly, the form of clown theater has become a key approach to building relationships with audiences, critics, and potential presenters and producers. These conversations happen directly after shows, in workshops, over the phone and in all the impromptu opportunities to cultivate relationships with potential audience members including workplaces, public transportation, weddings, parties, playgrounds, and dog parks. I do not mean to suggest that 500 Clown engages in inappropriate proselytizing of clown, but rather that these informal sites of conversation are often where people introduce themselves and what they do. And these sites are often where 500 Clown company members find themselves dialoguing about what clown is, directly after introducing themselves as part of a company called 500 Clown. I should also add that company members are often asked about the significance of

"500" in the title, to which there is no single reply. When Danzig was first conceiving the

clown theater production of *Macbeth*, there were going to be five clowns. Then it dropped to

four, and finally to three, at which point there was a sort of throwing up of arms, "Well, if it can

be three, it can be five hundred." This is not entirely accurate, but suggests the spirit in which

the number five hundred was proposed. The name 500 Clown also promises something

impossible, which potentially opens up imagination about what the name will deliver if not,

literally, five hundred clowns. Over the years, it has taken on new meaning. If there are three

clowns on stage, where are the other four hundred and ninety-seven clowns? In the audience?

On the street?

Returning to clown in the company name, one strategy yet to be implemented is to use

the 500 Clown website as a means toward engagement with the term clown and to do so through

providing links to a broad spectrum of influences on 500 Clown-style clowning including, but

not limited to, Grock, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Avner Eisenberg, Geoff

Hoyle, Bill Irwin, David Shiner, and Roberto Benigni. Additionally, 500 Clown will create links

to action-based performance and art including Fluxus, Jackson Pollock and Chris Burden;

physical theater including Vsevolod Meyerhold and Konstantin Stanislavski who, in his later

years, "altered his emphasis from inducing emotion through affective memory to a system of

psycho-physical chain-of-action, where *action*, rather than psychology, induced emotion and

feeling" (Bogart and Landau 16); theater-makers particularly interested in creating active

relationships with audiences including Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud and Dario Fo; and related

performance modes like Guignol and Buffoon. 500 Clown hopes to be not only a series of

theater productions but a site (virtual and material) through which to investigate clown through

its history, predecessors and genealogy. This dissertation obviously participates in that vision of

communication.

The links listed above suggest a broad basis for clown and intend to give 500 Clown website visitors an array of practices that they can sift through, connect, and distinguish from one another if they choose. In this and subsequent chapters, I take that provocation myself drawing from various performance languages in order to articulate what clown theater is as practiced by 500 Clown. In this chapter I move towards a working definition of clown. I need to clarify that this definition is my own, rather than a 500 Clown definition, though it has developed out of the work I have done with 500 Clown. As stated earlier, 500 Clown did not begin with a shared definition of clown. Years ago company members agreed to disagree, finding that attempts to define clown in words ended in frustration and seemingly irreconcilable conflicts. Now, years later, pressed to remember those disagreements, I and other company members come up empty. What we do remember is each of us being, at times, fiercely loyal to the watershed moments in our individual trainings and encounters with clown that led to our attachment to the form. For Kalina, clowning had provided access to a deep and expansive emotional range that he never found in his acting training. For Danzig, clowning provided a form in which he could free-associate physically and mentally with alacrity, humor, and outrageousness. Brennan came to clowning through watching a 500 Clown show and bringing her improvisational skills to Big Apple Circus Clown Care. She did not have an allegiance to what she had been taught. Rather she had an expectation of unpredictability and a vital convergence of improvisation, physicality and dramatic acting. As a director new to directing clowns and clown theater, I was caught between giving the performers space to freely follow impulses and trying to exert control in order to create coherent composition and narrative. All our individual associations and preoccupations with clowning created a chaotic and unwieldy language in the rehearsal studio.

We lacked a shared vocabulary to articulate how we, as a company, wanted to move forward in the work. However, where language failed us, our various practices of the form were productive and symbiotic.

My definition of clowning that follows derives from an integration of these varying practices used and investigated by 500 Clown in rehearsal, performance and teaching. I claim it as my own, because I have neither put it up to unanimous vote by my fellow company members nor subjected it to the negotiation and editing that would surely ensue. For any clown practitioners, including Brennan, Danzig and Kalina, who encounter this definition, I can only assume that it will provoke debate and critique.

Natural and Artificial

Perhaps the simplest or most obvious place to begin building a definition of clown is its etymology, which is traced back to the sixteenth century as, "a farm worker, hence a boor, hence – boors seeming funny to townsmen – a funny fellow, a buffoon, a jester" (Partridge 106). According to William Willeford, in *The Fool and His Scepter,* the clown lacks judgment or sense whereas his close relative, the fool, is "deficient in judgment or sense altogether" (12). These definitions provide a starting point of clown as a type of person, clearly informed by judgment and stereotype as well as reliant on an oversimplified binary relationship between farm worker and townsmen and arguably, by extension, between country and city. Raymond Williams begins his classic text *The Country and the City* with the customary ideas of country and city. The former is associated with peace, innocence and simple virtue as well as backwardness, ignorance and limitation while the city is typically thought of as the cite of learning, communication, light, noise, worldliness and ambition (Williams 1). Clown and fool are entangled in these contrasting ideas of country and city, which, Williams argues, extend to classical times.

Often studies of fool and clown overlap, and an important aspect of the fool in John Towsen's *Clowns* sheds light on an important aspect of clown. Towsen and Willeford note a distinction between the natural and the artificial fool during the era of Elizabeth I, circa late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries. The natural fool, borrowing Willeford's definition, is the person who is deficient of reason; the artificial fool is the person who imitates the natural fool. Though Towsen does not speak of the artificial clown, his language about fools provides a language about clowns. According to this logic, a natural clown would be, according to its etymology, the farm worker judged as the funny fellow, whereas the artificial clown would be the person imitating the natural clown.

This introduction of imitation is significant because it pulls clowning into a domain of performance or acting. And though imitation might suggest superficiality, it does not need to. If clowning imitates by engaging in actions like being easily distracted, falling, tripping, turning oneself upside down, and encountering social conventions with naiveté, and those actions in turn affect the person engaged in them, then where is the distinction between natural and artificial? Clowning is a process of engaging in folly, not merely imitating folly. If there is a distinction between natural and artificial, then it lies in whether one has the choice to turn on or off the engagement in folly.

To delve into this further, I turn to how Willeford construes the relationship between folly and madness, which he develops through a reading of Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly*. After citing Erasmus' first class of madness, which is horrible and demonic, Willeford quotes Erasmus on his second class of madness, which "is far different from this. It comes, you see, from me [Folly]; and of all things is most to be desired. It is present whenever an amiable dotage of the mind at once frees the spirit from carking cares and anoints it with a complex delight" (24). This

kind of madness, Willeford goes on to say, "is folly, and a blessing" (24). Though Erasmus

configures madness in varied and sometimes conflicting ways, Willeford notes that "at other

times he regards it as analogous to a transformation of consciousness that would allow us to see

things more truly" (25). This definition of pleasurable madness is particularly relevant to

contemporary clowning, more so than the country bumpkin or clod as target of imitation.

Rewording it to reflect my own experience in the practice of clowning, clowning is a pursuit of

this transformation of consciousness that allows us to see things, if not more truly, than certainly

differently from conventional ways of seeing. Clowning therefore, in its madness, attains a

power to counter norms, however defined in a particular social and historical context.

"Transformation of consciousness" is sometimes used as a concept in clowning practice.

More frequently, one might overhear directives such as: be truthful, be honest, reveal yourself,

be present. At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted Taylor describing his work as "pulling the

personal clown out from within," which suggests a belief that engaging in the folly of clown

excavates a clown inside himself, a far cry from imitating the country bumpkin or clod. The

language of clowning practice typically refers to various incarnations and productions of self,

thereby unleashing problematic and fraught performance concepts, which land us squarely in

issues compellingly and provocatively raised on acting theory and discourse by Philip Auslander

in his essay, "Just be Your Self," in Acting (Re)Considered.

In his essay, Auslander problemetizes language in acting practice that is preoccupied with

assumptions about self in statements like the ones listed above. He begins his essay by citing

Derrida's distinction between logocentrism and difference. Logocentrism, in brief, is a

philosophical position that there is an existing foundation of meaning. In contrast is the position,

advocated by Derrida, which Auslander summarizes as the belief that "every mental or

phenomenal event is a product of difference, is defined by its relation to what it is not rather than by its essence" (59). Auslander uses these two philosophical positions to interrogate acting theory, questioning whether the self so frequently referred to in acting language is presumed to exist as a fixed essential being or whether it is constructed through the process of acting. Does acting generate a self and is that produced self then only a perceived being in relation to what it is not?

Auslander's investigation into the language of acting and particularly the assumed foundation of self demands an awareness, thoughtfulness and deliberation in speaking about clown. My experience in the rehearsal studio and classroom is that it does not really matter whether self is presumed to exist or is generated through the practice of acting or, in this case, clowning. What matters is the clarity of thought about it. The search in clowning training becomes the search for the logic that allows one to move forward in the practice (which I will discuss presently). If excavating an inner self does not make sense to a student or performer, then perhaps the phrase "make yourself anew" or "reinvent yourself" does. As a director, my work is to custom-design language for each actor I work with, guiding them with phrases and directives that are meaningful. The language of practice demands flexibility. Flexibility needs a broad vocabulary, which theory thankfully provides. Theory introduces terminology and both familiar and new formulations of logic. These can then be experimented with in the rehearsal room with the purpose of moving the work forward.

Whether generative or revelatory, clowning is not about imitating a character but rather doing, practicing, engaging in actions. Through the action of clowning, a character may emerge, meaning a series of traits that create a distinctive personality. But even as clown characters begin to take shape, 500 Clown keeps its focus on the actions of clowning. The performers,

rather than becoming their clown characters, focus on doing, executing actions and allowing the outer shape of personality to happen without deliberation or conscious attention. So what is this practice? What are the actions to which I keep referring?

The Practice: Eight Actions

I propose eight elements of the practice. I do not mean to suggest that this is a finite or complete list but rather moves toward a blueprint of clowning as practiced by 500 Clown. At moments I provide examples, but leave elaboration and examples to subsequent chapters that delve more deeply into 500 Clown's teaching, rehearsing and performing. The actions I have included here are (1) to discover, (2) to follow impulses, (3) to partner with everything, (4) to solve problems, (5) to care, (6) to be resilient, (7) to play with conventions, and (8) to choose a context.

(1) To Discover

I begin with the action *to discover*, or sometimes described as *to not know*. Danzig says, "So much of what it means to be an adult is to be responsible and to know things, which shifts people to a place in which they can function unconsciously. The skill of not knowing is the thing that allows people to become conscious" (6 June 2006). Danzig's experience with clowning is that when he does not know what will come next, or how a relationship will develop or how to enter the stage, then he finds himself conscious -- awake, aware, taking nothing for granted. If he knows what will happen, then unconsciousness sets in, characterized by a feeling of being on automatic pilot, closed to discovery and investigation. Danzig continues, "'I don't know' puts the person in a new experience, live to it" (6 June 2006).

In clowning, *to not know* requires being inventive in encounters with people, things, and architecture. The danger, of course, is falling into the imitation of not knowing as opposed to

actually not knowing, thereby putting on that thick mask referred to earlier – the mask that

lies, the mask that pretends to not know how a door opens, when of course the 35 or 55 year old

knows quite well how a door opens. The action *to discover* then does not mean to pretend to not

know how the door works. Rather the action is to do everything possible with the door as a

means towards discovering the door. Slam a body into a door, turn a knob back and forth, rattle

the hinges. Not knowing all the ways one can physically interact with a door is possible. The

question and investigation are real insofar as the actor does not know the answer. He only learns

the answer by engaging in the actions, without knowing their consequences.

(2) To Follow Impulses

Discovering the world is enacted through *following impulses*. The Oxford English

Dictionary gives multiple meanings of *impulse*: "An application of sudden force causing motion

… force or influence exerted upon the mind by some external stimulus … incitement or stimulus

to action arising from some state of mind or feeling … sudden or involuntary inclination or

tendency to act, without premeditation or reflection … the wave of change which travels through

nerve and muscle in passing from rest into action" (1394). In 2005 at Chicago's performance

venue Links Hall, Michael Kennard of the renowned Canadian clown duo Mump and Smoot

taught a three-day clown workshop focused on impulse in which he led exercises designed to

make students aware of their impulses, coaching students to allow their impulses to propel their

actions. Kennard introduced this concept in the following way: three students stand at one end

of the room. They close their eyes. With eyes closed, they walk to the other side of the room

and stop just before touching the wall. He coaches students to feel all the urges in their bodies to

move forward, backwards, speed up, slow down. Then he introduces variations to the exercise,

all highlighting listening to the body, becoming internally aware of what it feels like to follow an

impulse, to judge an impulse, to sift through impulses and selectively follow or discard them. Additionally, Kennard coaches students to be aware of what gets in the way of sensing the impulse and saying yes to it. Holding one's breath shuts down the body. Chatter in the mind censors.

As a student participating in the workshop, I was struck by the idea that one cannot pick and choose among impulses; one cannot judge one as worthy and another as not. The task is to follow the impulse, to follow the tendency to act, not to judge it. If one starts to censor impulses, then it will be impossible to follow them. Clown teacher Chris Bayes also focuses on impulses, even while putting some parameters on them. Bayes calls clown the pursuit of the unsocialized self, the self driven by impulses freed from social restraints (12 May 2005). This raises the question, which impulses qualify as clown impulses?

Clowning has the potential to transcend debates that pit impulses against socialized drives or calculated responses. It does not matter if the impulse is unsocialized, neurotic, fearful or petty. It does not matter if, scientifically speaking, a neurotic impulse is technically not an impulse. It does not matter if only one of those urges is considered an impulse and the other is considered socialized behavior. Labeling, categorization and biological accuracy are not relevant. Clowning entails the entire range of a human being's urges. Every time a person feels an urge to act, that is an impulse and should be recognized and followed as such.

Clowning's terrain is a forcefield of an unlimited number of drives, a playground for multiple selves and impulses to collide and interact. Rather than revealing, if it were even possible, a single truthful self from which impulses come – a pure self underneath the pressures of socialization -- clowning reveals censored and uncensored behavior, neuroses, courage, shame. Clowning reveals any number of drives and emotions and energies that career through a

human being. If impulses are blocked and not followed, then clowning falls short of its potential to expose a human being as complex, messy and full of contradiction. Clowning begins when someone has given herself permission to act on impulse, without censorship.

Following impulses offers an action to the more vague directive to be present, a recurring theme in clown. "Be present" is said over and over again when working in clown. Be in this moment, in these live immediate circumstances. Being is a difficult action. Allowing impulses and urges to trigger behavior is more active. The action of following impulses prioritizes actual experience and says act on what is happening as opposed to a preconceived idea of what will happen. Impulses when followed create a series of behaviors and actions.

(3) To Partner With and Relate to Everything

A third action of clowning is *to partner with and relate to everything.* Key elements of relating and partnering are involvement, connection, communication, and cooperation. In clowning, relationships and partnerships happen between people on stage, audience, architecture, sounds, objects, and stimuli of all kinds. Referring to the investigation of the door described above, what if the door is conceived as partner instead of as an inanimate object? When the door slams back on someone, that door has made a proposal. It is not that the person clowning needs to believe the door is alive. Rather the person needs to notice and be affected by the slam, whether it is sudden, loud, painful, or anticlimatic. Then the impact of that door's action will affect the next thing the person does. As I'm writing I look out the window. It is windy outside. There is a tree and its branches are in constant, irregular movement. If I partner with that tree, I may become quite still, a counter-point to its movement. Or I may mimic its movements with my eyes and my head. Its actions are provoking my actions, my impulses. We are in a partnership, a relationship. I am not unmoved or unaffected by its actions.

Gaulier uses the word complicity. Do you have complicity with your partner? Imagine you are playing catch. Do you throw the ball so she can catch it? How do you do that? Eye contact? Knowing her skill level? Knowing where she is, when she will turn, when she will look away? Or do you ignore what she is doing, throw the ball with no awareness of her and therefore make it improbable that she will catch it? Of course, there may be times when the partnership warrants slamming the ball across the room, making it impossible to catch – thereby provoking an escalation in tension or drama or conflict in the relationship. But to begin with, at a basic level, can you be in an easy reliable awake generous partnership with someone or something? This is a foundation of clowning.

(4) To Solve Problems

Another action of clowning is *to solve problems*. Bayes says that clown illuminates "something fundamental about how a creature deals with the logic of the world. And through skewed logic or what I would call 'clown logic' which is not skewed at all actually: it is direct cause and effect but from the clown's experience and it is not abstract in any way. It is grown up logic that is abstract, social logic that is confusing. Through clown logic, we begin to see how insane the roles are, how polite a creature is – boring, appropriate behavior" (12 May 2005). Discovering means clowning entails encountering the world as an unknown, not taking for granted what things are, their uses, the efficient or typical ways of doing things. How clown then approaches the world reveals clown's resourcefulness, ingenuity and particular logic. This *how* distinguishes clown not only from people in general but from other clowns. The clown is revealed in all her particularity and individuality. Her idiosyncrasies are revealed through her encounter with the stage, the audience, and the theater's architecture.

Clown scholar and practitioner Donald McManus describes a typical scenario in which an audience identifies a problem on stage, imagines or predicts a solution according to conventional logic, and then is surprised to see the unconventional solution the clown proposes.

> A basic scenario for clown action involves the presentation of an obstacle that the audience recognizes as a simple problem, but which the clown, for reasons not always explained, cannot fathom. The American circus clown, Emmett Kelly, performed a routine in which he swept up the ring after an acrobatic or equestrian act. While sweeping, Kelly would notice the spotlight, not understand that it was operated by a technician somewhere in the rafters of the tent, and attempt to sweep it up. The spotlight would get smaller and smaller, teasing Kelly but never disappearing. Eventually, Kelly would sweep the light under the edge of a canvas drop cloth and the light would go out. A good clown act is usually resolved by means of the clown finding a solution to the problem at hand that takes the audience by surprise because it is either not the solution that they had envisioned or had not been presented as consistent with the theatrical convention being used. (12-13)

In *500 Clown Macbeth,* one of the performers shoots another performer using a 92 F Beretta blank firing gun with a chrome finish and lead-filled barrel. The gun sounds and smells real. In one performance, the gun jammed and did not fire. Kalina, who fires the gun, tried to fix the gun. He emptied it, reloaded it, and checked the trigger. It continued not to fire. Danzig, at whom Kalina was aiming, hesitantly came out from hiding. Kalina, frustrated with himself, the gun and the situation, began to throw bullets at Danzig. Danzig allowed the impact of being hit by bullets to send him crashing through trapdoors to what appeared to be his death.

The reason to not quickly solve problems in clown theater is that the quick solution is typically reasonable, efficient and expected. Problem-solving is not something through which to move quickly. It is the means by which clown logic, which is different from everyday logic, is revealed. McManus finds that when the audience predicts one outcome, and clown logic reveals another unexpected outcome, the surprise of the novelty and absurdity of the solution is released through laughter. Humor derives from the incongruity of expectation and actual realization.

Often physical virtuosity is associated with clowning – slapstick, tumbling, instrument playing, circus arts. Physical skills are particularly productive in the context of problem-solving, because they can be used to provide the unexpected solution. For example, in *500 Clown Frankenstein,* Danzig ends up on one side of an eight-foot barrier created by the main set piece – a table that can surprisingly transform into different positions.

Figure 3-1. "Victor, come in to your laboratory," invites the Landlady (Brennan) to Dr. Frankenstein (Danzig) while Shank (Kalina) stabilizes table in 500 Clown Frankenstein. Photo: Elliot Lieberman

Danzig wants to get to the other side where Kalina and Brennan are. The obvious route is to walk to the other side of the barrier. But Danzig won't look around it, he'll only look at the wall in front of him and knock on it. Brennan, in response to Danzig's knocking, once spontaneously said, "Come in." Danzig took that invitation as a provocation to hurl himself onto the wall, climb over it, and lower himself head-first onto Brennan and Kalina. Having physical skills expands the range of possibilities as to how problems can be solved, thereby revealing varied kinds of clown logic.

(5) To Care

A fifth action of clowning is *to care,* which entails making the choice that what happens matters. If the audience laughs, it matters. If it doesn't laugh, it matters. If the gun jams, it matters. If the door slams in your face, it matters. If a siren sounds outside the theater, it matters. By "it matters," I mean "has consequences." It changes the next action or how the next action is executed. Clowning demands being affected by everything, to be vulnerable to what is actually happening in the moment. To be affected is the counterpoint to the familiar image of clown in the United States, where experience and therefore vulnerability are masked behind thick coats of a made-up never-changing unaffected smile. In his teaching manual, Jacques Lecoq shares a pedagogical reflection he made when trying to answer the question, how do clowns make us laugh:

> 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 realized 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, not at the characters that they had been trying to show us, but
> at the person underneath, stripped bare for all of us to see. (143)

The goal of being funny in that exercise ironically was reached through exposing the emotional impact of failing as a result of caring. Similarly, the students' admission of failure to the audience puts them in relationship with their audience. At the moment of admission, students

and audience share the experience of failure from opposite sides of the footlights. In the best

scenario, that alliance in the context of a painful situation triggers a release of laughter. That

release of laughter – that humor – creates another bridge between performer and audience and

among audience members. A shared sense of humor communicates, "here we are, doing the

same thing, on the same page.… There's complicity, rapport" (Danzig, 6 June 2006). If the

students do not care about their failure, then nothing happens. There has been no experience that

the audience can enter into or grasp. Or if the students suppress their caring, swallow their

feeling and act unaffected, then they have lied to the audience, creating a disconnect and a

disengagement.

(6) To be Resilient

On the other hand, it is easy to imagine that an audience's laughter at the student's failure

is potentially cruel. Set the scenario above in a middle school classroom, and the laughter of a

student's peers could be devastating. Enter *resilience*. When the audience laughs at the clown's

failure, the clown is elated. The audience is laughing! The audience is enjoying itself. The

clown cannot be beaten down by failure. Rather the clown must bounce back. "Resilience is the

physical description of hope" (Danzig, 6 June 2006). The clown's resilience is in the context of

trying and failing and trying again, evoking Beckett's famous line in *Worstward Ho*, "Ever tried.

Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better."

How resilience is read is determined by context. The middle school context differs

significantly from a clown class or theater venue. Clown teacher Ronlin Foreman proposes that

after a clown gets hit, he must stand back up. He is ready for more. If he stays down, it is

tragedy. What is the timing of resilience? How long can he stay down before standing up, and

still demonstrate resilience? If a male clown hits a female clown, and she continually bounces

back to be hit again, then a tragic story of abuse starts to emerge rather than one of hopeful

resilience, which brings me to the seventh action of clowning in this blueprint: to play with

conventions.

(7) To Play with Conventions

A seminal text on clowning's role to turn conventions inside out and upside down is

Bakhtin's *Rabelais,* in which he describes how in carnival, "[c]ivil and social ceremonies and

rituals took on a comic aspect as clowns and fools, constant participants in these festivals,

mimicked serious rituals such as the tribute rendered to the victors at tournaments, the transfer of

feudal rights, or the imitations of a knight.… [Carnival] had a characteristic logic, the peculiar

logic of the 'inside out' (*à l'envers*), of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to

bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations,

comic crownings and uncrownings" (5, 11). Rituals could be affectively mimicked because they

provided a set of known ordered procedures and patterns of actions. Playing with those actions

by getting them wrong or enacting them in unconventional unpatterned ways could be

recognized as such. To invert a norm means having a norm to begin with – an expectation that

can be upset.

Bakhtin's carnival is a site of play, "a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere

of activity with a disposition all of its own" (Huizinga 8). Play happens within certain limits of

time and place, and within those limits it has its own course and meaning. Huizinga tells us play

creates order and is order; play has rules that determine the order of the temporary world

circumscribed by play; play contains an element of tension involving something to be achieved;

and play moves toward ending that tension (8-11). If we develop this in regard to clowning and

its play activity, the whole world becomes a potential playground, a site in which clowning

inverts norms, conventions, and codes of behavior. But the world as playground is too broad, too unordered to be an affective site of recognized norms. Within the world, however, there are an innumerable number of contexts that are ordered, which provide an authoritative structure against which and with which clowning can play.

(8) To Choose a Context

Clowning needs a context; *choosing a context* constitutes the final action of this blueprint. In Gaulier's clown class I met an Italian woman who had held a position as clown on ski tours. As I recall it, her job was to go on a ski trip with her partner and get into trouble, over and over again. On the chair-lift, her skis would fall off. She'd clumsily fall down the slope. The purpose was to create a memorable trip in which fellow skiers laughed and returned home with incredible stories to share.

Shifting to another context for clowning, in an episode of the 1950s television show *I Love Lucy,* ballet provided the setting in which Lucy could enact her continual desire to break out of her role as housewife and into her husband Ricky Ricardo's show business. In the episode entitled "The Ballet," Ricky is short two acts for his nightclub opening -- a ballet act and a burlesque comedy routine. Lucy first takes a stab at getting into the ballet act. Ballet's rigid positions and form provide a productive context for clowning's play. Lucy hesitantly enters the classroom wearing a tutu, attire more appropriate to a school recital than professional rehearsal. Taking first position, Lucy turns out her feet too far and loses her balance. While attempting a grande plié, Lucy's knees lock together; the instructor unlocks them with her pointer, causing Lucy to unexpectedly spin around. When it is time for fast-paced tendus, Lucy energetically smacks her legs in and out of position; the momentum of her movement leads her legs to swing higher and higher propelling her into the Charleston. The instructor asks Lucy to go to the barre.

Lucy interprets this as going to get a drink at the local bar. Then she realizes, oh that barre. Lucy raises her leg onto the barre, only to have the barre become wedged between her heel and ankle. The ballet instructor barks out a command to lower the leg in French, "en bas." Lucy, now alienated from her leg that is clearly betraying her, barks the command at her own leg. "En bas! En bas!" In a wild attempt to free her leg, Lucy ends up hanging upside down from the barre. The ballet, with its rigid order and precision, provides a seemingly bottomless well of opportunities as a context for clowning.

As another example of a clowning context I shift focus to Big Apple Circus Clown Care, where Brennan, Danzig and Kalina have all worked as clowns and supervisors. As described earlier, the program brings clowns into children's hospitals. Brennan contrasts the hospital context with more conventional performance contexts for clowns. In the latter, a group of people congregates who are expecting to see a performance. Perhaps they have bought tickets and taken their seats, waiting for the show to begin. The hospital is a treatment, not a performance, venue. Expectations are shattered when, instead of a doctor entering the room to listen to a patient's heart or a nurse entering to change an IV, the clown enters. According to Brennan, "we clown the conventions of the hospital in all different kinds of ways -- procedures, appropriate volume, doctor behavior, nurse behavior -- and we don't stick completely to those things, but that's where we begin. We wear doctor coats.… We're in a medical environment" (27 April 2007). Each clown will develop individual ways to play with conventions using tricked out doctor coats, musical instruments, surprising objects, character status and type, but the authority of the hospital and its protocol remain constant.

Kalina adds that the clowns will not stand on furniture or window sills, and will wash their hands, "but I make a mess out of washing my hands, start flipping paper towels … snow

storms of paper towels; we're definitely not supposed to do that" (22 April 2007). He recalls

putting on rubber gloves and shooting them all over the place.

> In the old days, we'd take empty IV poles and ride them like scooters down the
> hallways, getting in trouble more than once, pushing the dos and don'ts.… As a
> supervisor, I only had two rules: Never put a child or anybody else at risk, and
> never put yourself at risk. You're not going to bust into a tuberculosis or a
> compromised immunity room without a gown and masking up, you're not going
> to stick your foot in the piss bucket.… After that, it's wide open to push those
> rules… If we didn't get called in to be told you can't do this, then I'd feel like we
> weren't doing our job. (22 April 2007)

Brennan describes an instance where clowning impacted hospital procedures.

> My partner and I [the clowns always work in pairs] went into the pre-op, pre-
> surgery area, and as we were going in, a little girl [about 4 years old] came
> busting out. She had smashed her hands on the bar of the fire door and was just
> running away from the people trying to bring her into the operating room. She
> looked at me and just stopped and smiled, and was excited. My costume does so
> much of that kind of immediate work -- I have this hat that has these two cones
> coming off the sides, like a double princess hat, with curly ribbon coming down
> and my doctor's coat decked out with ruffles, and an enormous ass. The visual is
> really clear – this is not a normal hospital person. So she saw me and stopped
> and smiled, and we played with some of the toys that I had in my pocket, and we
> played with my ukulele, and we played with bubbles for a while. The surgeon
> and nurse kind of hung back, but at some point they looked at me and were like

alright, we gotta get this going, so I put my hat on the nurse, and the little girl,

who was holding my hand, looked at me and looked at the nurse and took the

nurse's hand and they walked into the OR. (27 April 2007)

Brennan finds meaning in this anecdote because it suggests the clown is a symbol of being safe

and alright, and it can transcend an individual person. It can be epitomized in a hat that changes

the energy of a situation.

Perhaps the most important convention that is challenged or turned on its head by the Big

Apple Circus Clown Care is the patients' lack of empowerment. Brennan describes the children

in the hospital as audience members who are not there by choice, not there because they want to

be. They have to be. And in the hospital, these children do not have many choices at all. They

do not get to choose how a procedure feels or what is done to them. In addition to performing in

public areas like waiting rooms and hallways, the clowns travel from room to room, always

knocking before they enter and always waiting to be invited in by the child. Whereas the

children cannot control if and when doctors and nurses enter their rooms, they do exercise that

power with the clowns. "The number one thing is to empower the kids through choice.…We can

either do whatever the kid wants … or have as much interaction as happens when a child

watches TV. It's all about what they want from the experience" (Brennan 27 April 2007).

Inspired by the specific ways in which clowning and its contexts shape one another, 500

Clown carefully selects its context, its playground for clowning. Whereas in the past the

company would readily accept offers for clowning gigs at corporate parties, galas, street fairs,

and the like, it now tends to decline these invitations (unless the money is too good to turn

down), because 500 Clown is not practiced in playing with the conventions of those sites.

500 Clown Christmas, created in 2005 by 500 Clown, composer John Fournier and clown performer Chad Southard (Kalina was at the University of Idaho getting his MFA in Directing), uses the holiday season as its context. When the show premiered at Chicago's Storefront Theater, it teetered on the edge of basing itself on Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and being a holiday party, an uncertainty pointed out by Chris Jones in his *Chicago Tribune* review, in which he wrote, "And it's certainly true that '500 Clown' and John Fournier (who wrote the songs) haven't quite decided if they are rooting their work around a parody of 'A Christmas Carol' or merely riffing on the socio-political manifestations of the holidays. The latter choice is the best for the future. Stuff the Dickens" (Jones, 24 November 2005).

Figure 3-2. Adrian Danzig, Chad Southard and Molly Brennan sing "It's Christmas Time Again" with Dave Williams (percussion), Matt Thompsen (bass) and John Fournier (keyboards) in *500 Clown Christmas*. Photo: Chris Plevin

Indeed, when the show returned in 2006 to the Storefront, this time with Kalina (Southard left to pursue other non-theatrical interests), Dickens' story was merely one of many holiday traditions with which the clowns played. Other traditions and conventions, which were present in the 2005 production but not as confidently foregrounded, were gift-giving, toast-making, caroling, and family get togethers. The show trafficked in themes of greed and generosity, friendship and loneliness, celebration and suicide, without trying to deliver an overarching dramatic narrative.

In contrast to *500 Clown Christmas, 500 Clown Macbeth* and *500 Clown Frankenstein* strongly rely upon and play with theater as their contexts. Thus the company categorizes those productions as clown theater. The following three chapters address the particulars of this interaction focusing on action, play, audience and narrative structure.

CHAPTER FOUR
THEATER AS CONTEXT: A PRACTICE OF PLAY IN ACTION

In this and the following two chapters, I aim to articulate the dimensions of clown

elements in the context of theater. My first task, however, is to address what theater I am

referring to as the context for clown. Given the breadth of its practice and theory, theater must

be qualified with some limitations and definitions in order to be meaningful. Indeed, I have

struggled to find productive limitations to the term theater. My forays into realist and

conventional theater have churned out more difficulties than solutions. In the midst of struggling

to find a useful definition of theater, I came upon Hans-Thies Lehmann's book *Postdramatic*

Theatre, in which he proposes that theater is not inherently dramatic; rather dramatic theater is a

category or paradigm of theater. This was my doorway into understanding how theater functions

as a context for clowning in the 500 Clown model of clown theater.

Dramatic Theater

By "dramatic," Lehmann refers to theater that is attached to literature and its requisite

components: plot, character, and fictional coherence. Lehmann describes dramatic theater as

being "subordinated to the primacy of the text.… Even where music and dance were added or

where they predominated, the 'text', in the sense of at least the imagination of a comprehensible

narrative and/or mental *totality,* was determining" (21). In non-dramatic theater, "the reasons

why dramatic action was formerly central to theatre no longer apply: the main idea no longer

being a narrative, fabulating description of the world by means of mimesis; the formulation of an

intellectually important collision of objectives; the process of dramatic action as the image of the

dialectics of human experience; the entertainment value of 'suspense' where one situation

prepares for and leads to a new and changed situation" (69). Lehmann's post-dramatic theater is

that which acts outside the paradigm of dramatic theater, with "post" not meaning a rupture with dramatic, but rather a conversation with and reference to dramatic theater.

Using Lehmann's proposal of dramatic theater as a category of theater practice rather than a totality of theater practice, I find that dramatic theater is the context for clown in 500 Clown's work. Dramatic theater comes with a set of expectations and conventions for storytelling that works as an authority against which and with which clowning can play. The paradigm of dramatic theater is driven by expectations of plot, conflict, mimesis and suspense. 500 Clown relies on these expectations to provide a context in which clowning can gain its meaning, humor, and power. So how do the elements of clowning intersect with this context? I use the concept of play as the launch pad for this discussion, beginning with common usage of play in theater and then moving towards the play of clowning that was introduced in the previous chapter.

In the United States, we typically call the theatrical event itself a play, referring to a theatrical production of a script. This kind of play shares characteristics with Huizinga's description of play as "a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own" (8). A theatrical production of a script has its own setting and characters. Its dramatic structure crafts the introduction and resolution of conflict, which create ascensions and releases of tension. Additionally, the play world is ordered by two distinct kinds of logic. One is the logic of the dramatic world. For example, what rules order the relationships between characters? What rules order the plot? Do the characters directly address the audience? Do characters have the ability to move back in time, or jump ahead over hours or months or years? The answers to these and other questions become the logic of the playworld, which in turn allows an audience to understand and engage in the play's events.

The second kind of logic concerns a particular theatrical production of a play. Is the set realistic? Or abstract? In what style is the acting? Does lighting draw attention to itself as a theatrical tool or try to be invisible? How does the sound design function? Theater-makers tackle these and many more questions when conceiving and staging a production, which is why any production of a script is ultimately an interpretation of that script.

Theater Clown and Clown Theater

In a play that is a theatrical production of a script, there can be a character who is a clown, what clown historian John Towsen calls a "theater clown" played by an actor. "Often he will step out of the play and comment upon it, appearing to be as much a part of the audience as of the drama" (31). Yet however extensively the theater clown may play with dramatic conventions, the theater clown is written into the playscript by a playwright, even if that comes in the form of a blank space in the script to be filled by the clown or actor's self-generated performance. Though the character's function may be to impose an unconventional logic that disrupts the storyline or exposes theatrical devices, and though the actor playing the clown may have license to improvise, still he is controlled by the playwright who delimits the space for clowning in the theatrical production. However, David Wiles in *Shakespeare's Clown* cautions that the viewpoint of a single mind controlling a theatrical production is a modern notion, which he contrasts with the relationship between the Elizabethan dramatist and actor. Focusing on actor-clown-musician-comedian Will Kemp, Wiles writes, "Though Kemp had to adapt himself to the demands of writers, it is no less certain that writers had to adapt themselves to the demands of Kemp" (42). This two-way street of adapting to demands of both performer and writer corresponds to Towsen's description of clown in theater when he writes, "Throughout the

history of theater, the clown has insisted on being his own boss, placing far more trust in the art of improvisation than in the words of any author" (31).

This notion of clown as boss, author, and cast of characters suggests clown as discourse, "the means by which the content [what happens] is communicated" (Martin 108), which leads to a consideration of clown theater as a theatrical form. Moving beyond clown as character in a play and deeper into the idea of clown as discourse, I consider how the hybrid form of clown theater combines the play that is a production of a theatrical script with the play of clown as boss, which returns us once more to Huizinga, whose main characteristic of play does not have an easy correlation with the play a theatergoer attends. Play, he writes, "is free, is in fact freedom" (8).

In a theatrical performance, the world that the clown encounters and plays with includes the temperature in the theater, honking cars outside, the light that does not work, the ripped costume, and the audience, not en masse but as individuals. What are they wearing? What do they look like? What sounds and gestures do they make? Once all that material is considered part of the theatrical event, then the nature of the event significantly changes. The event of going to clown theater is not seeing a live performance of a *rehearsed* play, play being a noun. Rather the event is witnessing and participating in *unrehearsed* play, play being a verb. Yet that too is not a fitting description, because something is planned. "Entering the empty ring with his hands in his pockets and working 'with nothing' – this is the essence of the circus clown" (Remy 11). This is not, however, the essence of clown theater. Something has been rehearsed. And that something resembles *and* is different from play as a theatrical production of a script. Developing an aesthetic vision and theatrical structure to bring clowns' anarchic play into the theater, while harnessing it to serve an overarching narrative is the art of clown theater.

Clown teacher and director Chris Bayes offers a challenging and invigorating provocation that one cannot leash a clown, just like one cannot leash a cat. Clown's play is anarchic. It is chaotic.

> When you start to make work, you don't make work from the soft brain of the clown, but you make work from the hard brain of the actor who wants to solve the problem of his show…but then you're not actually letting the little duck lead you.… You're trying to -- the expression I often use is -- you're trying to walk the cat.… You're trying to walk the cat but you end up dragging the cat down the street because you can't walk the cat.… You can't train a little duck, you have to let the little duck do whatever it wants to do.… You can't walk the cat, right? … You drag the cat down the street. (Bayes)

Action Script

500 Clown does leash clowning by ordering clowning into components and investigating how these components can be brought into theater. In doing so, 500 Clown gives itself license to corral, shape, limit, and structure clown's play. The primary way in which 500 Clown does this is through playing action. 500 Clown scripts are action lists, which provide written records of the shows. [See Appendices III - VIII for scripts.] The performers memorize the actions. The actions, when carried out in sequence, accumulate to convey a story, a process that I will discuss at length in Chapter Six. These action lists are akin to Commedia Dell'Arte's scenarios, which outline who does what when. "*Commedia* performances were never totally improvised.… The troupe of some dozen performers first decided upon a basic scenario, or *canovaccio* (canvas) – a plot outline that would serve as a structure for their improvisations. The scenario, broken down into a series of entrances and exits, with indications of the essential comic business, was hung on

a wall backstage so that it could be consulted at will" (Towsen 72). A 500 Clown production follows a score of actions, but how the actions are executed changes from performance to performance. Additionally, in a performance, new actions can be inserted between set actions. Sometimes the new actions earn a place in the list; sometimes they do not.

500 Clown's action scripts do not predetermine how actions are executed, thus making space for playing actions. Different modes of play in a 500 Clown production intersect, overlap, disrupt and collide with each other. I have broken these down into six categories: (1) prompted play, (2) playing with the audience, (3) playing scenes with the audience, (4) playing with physical chance, (5) playing emotions, and (6) playing to generate.

(1) Prompted Play

Prompted play can be compared to what John Rudlin calls extemporization in Commedia Dell'Arte, wherein fixed structures prompt improvisation. According to Rudlin, seemingly improvised dialogue in Commedia Dell'Arte "would be more an extemporization, using known structures or *meccanismi*. Monologues were also stock, taken from the *repertorio* or *zibaldone* (gag-book) kept by the actor for each Mask" (55). The fixed structures for 500 Clown include the actions in the script; words that the performers have spoken in previous shows that they might repeat, paraphrase or depart from entirely; and emotions that have been generated in previous shows that they may strive to repeat. In a 500 Clown show, the director, stage manager and performers know that in a certain moment or scene of the show the clown will execute a certain action in a loosely predetermined amount of time and that action will lead to the next known action.

The *500 Clown Macbeth* action script says, "Shank try to get crown. Kevin and Bruce coach Shank." In the show, the actions are generally played as follows, with specific details

changing performance to performance. Shank balances precariously on the scaffold rung

second from top, stretching his arm to catch hold of the crown, which maddeningly hangs just

inches out of reach. Bruce sits on the opposite side of the scaffold, watching with eager

anticipation as Shank tries to grasp the crown. "Grab it!" Bruce calls out, or, "Reach it!" or, "Oh

Shank, ooh ooh Shank!" Bruce cries out as he holds his hand in the air waiting for Shank to call

on him to speak. Shank responds, "Bruce." At the same moment, Bruce says "Ooh ooh!"

missing that Shank has called on him. This repeats until finally Bruce hears him (anywhere from

two to five cycles). Or, Shank never says "Bruce" and just says "Yes?" and Bruce plays that he

does not know he is the one being called on. Or, Bruce hears his name but has fallen in love

with the game of being the student trying to get the teacher's attention. Or … any number of

other similar scenarios. Whenever and however this bit is resolved, Bruce offers Shank advice.

"Get longer," he says. Or, Bruce demonstrates to Shank how to get longer. Bruce might

lengthen his arm with intense focus and concentration, or with science-fiction-inspired plasticity

of an action-figure.

Prompted play is the most prevalent mode of improvisation in the show, happening in

scenes as described above or in quick moments throughout the production. After Bruce breaks

free of being trapped underneath a four-by-eight-foot platform, his kilt is typically caught around

his torso leaving his crotch (clad in blue hockey shorts) exposed to the audience. Bruce, with

sheepish embarrassment, pulls his kilt down, apologizing for the inappropriate display. What he

says to express his discomfort varies performance to performance. Moments later, Shank

uncomfortably (and unwillingly) is stuck in a split, right foot on the scaffold, left foot on Kevin's

shoulder. Kevin releases his left foot, causing Shank to collide into his right foot, which is now

sandwiched between the scaffold and his torso. Shank swears or weeps or eulogizes his foot.

Figure 4-1. "I got it," says Shank (Kalina) straddled across scaffold and Kevin (Brennan) while Bruce (Danzig) directs the audience's focus to his partners in *500 Clown Macbeth.* Photo: Michael Brosilow

(2) Playing with the Audience

This kind of play starts off in a performance as playing off audience reactions, and over

the course of a show, it develops into relationships between performers and individual audience

members. The relationships affect the show. These relationships are developed in short exchanges that may turn into improvised scenes. Recurrent exchanges may turn into *leitmotivs* for an evening's performance.

500 Clown Macbeth opens with Bruce, Kevin and Shank entering from behind or above the audience. In the Lookingglass production in summer of 2004, the clowns looked down from the lighting grid, descended to the balcony, climbed down rails and each other's bodies to audience level, and maneuvered gracefully -- or not -- over audience members until they reached the aisle. Entrances are restaged at each venue to take advantage of the architecture. Once in the aisle, the clowns travel towards the stage creating the heath -- the tract of uncultivated land into which the witches enter. They improvise a soundscape of wind, marsh, birds flapping their wings, horses rearing up, geysers exploding – clearly extrapolating from the desert place described in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Their soundscape is triggered by audience cues. An audience member might turn his head quickly, and the clowns respond with a bird squawking. If the audience is particularly hushed, the clowns "squish squish squish" through the tension.

Their animated trek through the audience allows the clowns time and space to meet the audience. Who is here tonight? Is it full? Are there pockets of empty seats? Who is bald? Who are the big laughers? Who is anxious? Who is closed off, seeming to not want interaction? Where are children sitting? The clowns gather information and find their allies and foes. Relationships begin, which will grow throughout the show. If someone seems scared, the clowns might remember to check in with that person later. The clowns might interrupt a violent or particularly intense moment later in the show to check in with a child they have encountered earlier.

At a later point in *500 Clown Macbeth*, Shank tries to stand on the top rung of the scaffold with nothing to hold onto for stability. Someone in the audience might gasp. If Shank hears a gasp, he stops the action and scans the audience to find the gasper. Shank might nod as if saying, "Yup, this is dangerous." Or Shank scolds the gasper for being noisy and making it difficult to concentrate. That in turn elicits more audience responses. And the dialogue continues until finally, and this might be minutes later, Shank performs his balancing feat.

In *500 Clown Frankenstein*, Bruce (playing the role of Dr. Victor Frankenstein) seductively consumes the entire hand of Kevin (playing Elizabeth), in a bizarre display of clown lovemaking.

Figure 4-2. "Don't tell me the dark things you did at university," warns Elizabeth (Brennan) to Victor (Danzig) while Shank (Kalina) holds the table on his back in *500 Clown Frankenstein*. Photo: Michael Brosilow

In one performance, Kevin looked directly to a group of children in the audience, trying to give

Bruce the wink to tone it down. The children seemed delighted with the hand-eating feat and the

attention they received. The adult audience seemed to enjoy the clowns making impulsive decisions to accommodate all ages.

Another example demonstrates how an entire scene may materialize out of playing off the audience. In *Macbeth*, after Shank shoots Bruce, Bruce falls through trapdoors landing under the stage, and Kevin looks into the pit in which Bruce lies and reports to Shank, "He's dead." Shank cannot hear her. He is wearing bulky headphones to shield his ears from the loud gunshots just fired. Kevin coaches Shank to remove the headphones. Once Shank can hear again, Kevin returns to her place on stage, looks once again into the pit, and carefully recreates the sober moment in which she reports Bruce's death to Shank. "He's dead," she repeats. The audience often laughs, perhaps at the self-consciousness of the acting, perhaps with relief that the show will still be funny though it just felt uncharacteristically serious and devastating. When the audience laughs, Kevin turns her gaze to the audience, with a look that says, "Don't laugh you guys, this is serious." Then she returns her focus to Shank, shifting her expression back into the scene. This shift from playing with the audience to playing in the scene with Shank often makes the audience laugh again. And once more, Kevin throws the audience a look, silently imploring, "Please don't laugh. It's a death scene." But because Kevin, being a clown, is thrilled when the audience laughs, she smiles, her enthusiasm bubbling over. But oops, there is a serious scene to play, and she turns back to Shank. This scene might be five minutes long, or, if the audience doesn't react to Kevin's first replay of the moment, there is no scene. This scene did not exist in rehearsals. It came about only in performance, in partnership with the audience.

When an audience is particularly quiet, this mode of playing with the audience is significantly minimized, and shows are easily five to twenty minutes shorter in length. Yet often an audience who starts out being quiet discovers that if it makes proposals, the clowns will

respond. And during a particularly quiet show, the clowns are extra attentive to the smallest

proposal to try to start that engine of playing with the audience.

(3) Playing Scenes with Audience

Playing with the audience as described above differs from another kind of play in which

the audience is scripted into a scene, cast in a specific role. Like prompted play, these scenes are

structured with lines and actions that the audience then paraphrases, as it were. However, the

audience does not know the script. The clowns provide the prompts for the audience's

improvisations. Carefully crafted scenes control what could turn into un-ordered freewheeling

play.

In *500 Clown Macbeth,* as described previously, Shank shoots Bruce, and Kevin reports

to Shank that Bruce is dead. Until the Lookingglass production of *500 Clown Macbeth*, Shank

would react to murdering Bruce in a similar way in each performance. His grief would move

him through laughter, anger and tears, speaking some words. Once Shank had reached the peak

of his emotional response, Kevin would launch into Shakespeare's text from Act V, Scene 1 (the

sleepwalking scene) in which Lady Macbeth says, "Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier and afeared?" In

the 2004 production, Shank brought his grieving into the house, casting the audience in a specific

role.

**Figure 4-3. "Take it to the house!" calls out Shank (Kalina) and Kevin (Brennan)
in *500 Clown Macbeth* Photo: Steven Schapiro.**

Shank learns from Kevin that Bruce is dead. Shank walks towards the theater's exit –

shocked, ashamed, panicked, sad, numb. Kalina, the performer, knows that he needs to intensify

whatever he is feeling so that it erupts out of him. Once he intensifies the emotion he is feeling,

he has license to open up to the audience. Shank might apologize for what he has done. Shank

might attempt to speak but finds no words. Shank looks from audience member to audience

member, trying to find some relief.   Burdened by self-hatred for the murder he has committed,

Shank chooses an audience member and tells that person to call him stupid. "Say it, say it," he

urges. Sometimes the audience member does not understand what Shank is asking. The person

might say, "He's dead." And Shank scolds him and says "No! 'Stupid Shank.' Please say it."

And the audience member says, "Stupid Shank." And Shank coaches him to say it again, like he means it, and continues to coach until he is satisfied. Sometimes Shank thanks that person for his effort and then moves on, casting someone else in the role. Inevitably (maybe after two times, maybe after ten times) the audience member convincingly says or yells, "Stupid Shank." Satisfied, Shank asks that person or someone else to smack him on the head. Typically, the early attempts are too soft, too gentle. With Shank's urging, someone finally whacks him with a hand or a pocketbook, to which Shank often replies, "Thank you." This cues Kevin, who has remained on stage, to say, from Act II, scene ii, "My hands are of your color, but I shame to wear a heart so white."

This play structure leaves space for variables, the big one being how the audience members take Shank's direction. And indeed the scene varies significantly performance to performance. Sometimes a zealous crowd overwhelms Shank. Sometimes it has been a quiet audience, and this is the first instance when energy from the audience bursts forth. Sometimes the audience divides into camps – one part compassionate towards Shank, the other aggressive towards him. Yet, because Shank is directing the audience's play, he can always guide it to a point at which Kevin is justified coming in with her scripted line.

In *500 Clown Frankenstein*, Shank, who has been forced by Bruce and Kevin to play a dead body, lies lifeless on the laboratory table. Bruce seemingly appears to conduct electricity into Shank's body in order to bring the creature to life. Shank slowly sits up. Shank does not want to play the creature. He believes himself to be Bruce's assistant. Bruce and Kevin react to Shank as if he is a hideous violent creature. Shank looks at them and they scream, try to run away, vomit, puppet Shank's hands to hit them, punch them, fling them to the ground, strangle them. Shank is alienated and confused, not sure how he has triggered his partners' reactions.

Bruce and Kevin send Shank into the audience. "Go, go," they urge. Abruptly they switch

into their *Frankenstein* characters -- the Doctor and Elizabeth – crying out, "No, don't go…don't

go in the village." Then quickly back to Bruce and Kevin, "Go, go…" Shank, utterly confused,

hesitatingly enters the audience.

As soon as Shank makes any kind of contact with an audience member – brushing up

against someone or tripping into someone -- Bruce and Kevin begin coaching the audience.

Kevin reads from Shelley's novel, "The children shriek." If there are children in the audience,

she makes it clear that they should indeed shriek, and most likely they do. If there are no

children, she casts adult audience members as children. Kevin continues to read, "The women

faint." Kevin and Bruce point out the women in the audience and encourage them to follow the

prompt. "The whole village was roused," at which point audience members are encouraged to

raise their fists, hit the creature (Shank), and throw things at him (programs, water bottles and

umbrellas).

When this idea was first proposed in rehearsal, 500 Clown had no idea what would

happen. Kalina, always wanting to find play with the audience, was excited. But would the

audience play along? Would they be timid? Would they be over-eager and actually hurt Kalina?

All those possible outcomes have happened in performances. Sometimes, though rarely, Bruce

and Kevin have had to work hard to provoke the audience into action. Other times, Bruce and

Kevin have had to forcibly remove Shank from a rowdy crowd. Sometimes, the audience has

proposed a different scenario in which it is sympathetic to Shank and deliberately defies the

instructions to insult and attack him.

The next scripted action is for Bruce and Kevin to intensify the assault on Shank.

Depending on how the play with the audience has gone, the entrance to that point varies. If the

audience has risen up against Shank, Bruce and Kevin build upon that intensity. If the

audience has not attacked him, Bruce and Kevin reclaim Shelley's plot and take matters into

their own hands. Sometimes the audience has endangered Kalina, the performer, in which case

Shank flees the audience only to be trapped on stage by Kevin and Bruce.

(4) Playing with Physical Chance

Playing with partners is a key component of clown performance. The two previously

described kinds of play involved partnering with the audience. Playing with physical chance

means physically partnering with objects, environmental elements, architecture, and humans

where the outcome of the play is unknown. These physical partnerships necessitate spontaneous

play and composition. In *500 Clown Macbeth*, the clowns battle each other over a bowl of stage

blood. By the end of the brawl, the stage and performers are covered in blood -- a mixture of

flour, water, red and blue food coloring, cocoa powder and black cherry unsweetened Kool-Aid -

- which causes undeniable problems.

**Figure 4-4. "Get it off me!" screams Kevin/Lady Macbeth (Brennan) as Bruce (Danzig)
flings blood at her and Shank (Kalina) in *500 Clown Macbeth.*
Photo: Jerry A. Schulman**

The performers struggle to stand up but slide and fall on the slippery stage. The performers try

to make eye contact with the audience, their eyes burning under coats of the concoction. They

wipe their eyes dry, but only spread the blood from hands to face to kilts to shirts. The physical

attributes of the blood cause a domino affect of problems, exacerbating the frustration the clowns

feel towards each other and their ill-fated attempt to perform the play.

In *500 Clown Frankenstein,* Shank pushes a 257-pound table, face down, across the stage

with Kevin riding atop it. The ease of this action depends on the texture of the theater floor and

the moisture in the air. Sometimes Shank gives it one solid push and it glides smoothly. Other

times it is a jerky ride with Kevin bouncing about. Other times it won't budge at all and Shank

coaxes an audience member to come on stage to help with the action. Kevin reacts

accordingly. Sometimes she floats on air like a princess. Other times, she is on a sled pulled by

stubborn dogs yelling "Mush, mush," referencing the discovery of Dr. Frankenstein on his sled

on a floating sheet of ice in the sea surrounding the North Pole.

These moments of physical chance are littered throughout the productions. Brennan

variously maneuvers around Danzig and Kalina's frantic chase near the end of *500 Clown*

Frankenstein. As they race across the stage, Brennan tries not to get run over. In *500 Clown*

Macbeth, Brennan stands on the four-by-eight-foot platform that lies across Kalina's legs.

Figure 4-5. "Up, go up!" directs Kevin (Brennan). "Ah my legs!" utters Shank (Kalina).
"You're cutting off his legs," cries Bruce (Danzig) in *500 Clown Macbeth*
Photo: Michael Brosilow

Sometimes her feet stick, sometimes she slides easily down. If she sticks, the audience shifts focus to Shank. If she slides, the audience remains focused on her. That small unpredictable moment changes the scene.

The examples thus far have involved partnerships with the physical world in which the unpredictable behavior of objects becomes part of the play. Similarly, performing challenging physical feats also necessitates spontaneous problem-solving and composition. This kind of play or improvisation is evident in circus, dance and sports. In the circus, if the first attempt at a trapeze or teeterboard act fails, the spectators watch the performers re-set and try again, perhaps a second time, perhaps a third time. The performers decide how many times they will try before giving up. In sport, physical feats are composed spontaneously given the immediate circumstances of the game, but constrained by the skills of the players and the plays that have been practiced and memorized. Similarly, the circumstances of a particular show inspire spontaneous physical composition that is constrained by the abilities of the performers and what has been tried in rehearsals and other performances.

500 Clown uses two kinds of physical choreography, one in which the physical action is meticulously staged and another which allows space for spontaneous composition. In *500 Clown Macbeth,* after Shank tries to stand on the top bar of the scaffold, he slips, flips over the bar, and holds onto the top rung, at which point Kevin says a line that she repeats in each performance: "No, Shank, *stand* on this one." Shank flips back over the bar. Bruce catches his feet so Shank is now laid out horizontally, forming a bridge between the two sides of the scaffold.

Figure 4-6. "Come to this side where its safe," coaches Bruce (Danzig) to Shank (Kalina). "I got it!" calls Kevin (Brennan) in *500 Clown Macbeth*.
Photo: Adam Friedland

Kevin attaches a safety cable to Shank's belt and then stands on Shank's back to reach the crown. When Shank can no longer hold the position, he triggers the release by uncrossing his left foot. Bruce releases Shank's foot as Kevin transfers her weight back onto the scaffold. Bruce jumps down onto the stage, at which point the platform collapses, which is controlled by backstage crew. This physical sequence is executed in the same way in each performance. How the performers play it – what they say, their emotional reactions – vary.

Though there are several choreographed sequences in both *500 Clown Macbeth* and *500 Clown Frankenstein,* more typical are improvised physical actions. Similar to playing off

prompts, the performers know that a certain kind of physical action needs to happen, but how

they execute it varies. In *500 Clown Frankenstein*, a choreographed sequence has Shank and

Kevin using their combined body weight to pull the table off Bruce, as shown in Figure 4-7.
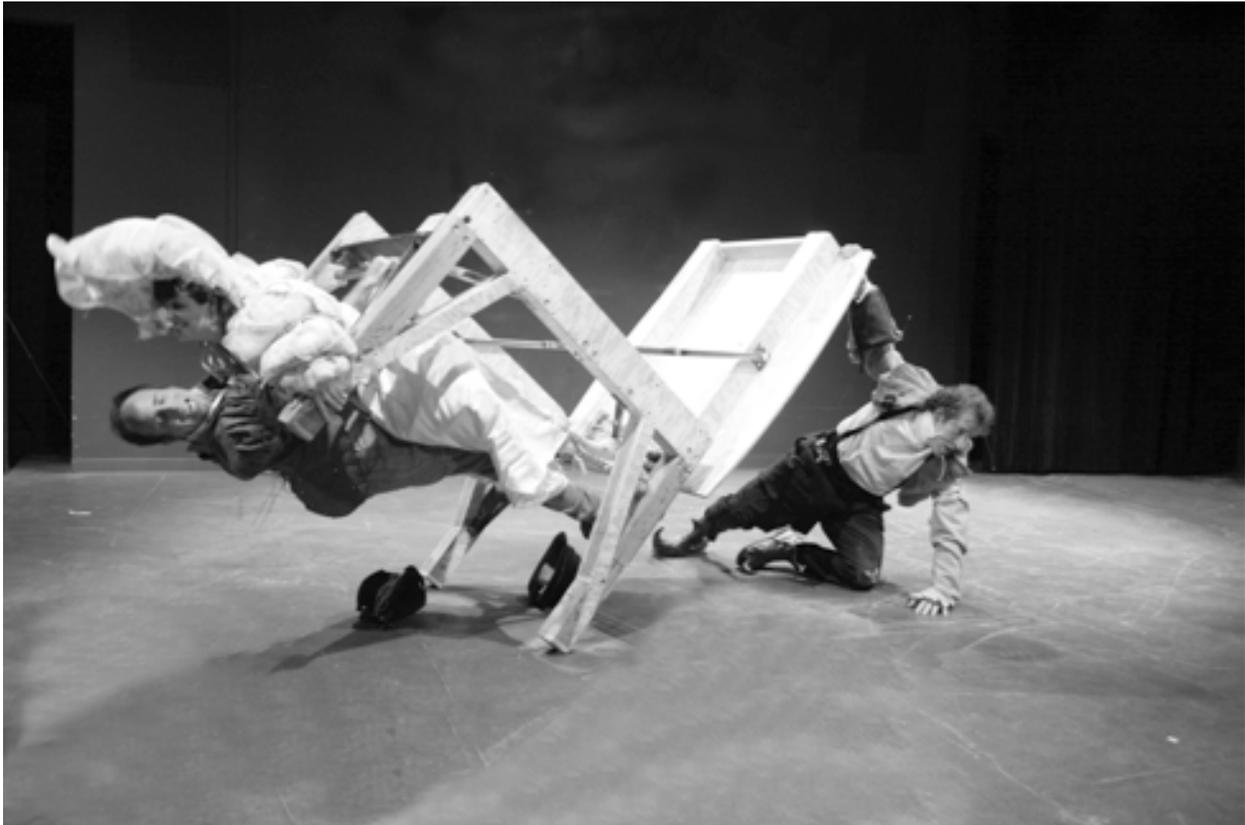
Figure 4-7. "I'll play this part," says Kevin (Brennan) in *500 Clown Frankenstein.*
Photo: Elliot Lieberman

Following this sequence, the table stands with Bruce perched either on one side or atop the

surface of the table (now on a vertical axis) as seen in Figure 3-1. The spontaneous composition

begins: Bruce descends into the body of the table, transferring his weight to Kevin and/or Shank.

Sometimes Kevin is the ladder down which Bruce slides. Sometimes her hoop skirt gets caught

and she has to shake herself free. Sometimes Shank collapses under Bruce's weight. Though

these actions vary, what remains constant is the safe transfer of weight between performers,

which has been learned over years of rehearsing and performing together.

(5) Playing Emotions

The emotional lives of the clowns are another realm of play structured into clown theater. Typically in a scripted rehearsed play of dramatic theater, actors with the guidance of the director discover in rehearsals how a certain moment or scene is to be played emotionally. This is not a science, and in live performances, there are variations. The lingo used to talk about these variations is, "I didn't feel it tonight," or "I phoned it in." Though this might seem to suggest it wasn't a strong performance, the actor has techniques to communicate an emotional life to the audience. There are countless anecdotes of exchanges between actors who use significantly different techniques to generate emotions.

Playing emotions is an improvisational element in all live theater, because the actor is making split-second, often-unconscious decisions about how to achieve certain moments based on her specific emotional experience in a given performance. Despite everything that has been meticulously planned in a theater production, there is a certain space left open for the emotional journey that an actor takes in each performance. How fixed this course is in a production depends on the approach taken by director and actors.

500 Clown does not fix or set what emotions happen in a performance. Rather the company wants the clowns to live emotionally on stage, meaning that they are vulnerable to and affected by a performance's circumstances, and the kinds of play described thus far illuminate what may happen. Returning to the moment in *500 Clown Macbeth* described previously when Shank reacts to shooting Bruce, 500 Clown does not determine beforehand what Shank's reaction will be, or what tenor it will take. However, the shooting must emotionally affect Shank, and he must build the emotion(s) to a high intensity.

In the 2007 version of *500 Clown Macbeth* at Steppenwolf Upstairs Theater, the ending was reworked. Kevin performs Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene epitomized by "Out, out damn spot." Bruce comes up from beneath the stage to deliver some blood from his gunshot wounds to help Kevin realize her objective to wash off her blood-stained hands. First he offers drops and eventually reveals a bowl full of stage blood. In previous productions, Kevin grew fascinated by the blood, let go of Lady Macbeth's scene, and became embroiled with Bruce and Shank in concocting bloody deaths. In this latest version, while Bruce and Shank play with the blood, Kevin stays on course as Lady Macbeth, growing her anxiety and desperate need to eradicate all signs of blood from her body, their bodies and the stage. The emotional escalation shifts performance to performance. Sometimes she is enraged, sometimes grief-stricken, sometimes overwhelmed by an outpouring of text, sometimes desperately rubbing out all signs of blood. Similar to Shank's reaction to the gunshot, intensity needs to heighten, but the tenor and content of the emotion are undetermined.

(6) Playing to Generate

500 Clown creates new material in performances. Trying material for the first time in front of an audience, whether it was proposed as an idea in the dressing room or whether it arises in a moment spontaneously in front of an audience, is perhaps the boldest kind of play structured into the show. It is bold because the performers will often try things that do not work, meaning the audience does not laugh or understand what the performers are doing, or the performers get stuck in a tangent and cannot find a compelling way back to the scripted action. However great the possibility for failure is, playing to generate is also a mode of play upon which 500 Clown relies, because it is the source of many of the actions that get scripted into each production.

In *500 Clown Macbeth,* the scene described previously in which Shank gives the audience the role of chastising him for shooting Bruce was generated during performances in summer of 2004, after six runs of the show between 2000 and 2003. In rehearsals for that production, 500 Clown decided to give Shank more freedom in terms of his emotional reaction to the shooting. Only when there was an audience did Kalina develop the scene. I, as director, was present at these performances giving Kalina notes on how to make it stronger in subsequent shows.

One of Brennan's tasks in the show is to secure one of the four-by-eight-foot platforms to the scaffold with a safety cable. (The safety cable prevents the platform from flying into the audience when the scaffold collapses at the end of the show.) The safety cable hangs from the scaffold throughout the performance. During a performance in spring of 2002, Brennan felt it necessary to acknowledge this cable since the audience obviously could see it. She began a routine of announcing "Safe" when she harnessed the platform to the cable. This was picked up by Shank who tried holding onto the cable when he stands atop the scaffold, announcing to the audience, "Safe." From there, "Safe" took off. Every time Shank and Kevin maneuver on the scaffold in a precarious way, they grab hold of the cable and say "Safe." During the bridge maneuver described earlier (in which Kevin stands on Shank's back while Shank is stretched between both sides of the scaffold), Kevin first attaches the cable to Shank's belt. Once the clowns have released that position and move on to the next scene, Shank remains harnessed to the scaffold by the cable, swinging uncontrollably and needing to be saved. This has become a regular *lazzi* in the show. "Safe" has developed into a significant part of the relationship between audience and performers. It is obvious to the audience that the cable does not actually make the clowns safe, yet by invoking the need for safety, the clowns acknowledge the

audience's preoccupation with safety. "Safe" becomes code for "Don't worry about us. We actually are safe so we can have a sense of humor or irony about being safe." Or, if the audience does not read it that way, at the very least, it directly names the anxiety felt in certain moments, thereby creating complicity between audience and clowns.

Over several performances of *500 Clown Frankenstein*, Brennan grew tired of her wrestling match with Kalina, when she refuses to be carried as the dead body to the laboratory. Brennan was physically sore and not having fun wrestling. Brennan did not have a plan for how to change it, nor had she talked with Kalina and Danzig about it. In a performance, instead of initiating the wrestling match, Brennan faced off with Kalina, Kung Fu-style. Kalina had no idea what to do. His hat happened to be on the ground, having fallen off his head earlier in the show. Danzig threw Kalina his hat. Kalina caught it. Kalina held his left hand up in the air and snapped his fingers. Then with his right hand, he flipped his hat up to his left hand. Instead of putting his hat on his head (as he does earlier in the show in a short hat routine), he threw his hat at Brennan, who allowed herself to be hit by the hat and fell to the ground dead. This spontaneous hat maneuver seamlessly echoed an earlier routine in the show (also discovered in performance rather than in rehearsal). The audience expected the hat to go on his head and laughed at the unexpected move. This routine is now repeated in performances.

All six modes of playing action described incorporate improvisation. In *Thinking in Jazz,* Paul Berliner writes that, "[w]hen artists use *improvisation* as a verb … they reserve the term for real-time composing – instantaneous decision making applying and altering musical materials and conceiving new ideas.… [U]nique features of interpretation, embellishment, and variation, when conceived in performance, can also be regarded theoretically as improvisation" (221-22). Improvisation harnesses the freewheeling energy of play into composition. Composition

requires a double vision on the part of the performer who is fully engaged in play and at the same time able to harness play into the action script, thereby making split-second often seemingly unconscious choices about when and how to move on. Additionally, all six modes of playing action share a commitment to heightening the affect and impact of the actions on the performers.

Action-Affect

Clearly, action surfaces as a major component to many performance, art and theater practices, and their varied processes and interests illuminate 500 Clown's approach to playing action. Two aspects of art-action practices stand out: The action itself constitutes the artwork and/or the effects caused by the action constitute the artwork. 500 Clown's action scripts, when played in the six modes described above, result in productions constituted by the actions themselves and the affect of the actions upon the performers. For example, *Macbeth* is predominantly made up of physical actions to reach the crown. The performers scramble up each others' bodies, climb the scaffold, and balance atop unstable surfaces trying to attain the crown. *Frankenstein* is predominantly made up of physical actions creating a laboratory and a creature. The performers maneuver the table into various laboratory-like positions, gather body parts, and animate life with electricity.

Yet what does it mean to say the theatrical production is constituted by these physical actions and ways in which the performers are affected by executing the actions? In an essay on Antonin Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty,* Paul Goodman notes Artaud's insistence "that theater, like any art, is an action in the sense of a physical cause … the interesting moment is when one is physiologically touched and one's system is deranged and must reform to cope with the surprise"

(78). Goodman describes this kind of theater as a context of effectual action, a description

that seems particularly relevant to 500 Clown's clown theater.

Though 500 Clown's interest in actions is in part inspired by 1960s performance

practices that put a microscope on everyday pedestrian actions, the company's interest in

heightening the affects or impact of actions sets it on a different path of inquiry. 500 Clown uses

actions to catapult the performers into emotional experiences and relationships, through which

story and drama are conveyed.   Either the action itself is so physically challenging that the affect

on the performer is inevitable, or conversely a fairly pedestrian action causes great affect. 500

Clown's performance style is about the performer being affected, impacted by what she does and

communicating those affects to the audience.

Growing Affect

Rather than limiting discussion of this performance style to the description above, I want

to expand the discussion by addressing how this mode of performance works in practice. How

does the performer practice hyper-feeling actions? To address these questions, I will make a

detour away from 500 Clown productions to the 500 Clown classroom. Before guiding students

into an experience of being affected, feeling the affects of actions, we introduce the idea of

following impulses. In the previous chapter, I described an impulse exercise by Michael

Kennard of Mump and Smoot. 500 Clown approaches impulse in both the rehearsal studio and

classroom by setting up structures that give rise to impulsive play. Yes, impulses happen all the

time. One walks down the street, feels an urge to look behind, in front, sideways, pause, move

quickly. But how does acting on impulse become stage worthy? What does an audience want to

watch? 500 Clown has found that action gives rise to impulse and certain actions give rise to

more compelling impulses than others.

A basic play of impulse occurs in a simple clown entrance exercise, a series of thirteen actions. (1) Enter the stage. (2) Immediately see the audience. (3) Inhale. (4) Exhale. (5) Walk to center stage. (6) See everyone in the audience. (7) Inhale. (8) Exhale. (9) Go to exit the stage. (10) The moment before leaving the stage, look back to the audience. (11) Inhale. (12) Exhale. (13) Exit. Whereas this may not appear to be a particularly exciting action list, sometimes the student forgets to take the first breath and then corrects himself on route to the audience. Sometimes a student bursts into laughter or tears. Sometimes a student comes too close to the audience and intuitively feels the need to step back and find a more comfortable distance from the audience. Sometimes the student feels his breath is not deep enough and repeats the assigned breaths. A University of Chicago student who took a 500 Clown course described her experience as follows: "As I stepped from behind the curtain and took a breath, people suddenly came into focus. I noticed their expressions and dared to make eye contact. I specifically remember [one audience member] raising his eyebrows, his mouth half open in an encouraging smile, and at that moment I relaxed. Through my breath, I suddenly felt a smile form in response and the moment of not knowing passed painlessly, even productively." What the audience sees within the structure is a play of impulses: the impulse to breathe or not breathe, to smile, to avert one's gaze, to clasp hands, or adjust hair or clothes. Even a simple structure like that gives rise to a noticeable play of impulses. The audience begins to form connections with that performer, getting to know her, almost as a character, in these circumstances. Sometimes the actions suggest a plot with conflict, drama and transformation.

Another impulse exercise is group carry. Students stand in two lines at either side of the room facing each other. Each student must carry everyone across the space, and each student must be carried by everyone across the space. A student does not have to carry someone alone.

Groups of students can carry one person. A student cannot cross the space if he is not involved in a carry. A student cannot repeat a carry but must find different ways to carry. There is no speaking. This action exercise, physically more demanding than the entrance exercise, also gives rise to impulses: the impulse to laugh, to breathe, to adjust a carry, to stop oneself from falling, to help another student, to hoist oneself on someone's back, or to turn someone around. People's behavior and impulses are affected by their insecurities about being carried, their fear of heights, their timidity at being touched, their confidence of strength, or their delight in being lifted.

The physical situations triggered by the exercise have the potential to emotionally affect the participants: being surprised by how someone lifts you or how you are lifting someone, needing help, risking falling, risking giving someone your weight, or risking being hoisted up high. 500 Clown uses group carry to demonstrate how to act on impulse, whether that means laughing, screaming, gasping, catching your balance, or catching someone's weight. Inevitably these physical relationships with fellow classmates have the potential to affect the students emotionally, *if* the performer is open to being affected. Rather than focusing on the psychology of being emotionally available, 500 Clown pursues an action-oriented approach to being affected.

Once emotional experiences are triggered by exercises like group carry, 500 Clown coaches students to build the experience, to develop it, or as Danzig describes, to make and climb the ladder. (1) Feel a giggle rise up in response to something. (2) Say yes to that giggle by letting it out, letting it be heard, letting it change your breath. (3) Grow the giggle into the next thing, maybe a laugh. (4) Increase the intensity of the laugh, and perhaps the intensity of the release turns the laugh into a cry. (5) Perhaps the cry is scary or terrifying. (6) Now terrified, try

to catch a breath, and so on. The idea is to allow each impulse to trigger more impulses in the performer and her partners, always saying yes and choosing to heighten the experience. If the impulse is to repress an emotion, then repressing is heightened.

Typically at this point in classes, in the midst of doing these exercises, an important question arises. "Am I trying to be truthful to what I am feeling or am I trying to be entertaining?" asks the student. "Both," I, the teacher, answer, only adding to the confusion. Being truthful of course is a problematic notion, suggesting that such subjective notions as truth and non-truth can be delineated. The performer's work in clown theater and, arguably, in acting more generally is to broaden the range of experience, vulnerability, access to emotions, and play of impulses. The performer works to expand and deepen his expressive and communicative range more so than what one typically does walking down the street. The work is to turn on caring, turn on feeling, and turn on being affected. Pushing beyond the normal everyday range of experience can, certainly at first, feel contrived and insincere. But in fact it is just as truthful as the more limited range of experience accessed in everyday life, which is constrained and restrained by expectations of public experience, again all in specific contexts. Where in our everyday lives is screaming expected and unexpected? Crying? Laughing? Hyperventilating with fear? We can imagine the different spaces and accompanying behavior as well as the often memorable moments when incongruity between experience and expectation – disruptions in appropriateness – occur.

Blurring Real and Imagined

The questions that come up in teaching this performance style provoke discussion about the relationships between pedestrian and heightened behavior, truthfulness and contrivance, authenticity and simulation. Blurred distinctions between these seemingly opposed concepts

point to similarly blurred distinctions between real and imagined circumstances in which the performer is invested. According to Danzig, broadening one's range of experience is connected to believing, which in turn leads to investment. To experience a moment inclusive of one's partners on stage - the real audience, the real set, the real costumes, the real fatigue, the real surge of energy -- demands that one believe that these circumstances matter. Only then can the believer invest in these circumstances by allowing them to have affect and consequence. Danzig's emphasis on the word real suggests that these circumstances are undeniable and consequential.

Believing in circumstances is a core component of acting. Not coincidentally, 500 Clown company members were first trained as actors in dramatic theater. Danzig and I began our training as high school students in New York, he at the High School of Performing Arts and I at HB Studios. Brennan received the bulk of her training as a theater major at University of New Hampshire, and Kalina at Illinois State University, also the training ground of several of Steppenwolf's founders. Though there are a myriad of approaches to dramatic theater training, a core tenet is that the ability to create life on stage hinges on the ability to invest in imaginary circumstances in such a way that evokes living these circumstances. "The basic technique [Stanislavski] advocates involves what he calls 'the Magic If'" (Leach 26). "In order to be emotionally involved in the imaginary world which the actor builds on the basis of a play, in order to be caught up in the action on the stage, he must believe in it" (Stanislavski 94).

Whereas imaginary circumstances are central to acting in the context of dramatic theater, imaginary coupled with real circumstances characterize the world of clown theater, and the layering of the two dissolves their distinctions which are always blurred at best. For example, overturning a 257-pound table, as Kalina does in *500 Clown Frankenstein* is real, in the sense

that he does not have to imagine the weight of the table or imagine its affect on his body.

The possibility of the table falling on his foot demands he work with it in a particular way. The

strength to overturn it requires he breathes a certain way. Yet for Kalina to build the emotional

affect of interacting with the table means he needs to believe in the stakes of overturning it. He

is overturning it to construct the laboratory for Scene 1, as ordered by his superior, Dr.

Frankenstein, played by Bruce.

In contrast, when Shank "kills" Bruce in *500 Clown Macbeth,* the performers have

entered the realm of played action and follow their impulses in relation to the belief in this

imaginary event. Yet this belief in a fictional death is coupled with Bruce's actual absence from

the stage. Shank is affected by both the belief in the imaginary murder of Bruce and Bruce's real

absence from the stage.

By engaging in undeniable consequence (the weight of the table) and consequence

created by belief (murdering Bruce), 500 Clown traffics on the blurry and indistinct boundary

between reality and fiction, or, to use different vocabulary, between mimesis and actual as

described by Richard Schechner in *Performance Theory*. The former defined as imitation of

action suggests that what happens on stage is a representation of life as opposed to life itself. Of

course, the action, however much it represents life, is also happening on stage, thus already

blurring any distinction. In contrast, Schechner posits an "actual" whose five basic qualities are:

"1) *process*, something happens *here and now*; 2) *consequential, irremediable*, and *irrevocable*

acts, exchanges, or situations; 3) *contest*, something is at *stake* for the performers and often for

the spectators; 4) *initiation,* a *change in status* for participants; 5) space is used *concretely* and

organically" (51). Of course, the actual also inevitably signifies or represents, especially if it is

framed by a performative context. 500 Clown's actions, as described, trigger both undeniable

consequences and consequences created through belief and investment in fictional circumstances. Additionally, 500 Clown's actions can be read by audience members as actions themselves and as signifiers, often related to the source text in the title, which inevitably audience members hold in their imaginations as they watch the productions, a process I describe at length in the following chapter.

I began this chapter with the aim of articulating how clown elements are realized in the context of theater. I have focused on playing action as the dominant language of 500 Clown through looking at what an action script is, six different modes of playing action, and the demands on the performer to be affected by action, which overlaps with acting, a core component of dramatic theater. In the following chapter I focus on another core component of theater – the audience – and its role as player in clown theater.

CHAPTER FIVE
AUDIENCE AS PLAYER: A PRACTICE OF SPECTATORSHIP

Continuing to investigate how theater functions as a context for clowning, I shift my focus to the audience. 500 Clown's model of spectatorship is inspired by an idealization of sport spectatorship, people packed into a stadium thrilled by chance and virtuosity, excited by the immediacy of the event. Spectators watch athletes perform virtuosic feats and complete stellar plays at the height of exhaustion and pressure. They witness the underdog win. They know that each sporting event is unique, happening for the first and only time. Pushing further into the ideal, the spectators *want* to be there. They do not furtively glance at their watches. In contrast, they wish the game clock would slow down, never wanting the action to end. Spectators are passionate, consumed, absorbed and in communion with other spectators. The rules and goals of the event are accessible; the objective is clear. "On any given weekend something like 160 million Americans emphatically engage in sport. And the comparison with theater is something like, I don't know, 17 Americans engage in theater" (Danzig 6 June 2006). Danzig's statistics are clearly felt, not researched, and 500 Clown's idealization of sport spectatorship surely betrays sport's own complex history.

Yet, that said, 500 Clown's idealization stems from the observation of a viewing etiquette different from that of theater in which sport spectators are moved to stand up, vocalize, spontaneously embrace, jump, and cheer in response to the thrill of witnessing a once in a lifetime physical feat or a point scored in the final moments of the game or a defensive play made under immense physical and mental pressure. The depths of emotion displayed in the stands inspire 500 Clown. Spectators wear their team's defeats and victories as if they were their own. Significantly, 500 Clown is not claiming that sport spectators feel more than theater

spectators. Rather, 500 Clown is compelled by sport as providing a particular kind of context for spectatorship, which allows for a public display of affect. Danzig proposes that in the context of sport, people are emotionally expressive, whereas in the context of their lives, their intimate relationships, perhaps they are not. "Sport can be seen as a teacher, maybe of the grosser levels of emotionality" (6 June 2006). For Danzig, theater taught him to reduce his level of fear of emotion. "That's the huge gift theater and sport can give culturally to the community: People survive emotions." Furthermore, the public display of affect affects others, setting in motion a participatory public communication of experience.

500 Clown, of course, does not chart new territory in its fascination with sport spectatorship. Brecht, arguably the most well known theater-maker to find inspiration in sport, noted the sheer popularity of sporting events. According to Brecht, fifteen thousand persons pay high prices, they buy their tickets, they know what will take place, and indeed it takes place (Willett 6). This ability on the part of spectators to understand the event was critical to the contact between public and event, which according to Brecht, was vital. "*A theatre which makes no contact with the public is a nonsense*" (Willet 7). Brecht saw the possibility of creating contact with the public in what he called a "'smokers' theatre', where the audience would puff away at its cigars as if watching a boxing match, and would develop a more detached and critical outlook than was possible in the ordinary German theatre, where smoking was not allowed" (Willett 8). Brecht sought intellectual engagement, made possible at the sporting event by the shared knowledge of game rules by spectators and players. The contact 500 Clown seeks involves expanding play to include the audience or, to put it another way, inviting the audience to play. How does 500 Clown do this?

Public Solitude/Public Space

Konstantin Stanislavski articulates a concept of public solitude in which the actor, though witnessed by the audience, focuses his attention exclusively on the stage action and what his playing partner is doing, a quite significant shift in acting practice and one made possible by the darkening of the house where the audience sits. "An actor must focus absolutely, and not allow his attention to wander, most especially not to let it wander out into the auditorium. Attention is of course related to concentration, and the actor is equally required to concentrate unremittingly on the stage action and what his playing partner is doing, observing, listening and responding truthfully" (Leach 25). 500 Clown works with a concept of *public space* as opposed to *public solitude*, meaning that the performer focuses not only on his stage partners' actions, but on the audience and the entire theater space, including but not limited to the stage. "Playing partner" expands to mean everything that could provide stimuli including audience, architecture, the street outside, and the backstage crew.

500 Clown productions attempt to communicate this notion of multiple or even infinite playing partners by shifting focus when the shows begin to that which is normally hidden or simply ignored. Earlier I described the opening of the Lookingglass production of *500 Clown Macbeth*, in which performers entered via the theater's unique architecture, drawing the audience's attention to the catwalk, balcony, and railings above and behind it. In *500 Clown Frankenstein*, Kevin stands at the edge of the stage greeting audience members as they enter. Once the audience members have taken their seats, Bruce enters a darkened stage, sees the audience still lit by houselights, and immediately exits. Shank enters and runs to the light booth to turn off the house lights. In both shows, 500 Clown immediately signals to its audience that

focus can be on familiar and unfamiliar elements of theater. The theater's architecture is the

set, the action will happen on- and off-stage, and controlling the lights is part of the play's action.

500 Clown does this as the first step to inviting the audience to participate as player. But

to expect that these actions will catapult the audience into an active role is naïve. Perhaps at an

earlier time when realism was the dominant theatrical mode, such disruptions could create

surprise, shock and even outrage, but that is not the case today when so many forms of

performance are accessible to spectators. In Chicago, an evening at the theater can mean a

national touring production of a Broadway musical, a gritty realist drama at Steppenwolf, a

sketch comedy show at Second City, and a non-linear dance-theater production at the Museum of

Contemporary Art, and that only begins the list of possible outings. In terms of the structures of

plays themselves, there are no longer any constants; conventions are broken left and right

rendering even the idea of conventions somewhat obsolete.

Eye Contact

So then, what makes the invitation to the audience to enter the play more effective? 500

Clown's invitation begins with eye contact, an element of clown I first learned from Gaulier.

Gaulier instructs his clown students to check in with the audience every five to ten seconds. In

whatever scene students are improvising, Gaulier coaches the performers to look out to the

audience, find a friend, and make eye contact. This action is often called checking in, but 500

Clown has found that terminology to be ineffective in its own workshops. Check-ins suggest

perfunctory exchanges. When reminded to check in, students quickly glance at the audience, but

the glance does not impact what they are doing or feeling on stage. The audience member who

receives the glance similarly feels unaffected. The glance seems to fulfill a clown requirement,

but it does not enable a relationship between performer and audience to develop.

The key to effective eye contact is using it to create relationship, a core element of clowning. In clown theater, every time the clown looks at the audience, the clown must be ready and available to be affected. That contact invites involvement, communication, and cooperation. This quality of connection impacts what happens next, thereby allowing individual audience members to affect the course of the show.

Effective eye contact is linked to an investment in the exchange between audience member and performer. Why does the performer look out to the audience and make eye contact? 500 Clown performers make contact with the audience in different ways. Brennan describes searching, reporting and laziness:

> There are times when I'm searching for something in the audience, to give me an idea… and that's a really vulnerable feeling, like if I don't know what to do and … there's really a question, I'm looking for a response or some material and so I'm scanning people and seeing how they're sitting and how they're watching … The other kind is reporting -- that's when I have something to give to the audience.… Something happens to me -- it's a reporting -- oh this is how I feel about this.… I'm not receiving so much then, I'm giving it out. You can't do both at the same time, but you can have a conversation with either of those. Third is lazy, just putting a face out there… I don't have anything to give and am not asking for anything. (21 April 2005)

In contrast to Brennan's three modes, Kalina describes two modes. "Something's happened to me. I look out to share it. They know emotionally where I'm at" (26 April 2005). Then Kalina receives their reaction, which in turn takes him to a new place, which he then shares with the audience. Or Kalina, like Brennan, gets something he needs. "I have to get myself to a high

place after the shooting [in *500 Clown Macbeth*] and for me, it's that whole balance between how do I jumpstart if I'm not there. I'll get in my way, in my head – sometimes I look to them [the audience], just breathe, and [it] makes me vulnerable." Danzig describes the contact as, "I'm looking out at the audience so I can be with them, so that they can be included in my being, in my experience, and give them access to my experience" (6 June 2006).

Expanding Audience Role: Playing with Expectation

Looking out to the audience expands to include modes of engagement beyond direct eye contact, all towards the goal of involving the audience as a player. In a series of post-show discussions at the Lookingglass production of *500 Clown Macbeth*, I had a chance to hear audience members' perceptions of what their role in the show was. One audience member learned that from the start, if she giggled, she would get a look. If she made a noise, she would get called out. Another audience member noted that an audience reaction would impact how the performer engaged in tasks on stage. Another perceived that the gasps of the audience during the bloodbath fed the action and infused the play with a particular feeling. As described in the previous chapter, making space for audience input is a dominant mode of playing actions.

Shifting audience members into the role of players is not always a smooth or easy process. On paper the relationship between performers and audience may seem straightforward, but in practice, it is less clear and often involves risk-taking, thereby transferring the site of risk from stage to audience or having risk-taking exist in both sites. Kalina describes a performance at Chicago's Chopin Theater in spring of 2002. As the performers traveled down the aisle in the opening of the show, the audience was particularly quiet, and Kalina felt the question "What the hell is this?" tacitly and uncomfortably hang in the air. About three-quarters of the way down the aisle, a gentleman with bright white hair and a beard (now affectionately referred to by 500

Clown as the "Santa Claus guy") said, "Boo!" The performers received his utterance with

the excitement of Christmas morning (apologies for keeping the metaphor going). The tension in

the theater broke as the audience laughed. What had seemed seconds ago like an abyss between

performers and audience was bridged; a partnership began to form.

Why do I call this risk-taking? I did not have the chance to talk to the Santa Claus guy

but this is what I imagine to have happened. The performers and at least some audience

members perceived the mounting tension in the theater: What are the performers doing? What

is this? Will it be good? Into that silence, Santa Claus guy proposed, "Boo!" He broke the rule

that the audience stays quiet. He broke the expectation that the performers are exclusively

responsible for what happens in the theater. His answer to the tension and silence in the theater

was to participate, to try a different and perhaps less conventional audience function. In doing

so, he could not know how the performers or his fellow audience members would respond. For

Danzig, the Santa Claus guy was a hero. "It's amazing when an older man, a cane-using older

man, a man who is infirmed because of his age, when that man can become a hero in the present

moment, that makes me feel like we're an old-time culture where age is a virtue because it

bequests wisdom. That's how he was a hero – because of his intelligence, understanding,

compassion, knowledge and comfort. Not because of any typical American heroic

characteristics" (6 June 2006).

Years ago when I administrated arts education programs for Theater for a New Audience

in New York City, I had the opportunity to attend several theater performances for elementary,

middle and high school student audiences. A "boo" from those audience members would not be

noteworthy. Bayes has found that subscription audiences are the least interesting and student

matinees the most exciting, because the former is reluctant to participate, and the latter is not yet

fully socialized (12 May 2005). 500 Clown typically performs for audiences that are socialized theatergoers, meaning they are accustomed to and perhaps invested in theater etiquette. When conventions are challenged or abandoned, uncertainty sometimes replaces familiarity.

The Santa Claus guy's "Boo!" relieved the tension that preceded it, but also likely gave rise to an uncertainty as to what else the audience might do throughout the performance. What can an audience member do? What is too much? What is the balance between conventional theater etiquette and this invitation to break with those conventions and speak out, stand up, dialogue with the performers? In a 2006 performance of *500 Clown Macbeth* at University of Maryland's Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, a seven-year old boy in the audience became very vocal, spontaneously shouting things, and leaping out of his seat. Several adults called out to the parent of the child, "Control your child." I, as director of the show sitting in the audience, felt profoundly confused. Was it my job to somehow mitigate the conflict? How would I do that? Escort the child and his parent out of the theater? Whisper to those who were uncomfortable that this kind of interaction is provoked by the performance and therefore is part of it? I sat quietly, albeit uncomfortably, and in the post-show discussion, listened as audience members negotiated the challenges provoked by the situation.

The 2004 interviews with Lookingglass audience members revealed their uncertainty as to what their roles should be. One audience member asked what the limits are when Shank prompts the audience to scold him for shooting Bruce. Another wondered how much the clowns would accept from the audience in the trick or treat section (quite literally when the clowns go into the audience asking for tricks or treats), which has since been replaced by other material. Another noted that theater conventions are broken and twisted during the show, but he was not

sure how far to go. Is there a boundary? And what/where is it? "What would happen if someone shouted something?" asked another audience member, while one remarked, "Still, I held back…. How we're programmed."

Building the Play Spirit

Ultimately the burden falls on 500 Clown – the production and performers – to create a safe context in which to play. Playing with roles implies experimentation. Experimentation sometimes leads to failure, thus the risk factor and its cohort trust. According to Kalina, the most important precondition for play is trust.   When an audience member experiments with some aspect of his or her role during the show, that audience member is making a proposal and therefore taking a risk. One can imagine the devastation of making a proposal and having it be ignored or publicly rejected as inadequate, stupid, or inappropriate. However, to do so in the spirit of play minimizes risk. To do so in the spirit of play means not trying to get something right according to a serious protocol, but rather to take pleasure in attempts. The audience's experimentation must be supported by a sustained context of play. Huizinga tells us that play can be broken. "At any moment 'ordinary life' may reassert its rights either by an impact from without, which interrupts the game, or by an offence against the rules, or else from within, by a collapse of the play spirit, a sobering, a disenchantment" (21).

One component of a safe context is accepting proposals, creating a spirit of play that says yes to taking a chance. If someone throws a ball to someone and it drops, no one dies. They're playing. What if someone calls aloud to Shank atop the platform, "Get the crown"? Kalina does not freeze and get derailed from his task. Nor does he ignore that proposal. Rather he finds the audience member and says, "You get it." Or, "I'm trying." Or any number of responses that make sense in that moment. Rejecting the proposal by ignoring it would be akin to collapsing

the play spirit. Play relies on trusting that your partners will receive your proposal and play with you. Trust is at the foundation of whether audience members will enter into playful relationships or partnerships with each other and with the performers.

It is difficult to imagine trust being established among one hundred to two hundred audience members in an hour. It is the responsibility of the performers to establish that trust by being trustworthy themselves. In that way, the performers take care of the audience. When an audience member makes a proposal, the performers celebrate that proposal and, in doing so, encourage fellow audience members to do the same. If an audience member celebrates another audience member's proposal, the performers celebrate both those actions. The performers do their best to not allow anyone in the audience to feel shut down.

Sometimes, as described in the previous chapter, audience members become players by being cast in a scene and given a specific role to play or task to do, requiring skill and practice on the part of the performer. First, the performer has to find an audience member who is available for that level of play. Though there might be some discomfort or awkwardness, the public exposure should clearly not be painful or humiliating. One strategy is to select an audience member who is on the edge of comfort and discomfort. The rest of the audience then sympathizes with and roots for that person. In effect, the audience member is an underdog in relation to the performer and so anything that person does in the pressure of performance will be celebrated. The tension of what will happen is palpable, and the relief at the scene's conclusion is often in the form of laughter, which further celebrates the audience participant. If the audience member who is selected is very eager to participate, then a different kind of tension emerges centered on whether the performer will be able to handle or contain the audience member's enthusiasm. In a sense the performer becomes the underdog.

From observing these forms of interaction at 500 Clown shows as a director and at other shows as an audience member, I have found it to be beneficial to have an act that is structured enough so that the audience member can succeed and also open enough to allow the audience member to actually bring something of him- or herself to the experience. For example, in *500 Clown Macbeth*, when Shank goes into the audience to be scolded and beaten for killing Bruce, Kalina the performer asks the participants to do very specific things, but *how* they execute the tasks is up to them. Often their individual choices and Shank's responses to them as individuals give rise to the humor of the situation, making both audience and performer responsible for the success of the event.

If the audience member is deeply embarrassed and ashamed to have the spotlight on him or herself, then, in my experience, the event is painful to watch. I witnessed what I would consider an abuse of an audience member by a clown in a solo performance. The performer asked a middle-aged man to come on stage. She proceeded to take off his shirt and at various moments was topless herself. She directed him to sit in a kiddie pool and the audience became aware that getting up and down was difficult for this man.   I was enraged and reminded that audience members do not go to the theater to be on stage; they rightfully expect to be audience members and not actors. If performers use their power to change that role, the onus is on them to proceed with the utmost care and respect. The performers are asking the audience members to enter into a new relationship with them, and the performers therefore must be trustworthy partners.

The project of involving audience members as players is served by ensuring that there is overall trust in the production, which Kalina understands as ensuring that the audience believes the performers are "in the know." Even if the audience perceives the freshness of discovery in a

show, it also wants to be confident that the performers are in control of the event. "The audience is on a roller coaster; it doesn't know what's on the other side, but it knows it's been tested" (Kalina 26 April 2005). I have often heard audiences members say that when they watch a 500 Clown show for the first time, they feel as if things are happening for the first time. Yet at the same time they trust that the show is a known entity, and that even with all the event's variables, the performers are in control of the trajectory of the show. (Repeat audience members, aware of what is planned, recognize what actually changes from performance to performance.) The audience trusts that the individual moments will accrue and be part of a cohesive whole bigger than the sum of its parts.

This trust comes from several sources. The program tells the audience that the show has been running off and on for several years. Often reviews are posted in the lobby, which attest to the fact that the show is, at least in part, repeatable. The audiences can recognize a dual logic guiding the show: At the same time as the performers are eager to play with audience proposals, they embark on actions that do not arise solely from the performer-audience partnership.

Yet trust is fragile, and inevitably there are moments when it is shattered. In one performance of *500 Clown Macbeth*, a man stood up in the audience and ordered the performers to stay away from his pregnant wife. This is an example of trusting and not trusting. The audience member did not trust that the performers would not physically endanger his wife, but at the same time he did trust that the performers could handle him standing up and making the demand. Indeed, the performers respected his request, and the audience welcomed his demand. Danzig recalls a painful moment of breaking an audience member's trust. "A woman was walking out of *500 Clown Macbeth*, an elderly woman, and I saw her and I said something like, 'Oh my god, please don't go, please don't go, please stay,' and the audience laughed. She

stopped. And she turned around and she sat down in an uncomfortable place for the rest of the show. That was horrible for her. She became a pawn in our experience, instead of being the author of her own experience .… She was moved from being a passive to an active observer, and I silenced her by paying attention to her" (6 June 2006).

Danzig also recalls another moment where trust was on the line, but with a different outcome. "Somebody's phone was going off, and I responded first and kind of climbed up the aisle transforming into a dragon and all sorts of violent creatures looking for the cell phone. When I found the person whose cell phone it was, she was terrified. The audience wanted me to annihilate her as this creature I had become. They were excited to watch that, and she was not excited to be the recipient of that. So I kissed her. And that was very relieving for her and, I think, for the audience" (6 June 2006).

Unfortunately, as the director of the shows, I do not know all the incidents when trust is shattered. I believe there have been audience members who were dismayed or humiliated by being singled out. I believe there have been audience members who were physically hurt or uncomfortable when the clowns race through the audience or climb over its chairs. I believe there were audience members who felt judged and dismissed by fellow audience members. Audience members do not necessarily feel empowered to say no to a performer when asked to participate, and even that refusal is a public act once the performers have shifted focus onto them. Often when coming to a theater, audience members expect to sit in the dark and have their experience of the production in private. When the house lights never fully go out and their experiences are exposed and made public, the audience is brought into a very different relationship to the action on stage. It is unreasonable to expect that everyone will feel confident and positive in that engagement.

Negotiating a New Role

500 Clown makes a choice not to set parameters or too heavily guide the audience's play. For example, it does not offer rules of engagement in the lobby or program, as one audience member suggested. The company feels that setting rules would mean knowing what could happen when you put hundreds of people in a room together. 500 Clown does not want to limit the possibilities of what can happen to what the company can imagine and control by legislating or recommending behavior. Additionally, 500 Clown is interested in making theater a site in which audience members negotiate new ways of acting and getting entangled with each other.

With no clear rules of engagement, dialogues begin among audience members in the form of words, gestures, glances, and any number of audience interactions. In my interviews with audience members, we discussed the expectation of being quiet. One woman described an argument she had during a performance with someone directly behind her in a reserved subscriber seat. The interviewee was explaining something to a child seated next to her, and the subscriber asked her to be quiet. The interviewee had been to other 500 Clown shows and told the subscriber that the performers did not mind talking in the audience and even welcomed it, to which the subscriber said she did mind, and if it continued, she'd leave and ask for her money back. The woman was torn between two different expectations – one coming from the performers and another from a fellow audience member. Another audience member mentioned her own desire that the story keep going and a perceived tension in the audience to keep audible reactions to a minimum so that the performers could move the plot forward.

Audience negotiations about whether to speak aloud or be silent, whether to stop the action on stage or urge it to move faster destabilize the role of the audience and constitute a form of play – playing with the conventions of audience etiquette and thereby playing with, more

broadly, theatrical conventions. The play consists of colliding with expectations and trying

on new behaviors outside of those that are expected. Expectations might include how the

audience will make sense of the production, how the production will include or exclude audience

members, how the source material will be treated. Expectations are cast as the authority.

Sometimes the authority will be subverted, sometimes defended, sometimes toyed with,

sometimes upheld.

500 Clown needs there to be expectations so that when the audience is invited to break

expectations (or when 500 Clown breaks expectations by asking the audience to play) there is a

consequence of tension, laughter, surprise – drama! Brennan says, "We do our shows in

theaters. We use the confines of the theater – all those conventions; it's the cultural context of

what we do, which is why it's hard for us to do what we do in an open setting" (21 April 2005).

Open setting refers to walkaround contexts like street festivals, corporate events, and private

parties. If there is investment in expectations, then when expectations are broken, something is

at stake. The break matters. "[T]heatre audiences bring to any performance a horizon of cultural

and ideological expectations. That horizon of expectation is never fixed and is always tested by,

among other things, the range of theater available, the play, and the particular production"

(Bennett 98). Clown theater needs the horizon of expectations to be rigid enough so that

challenging it results in dramatic tension, which in turn gives rise to emotional experiences such

as excitement, laughter, and fear. At the same time, clown theater can be a site for forming new

horizons of expectations because theater audiences are not a fixed entity with a fixed role.

Trafficking in relationships formed at the site and moment of performance makes the

theatrical event uncertain, undecided. No longer is it only the clown performer who does not

know and has a discovering mind. Not knowing and discovering are characteristics of the whole

experience. Earlier I spoke about how the audience is asked to take a risk in trying out a new

or unconventional role for itself. "Risk [in clowning] is the willingness … is so much … almost

everything … the willingness to go somewhere that you don't know or understand" (Danzig 6

June 2006).

Critics as well as audience members have mentioned risk in their responses to 500 Clown

productions. Tony Adler of the *Chicago Reader* wrote in a review of *500 Clown Christmas*,

"500 Clown owes less to Bozo than to Chris Burden, the artist who had himself shot – with a

gun, for a piece called *Shoot* – in 1971. The troupe puts risk first – even ahead of its audience,

which often gets thrown into situations of, shall we say, physical uncertainty." *The Chicago*

Tribune's Chris Jones writes of *500 Clown Macbeth*, "No word in the theater suffers from

hyperbole more than 'risk.' … But in reality, of course, the theater usually functions within a

pre-planned world. That's avowedly not the case here. Throughout this jaw-dropping, 75-

minute show, one fears for the health of performers who are climbing about a rickety scaffold-

filled set with no apparent safety devices."

Both these critics connect risk to physicality, where physical safety and health are at

stake, referring to that of the performers and also, according to Adler, that of the audience. 500

Clown's interest in physical risk follows this logic: An action's difficulty can be measured

according to the possibility of loss, injury or danger in executing it, or, its riskiness. When an

action is challenging to execute, audience members typically grow concerned. The performers,

by allowing themselves to be affected emotionally by the actions as described in the previous

chapter, allow their fears and vulnerability to be seen. In turn, audience members often make

audible sounds – gasps and ahs. The performers in turn respond to those sounds. Thus a public

dialogue, triggered by physical risk-taking on stage, develops between performers and audience. Physical risk thereby gives rise to relationship and communication.

Perhaps more potent for 500 Clown is the risk in dialoguing with audiences. What will the audience do? What, in turn, will the performers do? Developing relationships in each performance wherein audience members impact the performers make each performance, to some extent, an unknown entity. Will it be funny? Will the relationships be compelling? Will the performers play with the audience in interesting ways? Will the audience be forthcoming in its experiences in order for play to happen? If audience members are quiet, will the performers be able to build a meaningful relationship with them? 500 Clown tries not to create formulas for its interactions with audience members. Rather 500 Clown attempts to create, in the theater at the time of performance, relationships with audience members that share the rawness and unpredictability of encounters on the street.

Active Construction of Meaning

Thus far I have tried to describe and define the nature of contact 500 Clown seeks with its spectators, briefly described as playfully active involvement. Another key aspect to the spectatorship 500 Clown seeks is that of merging emotional and intellectual engagement. The company invites and provokes its audiences to engage both emotionally and intellectually through intersections of various systems of meaning, which interestingly correlate to sport spectatorship. 500 Clown does not try to create a theatrical version of a sporting event by mimicking sport. In fact, for a while, the company tried to boil down its production of *500 Clown Macbeth* to a sports-like competition for the crown. But a goal does not find an easy correlation in clown theater or theater more generally. The drama unfolds as characters or clowns pursue their objectives, and these objectives are more complicated than wanting to score points.

People hoard money and are charitable. They are self-sufficient and dependent. Overlapping intentions, which reflect how human beings function in the world, complicate objectives.

The intentions in a theater production are perhaps more akin to why professional athletes chose their profession rather than the goals of a particular sporting event. We see how sporting events are turned into dramas when profiles of players and teams accompany broadcasts of sports. A certain player is overcoming a formidable injury or grieving a personal loss. A particular team has not won the championship in eighty-eight years. Spectators are invested in more than scoring points. They are invested in the status of their city, the relationships between the coach and players, an athlete overcoming overwhelming obstacles. The lines between how drama is created in different spectator events are blurred as forms borrow from each other. And theater, like most other art forms, employs a more complex system of making meaning than making goals and accumulating points.

Indeed, *500 Clown Macbeth* borrows from the goal-centered drama of sport in its narrative structure as each clown competes for the crown. But along with that plot-line comes a far more complicated narrative. Three clowns begin a journey together and end up isolated from each other. A classic text containing thousands of words is broken apart and reassembled through physical action and a few utterances like "no" and "go." The events of the production – the series of actions that make up its script – can be organized into different narratives. Audience members can tell the story differently and consequently can derive multiple and contrasting meanings. Meaning is constructed in the interaction between the spectator and the show, a postmodernist view that the company embraces through its practice.

Brennan describes how 500 Clown invites its audience to tack between emotion and intellect:

> If they [audience members] are familiar with the [source] material, part of
> their active observance and participation is trying to figure out how we're telling a
> story. They click back and forth between emotion and intellect. They're
> connected to the visceral side of us falling down, getting rewarded, losing things
> … and then they're suddenly head slammed – trying to figure out story and being
> moved by the events of story.… It's a self-selective process depending on who
> wants to read in which way. (21 April 2005)

How audience members tack into intellectual experience depends on what they know of the

source or adapted text. According to Linda Hutcheon, adaptation for audience members who

know the adapted text involves "an interpretive doubling, a conceptual flipping back and forth

between the work we [audience members] know and the work we [audience members] are

experiencing" (2006, 139). The adapted text "oscillate[s] in our [knowing audience members']

memories with what we [knowing audience members] are experiencing" (Hutcheon 2006, 121).

500 Clown Macbeth defamiliarizes Shakespeare's text by deconstructing it to fragments

and reconstructing it into a new text that is meaningful in part because of the way the audience

reads the new text against the source text. "If we know that prior text, we always feel its

presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly" (Hutcheon 2006, 6). The source text

refers to whatever audience members carry in their imagination and experience. Perhaps they

read the text last year in high school English class or twenty years ago. Perhaps they have seen it

produced on stage or on film. Perhaps they have no familiarity with it. The list goes on. Each

person in the audience brings a different orientation. "[W]hat is produced at the moment of

reading is due to the cross-fertilization of the packaged textual material…. [in this case, a theatre

production] by all the texts which the reader [or spectator] brings to it" (Worton and Still 1-2). Perhaps what everyone shares is having some familiarity with the title.

Given those discrepancies in familiarity with the source text, the show works on multiple levels. Where one spectator experiences certain physical actions at face value, another spectator may connect the physical actions to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's striving for the crown. The audience is encouraged to build connections between the production and the source text, because occasionally the performers do as much. Each time Bruce tries to get Shank's attention by knocking on the stage platform, Kevin says a "knocking" line from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. "Hark! There's a knocking at the South Entry. Retire we to our chamber, lest occasion call us and show us to be watchers." "Wake Duncan with thy knocking. I would thou couldst!" "Knock, knock, knock in the name of Beelzebub…"

When Shank is at his most vulnerable after shooting Bruce as described in the previous chapter, Kevin says, "Fie, my lord. Fie! A soldier and afeared? My hands are of your color, but I shame to wear a heart so white!" thereby connecting Shank's weakness to that of Macbeth after he murders Duncan. At that point, Kevin is either excited at the literal evocation of Shakespeare's text or so bewildered by the events of the play that she launches into Lady Macbeth's most recognized scene, "Out damned spot! Out I say! One, two! Why then tis time to do it! Hell is murky but who would have thought the old man to have so much blood in him?" When Shank interrupts Kevin's scene after seeing Bruce reappear, Kevin accuses Shank of doing the banquet scene, which is typically less familiar to audiences.

When Kevin makes connections to the source material she conveys a sense that it is a game, almost as if to say, "Aha, I linked Shank's action to *Macbeth*. Point for me." This is an exaggeration, but the play spirit is there. When Kevin says the three lines corresponding to

Bruce's three knocks, the audience typically cheers, to which she responds with a bow. 500

Clown hopes that the playful spirit of making these connections – the game of it – is conveyed to

the audience, thereby bringing them into the discourse of play. On one hand, 500 Clown wants

its audience to be confident to make the connections between the actions on stage and the source

text. On the other hand, 500 Clown hopes the brevity and fun of the connections takes the

pressure off audience members who have little or no knowledge of the source text.

Initiating the Majority

Striking this balance with the audience is part of a commitment to make shows that are

meaningful to a broad range of spectators who bring to performances varied associations with

clown, theater, source text, venue, and so on. For Danzig, the image of his desired audience is a

circus audience: multi-generational, multi-ethnic, blue-collar and white-collar. In contrast to

Herbert Blau's description of an audience as an "initiated minority," 500 Clown wants its

audiences to be an "initiated majority." Blau introduces the idea of initiation as follows: "The

audience … is not so much a mere congregation of people as a body of thought and desire. It

does not exist before the play but is *initiated* or *precipitated* by it; it is not an entity to begin with

but a consciousness constructed. The audience is what *happens* when, performing the signs and

passwords of a play, something postulates itself and unfolds in response" (25). *Minority*

suggests that only some persons because of background and interests can be initiated or

precipitated. In contrast, 500 Clown wants to initiate a majority, referring to the broad audience

described by Danzig. Often prospective audience members ask if they need to be familiar with

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* or Shelley's *Frankenstein.* As one critic wrote, "In such a production,

the primary question has to be, 'How much prior knowledge of *Macbeth* is required to enjoy the

show?' The happy answer is none at all" (Samuels). The productions are amalgams of

deconstructions and slapstick, employing a "simultaneously cerebral and cranium-cracking style" (Mauro).

Another understanding of initiated comes from a workshop Danzig took with director Anne Bogart who describes the theater-maker as host. As Danzig understands it, "I'm a host and I want them at my party, and so I don't throw a party they can't understand. That's not a party at all." Relating to Blau's concept of the initiated audience constructed at the time of performance, Danzig conceives of initiating as "taking nothing for granted, earning the interest of the audience moment to moment, forging belief in the thing that is happening" (6 June 2006). Here, belief is a vestigial appendage of the theatrical idea of suspending disbelief, where theatergoers choose to believe in the fictional world on stage as if it were true, putting on blinders to block out theatrical conventions that would draw attention to the fictionality of the event. Danzig's goal for 500 Clown is that in a given performance interest is earned and belief created through the totality of the live experience, requiring no blinders or suspension of awareness. Ideally, performers and spectators alike can engage in the anarchic play of clowning.

CHAPTER SIX
CLOWN THEATER DISCOURSE: NARRATIVE THROUGH DISRUPTION

In this third and final chapter on theater as a context for clowning, I focus on how clowning interacts with dramatic theater's narrative discourse, the means by which story is constructed. Dramatic theater, as clowning's context, uses a literary structure that, per Lehmann, relies on linearity, suspense, rises and fall of action, character development and perhaps most importantly a totality of a fictional world. Clown theater maintains a goal of dramatic narrative but crafts that narrative through the disruptive force of presence.

The Present's Noise

Experimental theater director Richard Foreman describes how presence exposes noise. Taking off blinders exposes one to the disruptions of life's noise usually blocked out in service to other purposes:

> In order to get through the trauma of your life, we put on certain
>
> blinders…eliminate certain possible rhythms, eliminate taking pleasure in some of
>
> the noise that surrounds us, because if you walk into an office where you're
>
> applying for a job and you hear "bang bang" of a sledgehammer next door, you
>
> need to be closed to that rhythm. You have to be used to achieving what you have
>
> to achieve in your life …The whole thrust of art is to continually make available
>
> to us the stuff we've had to throw out or call noise or disturbance or garbage.
>
> (Foreman)

The noise of the present disrupts conventional rhythms and purposeful actions. In clowning, hearing the sledgehammer is part of the spirit and action of play, in which all stimuli become the clown's partners triggering impulses. Play constantly pulls the clown to the present moment and

present circumstances. In its pull to the present, play disrupts whatever course has been set in motion. Presence as clown's motor causes disruption upon disruption upon disruption and so on; all those disruptions accumulate into story.

Targets of Disruption

Donald McManus, in his study of clown as protagonist in modernist theater, proposes that disruption is the primary device that allows clown to occupy its typical insider/outsider position. McManus identifies two sites of disruption: theatrical conventions and fictional worlds. The former refers to "rules of performance, governing the mimetic conventions being used," and the latter refers to "social rules, governing the cultural norms of the world being imitated on stage" (13). In other words, the norms of theater are one target of disruption: clowns break the fourth wall, expose the presence of the stage manager, and show a wall to be painted canvas. The other target is the integrity of the fictional world of which the clown character is part**.** Referring to these two sites of disruption, "[t]he two phenomena affect each other because disruption of the mimetic conventions usually implies disruption of cultural norms, and the clown's difficulty with the cultural norm often leads to his disrupting the mimetic convention" (McManus 13).

In clown theater, the targets of disruption do not fall so neatly into McManus' categories of performance and social rules. Firstly, there is a meta-disruption that takes place with the source text itself. The audience's expectations of what that source text is as named in the productions' titles (*500 Clown Macbeth* and *500 Clown Frankenstein*) are disrupted by the clowns' play with the source text. In order to achieve this mode of disruption, the clown theater production needs to be of a popular and/or classic text. In the case of *500 Clown Christmas*, the holiday season complete with familiar rituals, conventions, and common cultural knowledge

takes the place of the classic text. Without a well-known source text, there would be no expectations or at least not enough to sustain a full-length performance of disruptive play.

The stories of *500 Clown Macbeth* and *500 Clown Frankenstein* are told through a series of breaks, which then reconstruct a new text strongly aligned thematically with the source text. As previously described in the Introduction, *500 Clown Macbeth* begins with three clowns descending upon the stage to tell the story of *Macbeth*. A crown hanging above the stage, maddeningly out of reach, sets in motion a series of attempts and strategies to grasp it. Over the course of the show, Bruce, Shank and Kevin's cooperative spirit fractures into betrayal and distrust, until each bloodied clown stands alone, isolated from his partners.

500 Clown Frankenstein, also described in the Introduction, shares a similar narrative construction. After an enthusiastic welcome to 500 Clown's story of *Frankenstein*, the performers are unable to start Scene One until the laboratory is constructed. When the laboratory is finally constructed, the performers face their next problem: Who will play the dead body? Eventually, Shank is forced to play the role and suffer abuse, as Shelley's novel dictates. But for Shank, there is no distinction between real and fictional abuse, or between Bruce and Kevin as his partners and Bruce and Kevin as characters from the novel. Shank becomes monstrously enraged, and ideally, the final confrontation between Shank and Bruce evokes the final confrontation between Shelley's creature and Dr. Frankenstein.

The similarities between each production's approaches to constructing narrative are evident. The clowns attempt to perform the source texts, are thwarted by various occurrences, depart from the source text and, in the end, tell the core of each story, or more accurately, what 500 Clown has identified to be the core of each story. The interweaving of clown events with Shakespeare and Shelley's texts appear to occur by chance (or at least that is what 500 Clown

strives for). After long spells of clown-inspired actions with no obvious correlation to the source text, parallels begin to emerge. Though that is the ideal relation between show and source text, it relies on the audience's familiarity with *Macbeth* and *Frankenstein,* and 500 Clown's audiences tend to be less familiar with Shelley's novel than Shakespeare's play. In addition, the construction of *500 Clown Frankenstein* is not as elegant as that of *Macbeth,* in the sense that the plot development does not align with the source text until the latter part of the show, and when it does, it does not provide as many anchors to help the audience make those connections, a challenge 500 Clown continues to address through rehearsal and performance.

Yet in both productions 500 Clown's clown theater aims to harness the clown's drive to play into complex storytelling. David Levin, performance scholar and audience member, wrote a response to seeing *500 Clown Macbeth* in spring of 2002: "[T]he piece, when it was teetering on those two tracks (autonomous piece of theater and riff on *Macbeth*), suddenly became weirdly dialogical--in dialogue with Shakespeare, to some extent, but also, in the process, with an absent interlocutor, which lent the kookiness a kind of weirdness, a weirdly elusive substance: suddenly, the piece was about the pure physicality of what was going on but also about something else, and not necessarily or exclusively Clowning or *Macbeth*, but both, as well as something in between" (Levin).

Exposing the Course

With action being the core theatrical language for 500 Clown, how does disruption work? How are actions disrupted? When Shank is about to balance on the top rung of the scaffold and the audience reacts audibly, Shank willingly interrupts his balancing action to converse with the audience. When Kevin is in the midst of informing Shank that Bruce is dead and the audience audibly reacts to her performance of the scene, Kevin willingly (and excitedly) interrupts her

dialogue with Shank to converse with the audience. Performers have stopped the action of the show to wait for audience members to return from the bathroom so they would not miss anything. Of course, in each case, the audience member has missed the disruption, which is arguably a highlight of that evening's performance. Similarly, there have been times when audience members have arrived late to the show, and the clowns stop what they are doing, re-perform what has happened thus far, and pick up where they left off.

Significantly the audience is aware something has been disrupted, which is different from how disruptions are often handled in scripted theater. During a performance, particularly one that strives to engage an audience in the totality of a fictional world, when an actor drops a line or misses a cue, the actors improvise their way back to the set script. The normal course has been disrupted, but the actors endeavor to cover up the mistake so the audience can continue to suspend disbelief in order to believe the dramatic fiction. Of course, there are examples when disruptions are visible. We know this from legendary stories of actors breaking the fourth wall to ask audience members to be quiet. I had a delightful experience watching actors burst into laughter in reaction to a kitchen cabinet that unexpectedly fell apart in a naturalistic kitchen set. Often in productions featuring stars, audiences applaud well-known actors when they first enter the stage, breaking the illusion that these actors are playing characters in the dramatic fiction. These moments disrupt by briefly exposing the conventions of viewing, when one kind of belief or reality instantly replaces another.

Clown theater wants its audiences to be aware of the disruptions and the spontaneous problem-solving that follows. The audience can only perceive a disruption if they perceive a normal course. There is no disruption without something in place to be disrupted. A normal course or throughline makes it possible to detect a disruption. Returning to the example of

Shank balancing on the scaffold, the audience understands that Shank is balancing on the scaffold in order to reach the crown. When Shank shifts his focus from the action to the audience member who has gasped, the audience can perceive that his change of focus disrupts because they understand the through-line of the action in which Shank is engaged.

Though this may seem obvious, 500 Clown struggled with this issue in its creation of *500 Clown Frankenstein. 500 Clown Macbeth* establishes a narrative throughline easily when the clowns try to reach the crown hanging beyond their reach. However, the first four incarnations of *500 Clown Frankenstein* failed to achieve a clear throughline and so the play of the clowns was fairly abstract. Though perhaps entertaining, the clowns' attention to the present moment did not create disruptions because there was no throughline to be disrupted. The production as a whole therefore lacked tension and drama and was often meandering, unanchored and at its worst, indulgent.

By its fifth run in fall of 2004 (one and a half years after its premiere), 500 Clown remedied the problem by clearly introducing the characters and declaring their objectives. Bruce will play the doctor, Shank will play the assistant, and Kevin will play multiple characters. Bruce interrupts Kevin's long list of characters to announce, "Scene One: My Laboratory," which establishes a clear objective for the audience to follow: to create the laboratory for Dr. Frankenstein. Once creating the laboratory is established, the clowns layer on another objective: to build the creature. Clearly setting up these objectives creates a course that is then disrupted by the clowns' pull to the present moment. Bruce gets carried away kicking the table and playing with the candlelight. When an audience member's cell phone rings and the clowns stop what they are doing to discipline the offending audience member, the disruption matters – it is dramatic – because the event has interrupted an objective in which the performers as well as the

audience are invested. Meta-objectives and individual actions create a linearity that makes disruption possible.

Alternately, a disruption can expose that in fact there was a normal course previously undetected. The beginnings of both *500 Clown Macbeth* and *500 Clown Frankenstein* might seem fairly chaotic and unplanned. However, when an audience member arrives late, the performers often re-perform the beginning demonstrating that in fact something is ordered enough to be repeated. However, the audience does not necessarily know which events happen at each performance and which are first-time occurrences.

Cumulative Disruption

Once the circumstances are put in place that allow for disruptions to occur and be perceived, there is a domino effect. One disruption follows another and another and another. Each disruption creates a problem for the clowns to solve. The problems disrupt the narrative voice creating an almost simultaneous telling and showing. The move between the two modes of showing and telling is so quick that one is incomplete without the other. In a blink of a moment, Shank tries to balance on the top rung *and* glances at the audience to comment upon the action he is taking. Balancing on the scaffold is showing. Looking to the audience and commenting on that action is telling. Yet Shank's look to the audience initiates a new scene with the audience, a new relationship with them, which almost instantly transforms telling into showing. In other words, as soon as there is a comment on one scene (telling about showing), the commentary becomes a new scene (telling turned into showing).

The speed and fluidity of showing and telling in clown theater's narrative voice blur the seemingly clear distinction of clown's insider/outsider position as posited by McManus and Towsen. There the distinction relies on a clear fictional world out of which the clown can step

and a clear set of theatrical conventions that can be broken. Clown theater (as opposed to a play with a theater clown character) relies on neither a clear fictional world nor a clear set of theatrical conventions. The fictional world and the "real" world of the audience and performers sharing an evening in a particular theater are not clearly demarcated because the moves between the two are rapid, fluid and overlapping. Additionally, the fictional world is not crafted to be a coherent entity out of which the clown can step. Rather than an inside/outside dichotomy, a more accurate dichotomy would be between predetermined course and presence. The former refers to that which is a planned series of actions, and the latter is the force that pulls the clown off course.

Past-Present/Present-Present

Disruptions not only characterize the present play of clowning, but also the process of developing, scripting and setting actions. Disruptions clearly happen in the present moment of performance, but disruptions are also crafted into narrative – to be repeated – in the present moment of rehearsal. The writing of clown theater's action script does not happen sitting down and conceiving actions in non-clown logic, but is derived through rehearsing. Performances are amalgams of repetition of disruptions found in the present time of rehearsal (past-present) and new disruptions in performance (present-present). Performances consist of the clowns' drive to play in the present moment of rehearsal, in which material is generated and crafted into actions to be repeated, and in the present moment of performance when those previously determined actions are played. Clearly, repeating the past-present of rehearsals is the common practice of theater-making; generating material specifically through presence in rehearsal and then interweaving it with the generation of material through presence of performance is a

distinguishing feature of clown theater. And of course material generated in the present-present of performances is repeated in subsequent performances.

The combination of past-present and present chips away at the notion of pure presence, which Richard Foreman calls an impossibility. Gertrude Stein, Foreman says, attempts to write "in the continual present, to not write with the future in mind, to not write with the expectation of any realized project in mind."

> There are often two of them, both women. There were two of them, two women. There were two of them, both women. There were two of them. They were both women. There were two women and they were sisters. They both went on living. They were very often together then when they were living. They were very often not together when they were living. One was the elder and one was the younger. They always knew this thing, they always knew that one was the elder and one was the younger. They were both living and they both went on living. They were together and they were then both living. They were then both going on living. They were not together and they were both living then and they both went on living then. They sometimes were together, they sometimes were not together. One was older and one was younger. (Stein)

I choose this example of Stein's writing because though it seems to propose a hypothesis about the relationship between these women being together and being able to go on living, the equation does not pan out. Continual living and changing circumstances of being and not being together challenge rational conditionality.

Foreman describes the process of creating in the continual present as having unclean edges, incoherence, wildness and contradiction, and by the time it makes its way outside of the

writer or artist into an external form, it has been cleaned up, at least to some extent, and is therefore a dead thing. The artistic endeavor, Foreman says, is to try and capture that present moment, whatever the art form, but of course that is impossible and so every work contains a contradiction and a falsehood. Presence, which is the very cause of disruption in clown theater, is disrupted itself by the theater-maker's attempts to harness it at the time of rehearsal into a structure to be repeated in performance, albeit one intended to be disrupted by performance's present moments.

Liveness and Lifeness

The play of presence and non-presence unveils liveness, a contested descriptor of theater and also a target of disruption for clown theater. In *Liveness,* Philip Auslander argues against the formulation that there are ontological differences between live and mediatized forms, positing instead "that the relationship between live and mediatized forms and the meaning of liveness be understood as historical and contingent rather than determined by immutable differences" (8). 500 Clown does not regard liveness as a given characteristic of theater, but rather one that needs to be forged in each performance. Accordingly, 500 Clown pursues liveness in the immediacy and specificity of each performance. The company's pursuit centers on ensuring that each performance is unknown. When a performer executes a challenging action, its affect on the performer is unplanned. When the performers develop relationships with audience members, the character of these relationships is unique to the parties involved. When 500 Clown invites audience members to be players, they play in unpredictable ways. Yet, what the performers do know is that they will be affected by their actions, relationships, audience's play and audience's responses. All these unknowns create a performance event unique to the time and space in which it occurs. However, the production is not only unknown as described above. "[A] certain

degree of repetition, be it the rehearsal process, *répétition* in French, or repeated

performances, is necessary for the theater to retain some form of frame and identity, to keep it

from dissolving altogether" (Puchner 201). This is, of course, true of 500 Clown's productions,

which I have previously described as amalgams of known and unknown events.

Clown theater disrupts liveness by exposing it. When presence acts as a disruptive force,

it sheds light on non-presence or the co-existence of repetition and non-repetition. The

disruptions of presence expose the play of knowing and not knowing in clown theater, thereby

exposing liveness, which is typically taken for granted as an a priori condition of theater. Made

visible through disruptions, liveness appears to be a characteristic that can be measured in

degrees, however problematic that is linguistically. Certainly pre-planned rehearsed events in

theater happen for the first time in performance in the sense that they have never been performed

for a particular audience on a particular night, and they are not mediated in the sense of having

been recorded at an earlier time. Yet, if we contrast the rehearsed planned event with that which

is shaped by the particular interactions between audience, performers, and other variables like

temperature and sounds, then there does indeed seem to be a higher degree of liveness or perhaps

a different kind of liveness.

Under the section heading "Theater against Theater," Martin Puchner suggests that

Artaud's desire to eliminate repetition demonstrates a pursuit of the *lifeness* of the theater.

"While the liveness of the theater is thus situated between the strictly unrepeatable and

repetition, what is truly immediate, unique, and irreversible, what can never be repeated, is life

itself.… Life is everything that is unmediated, unrepresented, unrepeated, unarticulated, and for

this reason it can be reached or 'touched' only when everything that would want to mediate,

represent, repeat, or articulate it is broken apart, interrupted, suspended" (201-204).

Disruption caused by the clown's indefatigable attention to the present moment lands clown theater in a terrain of undecideability characterized by confusion between present and past-present, known and unknown, liveness and lifeness. As noted earlier, Bayes cautions against controlling clown in the context of theater, likening it to an attempt to walk a cat, which would quickly turn into dragging the cat. A clown show, Bayes says, is and must be chaos every night. Though not what Bayes was intending, 500 Clown productions certainly entangle the clown performers in the chaos of repetition and non-repetition, knowing and not knowing. Clown theater moves beyond the predicament of the individual clown to a narrative discourse shaped by the chaos of clowning, a narrative structure built out of the accumulation of disruptions motored by the surprising, unpredictable, unknowable and never ceasing present moment.

CHAPTER SEVEN
TURNING ARTISTIC PRACTICE INTO BUSINESS

This conclusion focuses on 500 Clown's current activity: turning itself into a business. As 500 Clown enters its seventh year of operations in 2007, the company is increasingly, and sometimes disturbingly so, preoccupied with running itself as a business, a preoccupation due in large part to the company's goal to financially support its four members. Summer of 2007 marked an important transition for company members. Danzig left his full-time tenure track faculty position at Roosevelt University's Chicago College of Performing Arts. Brennan left her steady part-time position as supervisor of Big Apple Circus Clown Care. Kalina returned to Chicago after two years at University of Idaho getting his Directing MFA, and I am completing this dissertation. Importantly, we are not seeking steady full-time or part-time work at this time, but rather attempting to have 500 Clown be our employer. This leap entails different financial risk for each of us, as we each have significantly different independent resources on which to rely when the going gets tough. No longer is 500 Clown serving artistic practice alone; it is also serving a financial goal.

Looking back to its inception, *500 Clown Macbeth* began as an artistic interest, not as an ambition for a company. As described earlier, Danzig's starting point for the project was to translate superstition into a physical experience, which he developed with Kalina, Engel, Reilly and me. This inquiry led to an investigation of performance style and collaborative development through the themes of ambition and superstition. Our concerns were specific to the intersections of clown and theater in performance, which, as this dissertation documents, gave rise to a vocabulary, terminology, and set of beliefs about clown theater.

Yet even without a clear ambition for a company in 2000, there appears to have been a

hope that something would continue beyond the show *500 Clown Macbeth* at Charybdis. In

the marketing materials for that first run, "F" was credited as creator of the show along with the

individual artists. F indicated the presence of a company -- an organized, though at the time, not

legal entity. F, suggesting a failing grade, was chosen to reflect clowning's embrace and

celebration of failure. "It is a moniker that ties in with what Danzig explores through his

clowning.… For Danzig clowning tries to make sense out of what's happening and not be

defeated by it" (Goddu, Citytalk). F tried to capture the tension between failure and resilience,

hope in the face of defeat. Danzig and his colleagues, including me, had an F stamp made,

bought a pad of red ink, and pressed F onto programs and flyers, a hand-made aesthetic that

persists in the company's current visual identity.

F, however, as a name succumbed to the failure it championed. During the second run of

500 Clown Macbeth by F in spring of 2001, audiences and colleagues referred to the company as

500 Clown. No longer just an adjective (of sorts) preceding *Macbeth,* 500 Clown was adopted

by the public as the company name. F was clearly not sticking. *500 Clown Macbeth*'s creators

joined its audiences and started calling themselves 500 Clown, dropping F entirely. Audiences

had informally voted no to F and yes to 500 Clown.

That early decision by 500 Clown foreshadowed listening to its audiences, which has

grown to be an integral action for the company. In prior chapters I have discussed the way

audience input is vital to the productions themselves, playing a defining role in the shows.   With

each incarnation of *500 Clown Macbeth* in its first three years, 2000 through 2003, at Charybdis,

the Chopin Theater and Pulaski Park Auditorium, the artists received audience feedback during

performances and in post-show discussions. This feedback was then used to develop the show.

Vaudeville inspired Danzig, and he likened 500 Clown's development process to the

vaudevillian practice of honing an act over years of performing. The connection to vaudeville was one of the first early concepts defining 500 Clown's process. Accordingly, it was promoted in press materials as a means towards including audiences and critics in the philosophy of continually bringing back the same, yet different, ever-evolving show. In choosing this model of developing and performing shows, 500 Clown chose to remain itinerant and to pursue touring, rather than producing a season of two to four new productions each year, which is typical of resident theaters that operate in one venue with subscribers making up a substantial part of their audiences.

One touring site is universities, which have historically been supporters of artistic experimentation through offering residencies and employment to artists. In an essay on university patronage of avant-garde art, Sally Banes describes a range of support universities provide to the performing arts.

> These include hiring artists, critics, and scholars to serve on departmental faculties – as either full-time or part-time employees – where they may receive both salaries and grants to do their creative work, as well as having access to in-kind contributions of space, materials, and staff support. University patronage also includes hiring nonacademic artists, critics, historians, and theorists to do lectures, performances, workshops, and master classes, as well as to do guest residencies of various lengths, from a week to a semester to a year. And universities sponsor museum exhibitions and installations, university press publications by artists and scholars, conferences, appointments to research institutes, and the preservation of artists' archives. As well as financial and in-kind support, universities provide symbolic capital to avant-garde artists in the

form of prestigious honorary degrees. (Banes, "Institutionalizing Avant-Garde

Performance" 230-31)

500 Clown's relationships with universities in Chicago range from employment as full-time and

adjunct professors to a long-term residency at University of Chicago as a Presidential Fellow in

the Arts from 2005-2007, which included a performance, open rehearsals, use of university

rehearsal spaces, quarter-long courses, and student advising. Colleges and universities outside

Chicago have been touring sites for the company to perform and teach in short-term residencies,

In 2006, University of Maryland's Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center presented *500 Clown*

Macbeth and hosted a series of workshops for students and the general public. In 2005 and

2006, 500 Clown performed and taught workshops at Franklin and Marshall College in

Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Pursuit of touring has necessitated that 500 Clown understand where it belongs and wants

to be in the theater marketplace. Currently the company is deciding which if any relationship to

pursue with an agent, someone who books the company into venues for a percentage of earned

fees. Entering into conversations with agents has revealed a new set of decisions about 500

Clown's touring goals. What used to be a vague and broad interest in touring begins to narrow

down to two different courses of pursuing theater touring in the United States, only exclusive of

each other to the extent that agents require exclusive contracts. One agent with whom 500

Clown has been in conversation has been in the business of representing clown for thirty-five

years. Whereas it used to be that a performance could be booked two days here and two days

there, all over the country, that is happening less frequently. Consequently this agent has shifted

focus to regional theaters that might host longer runs of a production as well as more

experimental art houses like Columbus, Ohio's Wexner Center for the Arts, Minneapolis'

Walker Art Center, Oregon's Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, all of which are

partners in the National Performance Network, founded in 1985 as a means to combat the artistic

isolation of artists and presenters throughout the United States. In contrast is another agent who

comes from the world of commercial theater, "the 200-seat houses that run *Falsettoland*,

Nunsense, *Late Night Catechism* and *Defending the Caveman* -- money–making theatrical events

all around the country, with small casts and sets, which sell-out playing to suburban audiences

who come to town to take advantage of what the town has to offer. It's a good night out; it's

entertainment" (Danzig 23 February 2007).

The practical truth is that 500 Clown will take what it is offered as long as it does not

take a financial loss on a gig. The company finds itself at an interesting juncture between

following opportunities that arise, as it has been doing since its inception, and now more actively

pursuing and creating opportunities, which requires vision and clarity about what it wants for

itself and how it wants to position itself in the marketplace. This decision is linked to the

company's philosophy about the economics of art-making.

Economics of Art-Making

The decision to continue development of shows over time through multiple runs was one

grown out of attention to audience interest. The company had unwittingly stumbled into

supply/demand logic. I say stumbled because 500 Clown did not consciously and deliberately

choose this as its economic model from the start. Through producing and performing, the

company arrived at its producing and presenting philosophy. If the audience member is a

consumer, does she want the product? If yes, then the company makes the product. If no, then

the product is retired. This simple equation led 500 Clown to embrace a for-profit status,

believing that if audiences wanted the work, then ticket sales should and would be enough to

support it.

500 Clown was excited to enter the consumer, commercial, corporate for-profit realm, or rather, for-profit *logic*. Coupled with that excitement was a distrust of the non-profit theater model, which company members linked to a lack of hustle to fill theater seats, at times a disregard for audience experience and desire, a disconnect between shows and audiences (implying a break in supply/demand logic), administrative overhead overwhelming focus on artistic practice, and an organizational structure that took power away from the artists and put it into the hands of a board of directors. 500 Clown grew philosophically committed to staying small, maintaining control of its organization and practices, keeping administrative responsibilities to a minimum, sustaining itself through ticket sales, and not growing dependent on subsidies. All these factors raised the stakes of the relationship between 500 Clown and its sole supporter -- its audiences.

Two clarifications or qualifications are in order. Firstly, 500 Clown's judgment of non-profit status needs to be understood in the context of a company seeking to make a decision about its own status, rather than a preoccupation with judging the business practices of other theaters. In other words, 500 Clown had to assess theatrical business models in order to determine what model it wanted for itself, as opposed to getting embroiled in judging other companies as an action in and of itself. Secondly, regarding 500 Clown's adherence to supply/demand logic, it would appear that 500 Clown was driven solely by its audiences' desires, creating whatever its public wanted. This however is not accurate. 500 Clown asserted its artistic interest in its first production of *500 Clown Macbeth* before registering any audience response. From there the company tested the viability of its artistic interests by paying close attention to how its productions were received by audiences, and then allowing that feedback to

affect subsequent pursuits.

Early in the company's formation, Danzig believed that audience interest was connected to knowledge. One of the motivators of his 2001 City of Fools Clown Theater Festival was to engage audiences in the form of clown theater through education and to encourage audiences to grow more discerning and demanding. Perhaps an appropriate anecdote comes from my own experience as a non-expert in visual art. I walk into a visual arts museum and seek out wall texts and audio-guides. The historical, social, political, and biographical information helps me engage with the artworks. In the most effective instances, these guides do not tell me the meanings of artworks, as if they had fixed meanings, but rather provide me with information and the confidence to construct meaning. As another example, in 1991, I took a workshop with modern dancers Eiko and Koma prior to seeing their performance. Participants gave their weight to each other and the floor; the landscape over which we moved determined our bodies' shapes. My kinesthetic experience in the afternoon workshop helped me to engage in their painstakingly slow and subtle performance that evening. Though different in their forms, these educational experiences offer tools for understanding and therefore for engagement. 500 Clown has continually created opportunities around performances to speak directly about its process and terminology, including teaching workshops, as a means towards activating audience interest in the form.

Teaching workshops in conjunction with and separate from performances also seemed to fit into the model of supply and demand that 500 Clown was pursuing. One could only teach a class if there was ample enrollment. If there were no students, there was no class. One could charge only as much as students would pay. Again, the financial equation seemed straightforward. 500 Clown's teaching debut was its clown theater institute that met on

weekends during the spring 2002 run of *500 Clown Macbeth* at the Chopin Theater. The

model was simple. The company paid rent to the Chopin Theater for the run of the show and

used part of that time to teach. The artists paid production costs and small stipends to themselves

from student tuition and ticket sales.

Initially, the supply/demand model seemed to be reinforced through teaching, but in later

teaching formats, the financial equation grew more complicated. 500 Clown taught workshops

as part of the PAC/edge Festivals, an advanced class in conjunction with its run of *500 Clown*

Frankenstein at the Loop Theater, and a regularly offered eight-week series of classes through

The Actors Gymnasium. Additionally, 500 Clown has participated in differently structured

residencies in Chicago public schools, private schools, and, more recently, universities. When

500 Clown teaches in the context of non-profit institutions, the purity of supply/demand logic,

which the company covets, breaks down. For example, Performing Arts Chicago, a non-profit

organization, supported 500 Clown's participation in its PAC/edge Festivals. Private and public

schools pay 500 Clown flat fees; the students are not directly consumers of classes. The slippage

away from a purely commercial model began to occur.

Similarly, the breakdown of supply/demand logic occurred in relation to performances

when 500 Clown entered into agreements that relied on the non-profit status of the partner

theaters and institutions. When 500 Clown was independent of these institutions, primarily

between runs of shows, the company suffered a lack of money to support its administration and

creative development, which was growing in scope and intensity. Between 2000 and 2006, 500

Clown was offered increasing numbers of opportunities; some concrete and others that required

follow up in order to be realized. 500 Clown's excitement over the increased activity was

coupled with a frustration at the lack of time and organization to effectively follow

up. Essentially, the activity demanded more administration, which the company was not

prepared to fulfill. The lack of organization was directly related to lack of time. Company

members were juggling 500 Clown with a number of other professional responsibilities that

covered their costs of living. The company scrambled to meet the demands, not through

deliberate organization of an office, but by default interests, skills and logistics. The physical

office including phones, press materials, computers, and general files was spread between each

company member's household and Danzig's office at Roosevelt University where he was an

Assistant Professor in Theater. Division of labor defaulted to personal interests and availability

on a day-to-day basis. Danzig was front man for the company with the title Artistic Producing

Director. He took calls from press, pitched ideas to presenters and producers and managed the

subsequent relationships; Kalina handled technical aspects of production; Brennan helmed

costume design and maintenance as well as promotional writing; I maintained press materials,

archival material, and rudimentary bookkeeping. Together we taught and designed

courses. (See Appendix IX for a breakdown of tasks.)

As 500 Clown company members were pressed for and desired more time to devote to

the company, they found themselves asking how 500 Clown could support themselves -- not just

emotionally and artistically as it had begun to do -- but financially. Could 500 Clown be a viable

business enterprise supporting its members as employees, perhaps even offering group health

insurance? Could company members let go of their non-500 Clown income-work, which was

both full and part-time, in order to do 500 Clown full-time? These questions, which began in

earnest in 2005-2006, set a transition in motion. For the first time the company was thinking of

itself as a business enterprise and strategizing how to make itself successful as a business, not

just as an artistic experience. For the first time the company to-do list included writing an

effective business plan, a task yet to be completed at the time of this writing.

Legal Structure

A prominent agenda item was to assess the company's legal status. Many business how-to guides begin with the question, "What is the correct legal status for your enterprise?" At the time of this writing, 500 Clown has just sent in the paperwork to dissolve itself as an S-corporation and incorporate itself as a not-for-profit organization. Why is a company that was so dedicated to being for-profit becoming non-profit? 500 Clown made its decision after long discussions debating the pros and cons of each organizational structure as outlined in the following tables:

FOR-PROFIT PROS	FOR-PROFIT CONS
Dependency on ticket sales and tuition	Lack of income outside of earned income
Clarity of supply/demand logic	Necessary high ticket price to pay production and administrative costs
Flexibility; quick decision-making time	Low incentive for long-term planning
Straightforwardness of paying for professional services; not depending on donations	No tax-free purchasing
Innovating alternative structure for a small theater company including sponsorship and investment for purposes other than profit-making	Difficulty being eligible for pro bono professional services
Minimal administration	Unclear ways to give associates of the company recognizable positions like board member roles
Rebel Spirit; the excitement of going down one's own path	Lack of role models; uncertainty of viability
The high stakes of the hustle	Hard to support experimentation that might not go over well with audiences
Compensating company members according to profits earned	
Independent, only accountable to ourselves	

NON-PROFIT PROS	NON-PROFIT CONS
Eligibility to apply and receive funding from private foundations and corporations	Time intensive to apply for funding with uncertain returns; amount of money awarded not necessarily enough to compensate for time taken to apply for it
Funding from individuals	Time intensive to build and nurture relationships with individual supporters; uncertain returns; amount of money received not necessarily enough to compensate for time taken to solicit it
Board providing financial and professional services; expanding audiences	Fear of catering what the company does to what funders want; letting granting applications dictate what the company does
Advance planning for the purpose of funding applications and board requirements; slower more considered decision making	Time put into developing and sustaining a board; board has influence on artistic process and company activities
Building a community of people who support the company in various ways	Limitation on flexibility and spontaneity; slower decision making; more people to be accountable to
Tax-free purchasing	Putting time into relationships other than those centered around performance/audience relationship
Increased eligibility for pro bono services	Compensation not directly driven by earned income
Alliances with different entities who can provide services and funding to company	Low on the priority list for professionals donating their time
Predictability of fees calculated in project budgets	Focus on networking that takes away from ticket sales hustle
	Responsible to the public that 'owns' us
	Predetermined fees unrelated to earned income

Another benefit to becoming non-profit is, ironically, increased access to the for-profit sector. As 500 Clown leaves the for-profit sector to become non-profit, it is suddenly gaining access to that sector at reasonable costs. Pro bono services and volunteerism are part of a range of services 500 Clown needs and is now eligible to receive. One example of a service 500

Clown can now access is The Arts and Business Council of Chicago, which creates

partnerships between the non-profit arts and for-profit business sectors. To non-profits, the

Council provides business mentors to help with making a business out of artistic practice. To

for-profits, the Council aims to "facilitate creativity, leadership and civic involvement in the

business community," thereby ensuring "the long-term economic and cultural vitality of

metropolitan Chicago." For the first time, 500 Clown has access to representatives from the

giving sectors of various for-profit corporations.

Yet however amicable that relationship sounds, "Corporations are not Medicis; they

never have been, they're not supposed to be.…They're not in business to be philanthropic," says

Nancy Perkins, a fund-raising consultant, in a recent New York Times article (Pogrebin).

Increasingly, the relationship between corporations and arts organizations is a partnership where

both have needs to be met through the exchange. According to Will Maitland Weiss of the Arts

and Business Council of New York, "The challenge for an arts group is to go into a meeting

thinking strategically: 'We want to reach this audience, you want to reach this market, and we'll

both win'" (Pogrebin). Whereas that speaks to institutions like the Metropolitan Opera and the

Chicago Symphony Orchestra as well as to 500 Clown's ideals of being a viable player in the

business sector, the challenge as outlined in Pogrebin's article is that a small company like 500

Clown cannot possibly reach the numbers of people a corporation seeks to reach, a number

typically falling in the hundreds of thousands.

The Arts and the Nonprofit Sector: A National Perspective

500 Clown's story is symptomatic of the ways in which the arts have been relegated to

non-profit status in the context of a broader economic and cultural system in the United

States. Stepping outside the fray of practical decision-making on the part of 500 Clown, I am

struck by the hold that for-profit and non-profit status have on artists' imaginations regarding

their roles in the United States marketplace. 500 Clown's individual issues intersect with

broader cultural issues concerning the economics of art-making in this country.

So, what is the non-profit system to which most theater and other forms of art production

are relegated? The range of non-profits are in "health care, education, religion, social services,

civil rights, community development, legal aid, art, recreation, politics, public policy, labor

unions, international peace, environmental protection, social clubs, and so on" (Gorham xi). The

common link shared by a broad realm of organizations is "that they are voluntary and self-

governing, may not distribute profits, and serve public purposes as well as the common goals of

their members" (Boris 3). Additionally, their "[n]ontaxable status confers financial advantages

on nonprofit organizations that are not enjoyed by other providers of goods and services. Tax

exemption allows nonprofits to keep much, if not all, of the surplus earned from a range of

income-producing activities. In addition, charities receive access to several unique sources of

revenue: at the federal level, tax-deductible charitable contributions (also generally deductible at

the state level) and the ability to issue tax-exempt bonds; at the state level, property tax

exemption and sales-tax exemption on purchases" (Brody142). Eligibility to receive tax-

deductible charitable contributions was critical to 500 Clown's and many other theater

companies' decision to incorporate as not-for-profit organizations. Tax-deductibility is of

primary concern to funders whether they be private foundations, government foundations,

corporations or individuals. In exchange for granting special tax status, the federal government

gets to certify the legitimacy of the organization. The number of arts/cultural non-profits has

been and continues to be on the rise in the United States, increasing by 41.2 percent or from

13,817 to 19,509 between 1989 and 1996 (Boris 10).

The clearest reason why 500 Clown changed from being a for-profit to a non-profit organization is that it could not support itself on ticket, tuition and merchandise sales alone. 500 Clown could not function according to market logic. The company needed to operate according to a different logic, and therefore, in Raymond Williams' terms, it pulled itself out of the market and into the domain of both patronal and public funding. In market production, Williams points out, there is symmetry in the coordination of reproduction, innovation and public taste. That which gets exempted from the market -- whether wholly or partially -- is something that is characterized by asymmetry, a lack of coordination. An example would be where the level of innovation exceeds public taste or the possibilities of efficient reproduction. These asymmetries are not necessarily unfamiliar or rare occurrences. Familiar asymmetries are constantly being negotiated, "(i) between the notion of a necessary 'high culture' and the pressures of the market on its continued viability; and (ii) between the notion of plural ('liberal') culture and the actual profit-governed market selection of what can be readily distributed or even, in some areas, offered at all" (Williams *The Sociology of Culture* 107).

Williams' example of a product or service that "exceeds public taste or the possibilities of efficient reproduction" addresses 500 Clown's stakes. 500 Clown aspires to symmetry in the coordination between its productions and public taste. However, theater like many art processes and products is handmade. Theater is rooted in actual people creating in real time. It is not mechanized. It is not an efficient production system using the least time and energy to make a product. This kind of inefficient production raises the costs of production, putting them in symmetry with high-ticket prices. This is exacerbated for theater that thrives in the intimacy of small houses seating fewer than three hundred people, certainly the case for 500 Clown, which seeks to make direct contact with each audience member. A commercial theater ticket can easily

be $100, clearly reaching spectators in a particular economic bracket. If a producer seeks

consumers who cannot afford to pay for its product (priced according to the costs of production),

then what are the options?

When 500 Clown made the choice to pull out of a for-profit and into a non-profit

corporate structure, it did more than change its economic structure. It chose to enter a non-profit

culture, which entails involving people as board members and funders, no longer exclusively as

audience members and students. This brought 500 Clown into the realm of philanthropy in

which non-profit organizations are sites for the enactment of citizenship. Non-profits not only

act as recipients of tax-deductible donations. They provide "avenues of civic participation and

representation of interests in the pluralistic, political system of a heterogeneous society. Diverse

values and interests are aggregated through associations … Nonprofit organizations, regardless

of origin, create networks and relationships that connect people to each other and to institutions

quite apart from the organization's primary purposes. Those relationships build social capital,

the cooperative networks that permit individuals to work together for mutual goals" (Boris 17-

18). For one chairwoman of a non-profit board, the organization became a place for focused and

productive work and community after leaving her career to raise children. For another, it

became a place where he could apply his expertise as vice president of marketing for a large

corporation after retiring. Additionally, social relationships expand and deepen as networks of

friends participate on boards of various organizations, involving each other in different

fundraising events. For some, being on a board continues an interest they had when they were

young, whether it is in the arts or other area. As a new non-profit, 500 Clown has to understand

what motivates people not only to sit on a board but also to donate money and professional

services, show up at events and advocate for the organization. "Once we're in the world of

getting money we become almost parasitic to the corporate structure … where capitalism is

creating too much money for some people, and we're living off the extra it creates. That's not

very tasty; if we're getting our money from corporations and individuals, how do we keep our

focus on our audience?" (Danzig 23 February 2007). Whereas the focus had been primarily

centered on audience members and their experiences, now it necessarily expands to include

funders and perhaps more accurately, the funding climate, which is shaped by continually

shifting concerns.

Though outside the market system might suggest being separate and distinct from that

system, outside retains a relationship to inside. No entity is freed from concerns of the larger

market culture. Williams lays out the deliberate and careful reasoning that goes into pulling

something out of market logic, which then in turn is held accountable to a set of standards

determined by the general social order. A non-profit organization is contained within market

culture but ascribed a different logic, not fixed or static, but continually negotiated in national

and local dialogues on topics including public funding, private funding, and quality control.

One famous and ongoing public negotiation in the United States concerning the purpose

of arts and therefore the justification to fund arts is wrapped up in the story of the National

Endowment of the Arts, created in 1965. The factors that led to its beginning have changed so

significantly that for the last two decades its survival has been and continues to be precarious and

tentative:

> The NEA was created because the government, increasingly drawn to the
>
> romantic modernist image of the artist as truth-telling visionary outsider, decided
>
> that artists could also serve the country by helping it to get beyond the deceptions,
>
> uncertainties, and injustices of the moment and experience a poetic lucidity and

mission that could help inspire and deliver its people. The NEA was an

ideological instrument. But it was also profoundly idealistic. It was only by

being exemplary in its idealism that it could be an effective ideological

instrument. It would not have been exemplary in its idealism if it had not been

willing to support artists who were intent on developing forms and languages that

questioned prevailing systems of power. (Brenson 35)

Critical to the NEA's formation was the perception that artists were serving a national need; they

were the necessary outsiders to increasingly technologized and consumptionist systems, and

perhaps more importantly, they provided a necessary cultural signifier of progress in the Cold

War competition with the Soviet Union. The NEA was founded because, in that specific

historical context, politicians were able to articulate a clear use-value for artists that was

grounded in service to the nation, thereby qualifying artists for national funding.

Within changing political and social contexts, the use-value or justification for funding

art and artists changes. As stated in *American Canvas: An Arts Legacy for Our Communities*,

published by the NEA in 1997, "[g]one are the days -- if, indeed, they ever really existed...when

art can be left to speak for itself, its right to public patronage unchallenged, its value to society

universally acclaimed. In addition to offering their basic programs, arts organizations will

increasingly need to place their work in a social context, making clear their stake in the

community" (Brenson 90). In 1995, the NEA shifted its focus from individual artists to arts

organizations and began to fund institutions instead of individuals. Additionally, no longer was

art valued as it had been at the Endowment's inception in 1965, as occupying a truth-telling

visionary outsider position; rather it must prove its worth in respective communities. "In a

stunning turnaround, the same agency that had been devoted to nourishing artists and making

them feel they were necessary to their country's ideals and dreams was now telling them, in effect, that it was only by becoming socially responsible in ways defined by the Endowment that they might be invited into the lobby of the nation" (Brenson 92).

The Endowment's definition of "socially responsible" reflects different concerns and trends. "With ideas of antimaterialism, antitechnology, and civilization having little relevance to American art and politics after 1989, arguments on behalf of the Endowment and of the arts began to be made in practical terms" (Brenson 103). Brenson finds a shift in art's value associated with stimulating tourism, growth of businesses, and real estate development through its presence in a given community. As Brenson describes, the language that once characterized NEA fellowships -- openness, courage, and inquiry -- was antithetical to a product-oriented market language that has persisted since the 1980s. Communities and cities now use art to "build up their civic and economic infrastructures and put themselves on the regional, national, or international map" (104).

For a non-profit arts organization to be competitive in the funding market with foundations and individuals, the organization is responsible for understanding and articulating how its activities align with current use-value of the arts, or, it has the choice to shift what it does to be in alignment with that use-value. In essence, a company must prove its worth as an entity to be supported outside a for-profit supply/demand logic. Worth in the nonprofit sphere is not calculated based on how much someone will pay for a product. It is determined by the particular beliefs, values and goals of granting individuals and organizations, which have application processes that signal how they value the arts. Sometimes organizations stake a claim to having a unique way of valuing the arts. Chicago's The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation stands out in this respect by expressly stating that artistic merit is its primary concern, which refers to

assessment of the artwork itself without attention to how it functions in a particular community. This mode of assessment contrasts with that of many other funding organizations whose line of questioning asks the applicant to demonstrate how their artistic work is of value to the community in which they are a part. Common application requirements in addition to asking for descriptions of the project's form and content include description of audience demographics. They ask: What is the importance of your work to the community? What unique contribution does your company make to the cultural life of the geographic area in which you are located? If the National Endowment of the Arts is any indicator of national trends in valuing arts, then its funding opportunities in theater offer insightful information as to how current use-value is measured. Grants for Arts Projects are divided in three categories. Access to Artistic Excellence aims to "encourage and support artistic excellence, preserve our cultural heritage, and provide access to the arts for all Americans." Challenge America: Reaching Every Community Fast-Track Review aims to "support projects that extend the reach of the arts to underserved populations," and Learning in the Arts for Children and Youth aims to "advance arts education for children and youth in school-based or community-based settings" (National Endowment for the Arts). Enhanced access is on par with artistic excellence in terms of fundability.

Becoming a non-profit organization – a publicly owned entity – and entering the competitive field of applying for limited philanthropic and government funds necessitates entering national, state and local discourse about the value of arts. A new administrative and philosophical task for 500 Clown is to understand how it fits into this pulled out space, and how that position can work in tandem with continued focus on audiences.

In Conclusion: Writing and Practice Revisited

This is the process in which 500 Clown currently finds itself, which brings me to the conclusion of this concluding chapter. My endeavor has been to write a practice of theater-making, inclusive not only of artistic form but also the dynamics of growing a theater company in a particular time and place. The relationship of writing and practice has been a reciprocal one in the sense that the practice has shaped the writing, and the writing has influenced practice. The former was not surprising because writing followed practice. Writing practice – articulating in words often chaotic physical, emotional and business processes – has also delimited practice by giving it shape, parameters, and definition. What was once sprawling and unwieldy has now been edited into a finite number of words that can be referred to whether in a classroom or rehearsal studio.

A word that keeps coming to mind in the process of writing is codification, the act of reducing to a general system or systematizing. 500 Clown's first tendency to codify was when it embarked on creating its second show, *500 Clown Frankenstein.* In the rehearsal room, the company encountered questions of whether to mimic the process of creating *500 Clown Macbeth,* as well as whether to mimic the show itself in terms of narrative structure and performance style. Company members found themselves being more self-conscious about how they were working, what they wanted the outcome to be, and projecting expectations of what an audience wanted based on public response to *500 Clown Macbeth.* Thus the company embarked on codifying its process through discussion and rehearsal, thereby limiting how the company worked and what the company made. 500 Clown found the limitations productive when they provided focus and purpose. When limitations constricted and suffocated, they were there to be

exceeded or broken. Their presence provided productive tension between consistency and innovation; reliability and experimentation; boredom and interest.

Codification also seems to create identity, "the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else" (Oxford English Dictionary 1368).   Indeed, being a company rather than a single show, entails having an identity derived from a set of practices, which, when repeated, makes the company itself and not something else. Writing practice has articulated 500 Clown's practices in ways that did not exist beforehand, and have asserted themselves in various sites. Because I, the writer, am also the company's director, grant writer and administrator, that articulation cannot be put away on a shelf. This dissertation is now part of 500 Clown as much as I am part of 500 Clown.   Each written articulation not only reflects what has been done but also, through the power of naming it and clarifying it, shapes the company.

Perhaps this is a critical opportunity of merging scholarship and artistic practice, where practice inspires articulation and articulation shapes practice. An immediate and quite practical consequence of this exchange is the Brecht project currently in development at University of Chicago. Rehearsing the final moment of *500 Clown Frankenstein* brought Brecht into 500 Clown's vocabulary. As the end of the show took shape in 2004 (crafted after a year and a half of experimenting with different endings), company members and I were surprised by what seemed to be a form of Brechtian alienation, a concept that is often theoretically understood but more elusive in practice. Kalina plays Shank, and is also read as the creature created by Dr. Frankenstein. He cradles the lifeless, yet clearly alive, body of Danzig who similarly plays both Bruce and Dr. Frankenstein. Or more accurately, Danzig is not playing anything at the moment; rather he lies there, eyes closed, dead and not dead. Shank interacts with Danzig as Bruce; Kevin interacts with Danzig as Dr. Frankenstein. Shank pleads with Bruce to come back to life and

chase him, to not give up, to be resilient. Shank needs his partner Bruce to be complete.

Read in reference to Shelley's novel, the creature cannot bear to exist without his creator.

Figure 7-1. "You don't get to give up," orders Shank (Kalina) to Bruce (Danzig)
in *500 Clown Frankenstein.* **Photo: Elliot Lieberman**

Interrupting Kalina's pleas, Brennan as Kevin (and also often interpreted by audiences as Shelley

herself) commends Shank on how well he has played the scene. She tells him it is time to exit

and to set himself on fire, as dictated by the novel, which she has pieced together from torn

pages.

**Figure 7-2. "That's great, you can go now," directs Kevin (Brennan)
in *500 Clown Frankenstein.* Photo: Michael Brosilow**

When Shank finally does leave the theater, matchbook in hand, Kevin reads from the novel,

"Polluted by crimes and torn by the bitterest remorse, where can I find rest but in death?" Then

she closes the book and says, "Blackout."

This dense matrix of characters – Shank, Bruce, Kevin, Dr. Frankenstein, the creature,

Shelley, and perhaps Kalina, Danzig and Brennan – emerge through clowning, and Shelley's

novel. They occupy fictional time and space of Shelley's novel, heightened time and space of

the stage, and the immediate time and space of the theater itself. Layers of revealed and distinct

circumstances suggest there is no unified fictional totality, but only fictions we choose to

believe in or not.

Brennan, Danzig, Kalina and I were struck by the ability of clown theater to merge

fictional circumstances, plot, presence, critical distance, and exposed theatricality in the context

of a single scene, and grew interested in going directly to Brecht, who we think of as the source

of those combined theatrical ideas. We tabled that idea as we began work on *500 Clown*

Christmas in early 2005, but shortly thereafter, as part of my dissertation research, I encountered

Donald McManus' book on clown as protagonist in twentieth-century theater, which I avidly

read and then passed on to Danzig who grew fascinated in the chapter on Brecht's *Mann ist*

Mann. Coincidentally, 500 Clown was invited to perform at Franklin and Marshall College later

in 2005 where we met McManus who was, at that time, on faculty. Meanwhile, through a series

of performance workshops and seminars in Chicago, I met David Levin, a professor at

University of Chicago. After seeing *500 Clown Macbeth*, Levin was instrumental in initiating

our residency at the university also in 2005, which became a perfect incubator for developing the

Brecht project.

I conclude with the specifics above not to suggest they are unusual, but to note that the

vital marriage between scholarship and practice is manifest in these mundane and pedestrian

sites. Opportunities arise out of relationships that cross borders of disciplines and institutions.

An occurrence happens in artistic practice. A book on a shelf provides a context for that

occurrence, which prompts a discussion with a professor, which leads to a residency at a

university, which leads to teaching a studio course, in which a paper is written that sheds light in

some new way on the practice, which in turn shapes the practice, and so on and so on. That

seems to be the productive conversation between the two modes of work, which at times do seem

at odds with each other. Artistic practice often struggles to resist definition. Scholarship struggles to define, albeit rigorously and sensitively. A definition sets the course for repetition, which then is a backbone against which innovation can happen. Despite the frustrations of often feeling like I have occupied two opposing camps, I end this dissertation with an awakened belief in the potentially symbiotic relationships between theater scholarship and theater practice.

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APPENDIX I
500 CLOWN PRODUCTION HISTORY

500 Clown Macbeth
Steppenwolf Upstairs Theater, Chicago (2007)
Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, College Park, MD (2006)
Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, PA (2006)
The Lookingglass Theatre Company, Chicago (2004)
Theater on the Lake, Chicago (2004)
Illinois State Theatre Festival (2003)
Pulaski Park, Chicago (2002)
Chopin Theater, Chicago (2002)
Weare, New Hampshire (2002)
Creative Alliance, Baltimore (2002)
Theatorium, New York (2002)
City of Fools, Chicago (2001)
Charybdis, Chicago (2000)

500 Clown Frankenstein
Orange County Performing Arts Center (2008)
Performance Space 122, New York (2007)
Steppenwolf Upstairs Theater, Chicago (2007)
Midland Arts Center, Birmingham, England (2006)
Acorn Theater, Michigan (2006)
Creative Alliance, Baltimore, MD (2005)
Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, PA (2005)
Loop Theater, Chicago (2004)
Theater on the Lake, Chicago (2004)
PAC/edge Festival at the Athenaeum, Chicago (2004)
Rhino Fest at Curious Theater Branch, Chicago (2003)
PAC/edge Festival at the Athenaeum, Chicago (2003)

500 Clown Christmas
Performance Space 122, New York (2007)
Storefront Theater, Chicago (2006-2007)
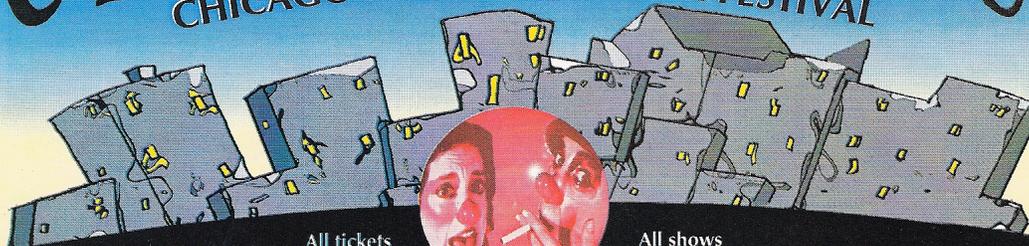Storefront Theater, Chicago (2005-2006)

500 Clown The Brecht Project
Presidential Fellows in the Arts, University of Chicago (2005-2007)

APPENDIX II
CITY OF FOOLS FESTIVAL SCHEDULE

APPENDIX III
500 CLOWN MACBETH ACTION SCRIPT
(SHORT VERSION 2004)

STAGE PRESET
Raised platform stage rigged; scaffold rigged; 3 bucket lights along downstage edge of stage; SR bucket with explosive; bowl of blood under stage; mat under scaffold; crown rigged.

ACTIONS:

Heath #1 - Discover bags

Trick or Treat – 1st bucket light redirects Clowns

Heath #2 – Understand the power of 'Macbeth'

King-ing Shank

Dance

Bruce wants the ball

King-ing Bruce

Crown is stuck

Discover scaffold

Reach for crown

Bruce misbehaves

Banish Bruce

Reach for crown

Bruce helps

Shank fights back

Reach for crown

Stage breaks

Bruce struggles

Kevin and Shank rescue Brice

Kevin reaches for crown

Bruce and Shank help Kevin

Kevin reaches for crown

Stage pins down Shank

Kevin reaches for crown

Set middle platform

Shank reaches for crown

Shank straddles with Kevin

Bruce discovers platform #2

Lower the drawbridge

Bruce delivers platform #2

Bruce defends his reign

Kevin arms Shank

Shank gets the gun

Shank kills Bruce

Kevin witnesses the murder

Shank breaks

Kevin holds the course

Kevin plays role of Lady Macbeth

Kevin needs blood

Bruce returns from the dead

Bruce gives blood

Blood bowl enters the stage

Have fun with blood

Go too far with blood

Clowns stand alone

Clowns attempt incantation

Clowns say Macbeth

Stage collapses

1 clown sees crown

APPENDIX IV
500 CLOWN MACBETH ACTION SCRIPT
(LONG VERSION 2007)

STAGE PRESET
Raised platform stage rigged; scaffold rigged; 3 bucket lights along downstage edge of stage; SR bucket with explosive; bowl of blood under stage; mat under scaffold; crown rigged.

ACTIONS

Create the heath (with audience, architecture, etc.)

Start Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*

Bucket lights go out

Shank investigate technical problems

Shank cause third bucket to turn off and stage lights to turn on

King Shank

Kevin usurp the power

Kevin and Shank play ball

Bruce top them; get attention

Kevin and Shank king Bruce

Reach the crown; take turns

Discover the scaffold

Kevin try to get crown

Kevin birth Shank

Shank try to get crown

Kevin and Bruce coach Shank

Shank catch across scaffold (cue for mid-left air bolt over screaming)

Kevin reach for crown

Bruce lets go and falls

Stage break

Bruce cover mistake

Kevin rescue Bruce

Kevin get idea to use ramp for crown

Bruce rescue Shank

Shank get idea to use ramp to get to crown

Platform crush Shank

Bruce and Kevin try to sort out the trouble with what's happening to Shank

Bruce and Kevin rescue Shank from platform

Shank discover leg no longer has feeling

Bruce and Shank argue over whose legs are whose

Shank and Bruce prepare ramp for Kevin catapult

Shank and Bruce catapulted Kevin off platform

Shank and Bruce position platform mid-scaffold

Scaffold and platform trap Bruce

Shank and Kevin use platform to reach crown

Shank bail on split

Bruce get DR platform

Shank use platform to reach crown

Shank bail

Bruce direct platform traffic with knocking

Kevin say knocking lines

Bruce jump up to get to crown

Platform fall on Bruce

Bruce propel/commandeer platform to top level

Bruce and Shank reach for crown

Bruce and Shank fight

Kevin escape

Stage give Kevin a gun

Kevin give gun to Shank

Shank shoot Bruce

Bruce fall to his death

Kevin report that Bruce is dead

Shank punish self for shooting Bruce

Kevin scold Shank for being so fearless

Kevin embark on "Out out damn spot" scene

Bruce enter and re-enter to give Kevin some blood for scene

Shank see Bruce

Kevin identify Shank's action as the Banquet scene

Kevin persist with spot scene

Bruce enter

Kevin see Bruce

Bruce give Kevin blood

Shank help Bruce give Kevin blood

Kevin get rid of the blood

Shank and Bruce play with blood

Kevin intensify need to get rid of blood

Separate onto platforms

Bucket light up

Incant

Say *Macbeth*

Stage Collapse

2 clowns disappear

1 Clown sees crown

Lights out

APPENDIX V
500 CLOWN MACBETH
(STAGE MANAGER'S SCRIPT 2007)

2007 production at Steppenwolf Upstairs Theater
 Created by 500 Clown
 Directed by Leslie Buxbaum Danzig
 Performed by Molly Brennan, Adrian Danzig, Paul Kalina
 Set Designer and Master Builder: Dan Reilly
 Lighting Designer: Ben Wilhelm
 Stage Manager: Angela Renaldo

STAGE PRESET
Raised platform stage rigged; scaffold rigged; 3 bucket lights along downstage edge of stage; SR bucket with explosive; bowl of blood under stage; mat under scaffold; crown rigged

CLOWNS begin the sounds of the heath at entrance behind (ideally above) audience.

CLOWNS descend from entrance site and make their way down aisle continuing to create heath and meet audience.

Stage and audience lights out; Bucket #1 on

CLOWNS: Fire burn.

CLOWNS go to bucket #1.

   CLOWNS: When shall we three meet again?
       In thunder, lighting, or in rain?
       When the hurly-burly's done
       When the battle's lost and won
       That will be ere the set of sun
       Where the place? Upon the heath
       There to meet with Macbeth.
       I come …

Bucket #1 off. CLOWNS REACT. *Bucket #2 on.* CLOWNS to bucket #2.

   CLOWNS: When shall we three meet again?
       In thunder, lighting, or in rain?
       When the hurly-burly's done
       When the battle's lost and won
       That will be ere the set of sun

Where the place? Upon the heath
There to meet with Macbeth.
I come …

Bucket #2 off with explosion. CLOWNS REACT. *Bucket #3 on.* CLOWNS to bucket #3.

CLOWNS: When shall we three meet again?
            In thunder, lighting, or in rain?
            When the hurly-burly's done
            When the battle's lost and won
            That will be ere the set of sun
            Where the place? Upon the heath
            There to meet with …

CLOWNS figure out not to say Macbeth. Shank goes under stage. Comes out pulling plug.
Stage lights on and bucket #3 off.

KEVIN: Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor
             Thou shalt be King hereafter!

BRUCE and KEVIN "king" SHANK. SHANK goes into audience to meet his people.
Once SHANK has found his fun as king, KEVIN asks to be king. SHANK says no. Escalation.
SHANK lets her be king.
KEVIN puts on her kilt, draws an imaginary sword. *Music cue.*
KEVIN throws her sword, it comes back to her, stabs her in the gut and she dances.
KEVIN passes the dance energy to SHANK
SHANK dances. KEVIN and SHANK play a game of keep away with the dance energy.
BRUCE becomes increasingly frustrated. Finally, he obtains the dance energy.

BRUCE: I got it! I got it! I got the thing!

BRUCE fails at dancing. KEVIN and SHANK take back energy. BRUCE exits.
KEVIN and SHANK take dance into the house.

BRUCE re-enters, crosses to center stage. He lifts his kilt to reveal red balloon (or hot water
bottle or firecrackers) hanging from his waist. Attaches air hose to balloon filling it with air until
it explodes.

KEVIN and SHANK approach BRUCE. They bow to BRUCE.

Crown flies in above BRUCE, but only descends a few feet below the grid, out of reach of
CLOWNS.

CLOWNS try to reach crown, lifting each other.

BRUCE and KEVIN thrust SHANK upward. SHANK lands on stageright side of scaffold.

KEVIN climbs over SHANK and reaches for the crown. SHANK tries to help by lifting KEVIN up on his shoulders.

        KEVIN: No! No! Down! Down!

SHANK lowers KEVIN and thrusts his head between her legs to see the crown. KEVIN pushes his head back. SHANK tries again. KEVIN hits his head. SHANK forces himself between KEVIN'S legs and pushes his way up. KEVIN births SHANK.

        BRUCE/KEVIN: Go get it baby!

SHANK reaches for the crown. BRUCE coaches him. SHANK shhs BRUCE. BRUCE shakes scaffolding. KEVIN banishes BRUCE from stage right. SHANK reaches back to the crown. BRUCE and KEVIN climb to top of scaffolding. BRUCE AND KEVIN suggest ways for SHANK to get the crown, culminating in BRUCE'S longer suggestion.

BRUCE mimes stretching each of his fingers and grabbing the crown

        BRUCE: Go.

SHANK copies what BRUCE has done and "mime" punches and hooks BRUCE.

KEVIN breaks SHANK'S mime hold of BRUCE with saw, sword, etc.

        KEVIN: This one. Stand on this one.
                       (referring to top rung of scaffold)

SHANK tries, slips and flips around bar hanging off of it.

        KEVIN: No, stand on this one.

Shank flips back over bar *(CUE TO RELEASE BOLT IN PLATFORM #1)*.
BRUCE catches SHANK'S foot so SHANK'S body forms a bridge across the scaffold. KEVIN climbs onto SHANK'S back to reach for the crown. SHANK'S foot comes loose. SHANK and KEVIN crash into the scaffold. BRUCE drops down from stage left side of scaffold. Platform breaks under him.

BRUCE covers the break.

KEVIN sees opportunity with platform diagonal to reach crown. Tries.

BRUCE and SHANK help. First they try to catapult KEVIN towards crown. Next, SHANK gets sandwiched between platforms, his legs crushed. KEVIN and BRUCE exacerbate situation

by jumping to get crown. SHANK pleads for them to get off him. KEVIN lifts platform, BRUCE pulls SHANK out. SHANK is face to face with BRUCE'S leg. Hits it. Can't feel anything.

SHANK: I can't feel my legs.

BRUCE: That is my leg.

SHANK directs KEVIN to be bigger, and directs BRUCE to make bigger ramp. KEVIN runs up ramp (and BRUCE'S body). SHANK and BRUCE lift platform with KEVIN atop it, KEVIN falls off.

SHANK drives BRUCE into the stage right side of scaffold with platform. BRUCE rides the platform into scaffold. SHANK pushes the platform over BRUCE and through scaffold. KEVIN jumps into the scaffold pit to help pull platform across.

SHANK and KEVIN climb onto the newly positioned platform lid while BRUCE recovers from being trapped between platform and scaffold. SHANK climbs on the stage right side of scaffold to reach the crown. He places left foot on KEVIN'S shoulder. KEVIN slowly inches stage left, inadvertently forcing SHANK into a split.

SHANK: Back it up

KEVIN releases SHANK'S foot. SHANK slams into scaffold.

BRUCE forces downstage right platform to detach from stage legs and maneuvers it to SHANK and KEVIN. SHANK climbs on the top edge and reaches for the crown. BRUCE wants to get platform across scaffold and knocks on platform to indicate this.

KEVIN: Hark! There's a knocking at the South Entry.
              Retire we to our chamber, lest occasion call us
              and show us to be watchers

BRUCE knocks on the platform again, signaling them to lift it.

KEVIN: Wake Duncan with thy knocking. I would thou couldst!

BRUCE knocks on the platform again, signaling them to lift it.

KEVIN: Knock, knock, knock in the name of Beelzebub…

BRUCE pounds on the platform and begins to climb it. SHANK lets it fall on BRUCE who gets crushed underneath it.

BRUCE: Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!

BRUCE notices his leg is violently contorted, panics, then rights it. BRUCE pushes platform to vertical position and lifts it, carries it stage right, raises it and lets it fall to SHANK and KEVIN who secure it in place atop scaffold.

BRUCE climbs onto the top platform and reaches for the crown.
SHANK also reaches for crown.
KEVIN scrambles up.
BRUCE and SHANK begin to hit and punch each other, barring each other from reaching crown.
Fighting escalates. KEVIN descends scaffold.

> KEVIN: Hey, Shank, let's go down here.

Fighting between SHANK and BRUCE continues to escalate atop scaffold.

> KEVIN: Shank, you come down here right now.
>   (continues, each time lowering the register of her voice)
>
>   Shank, you come down here right now.
>   Shank, you come down here right now.
>   Shank, you come down here right now.
>   Shank, you come down here right now.
>   Shank, you come down here right now.

Gun rises from stage, just upstage of KEVIN.

SHANK falls down from scaffold. KEVIN hands SHANK the gun.
SHANK takes the gun from KEVIN and dives under the stage.

> KEVIN: Go get it Bruce!

BRUCE collects himself, while SHANK appears downstage left of stage, aiming the gun at BRUCE and covering his ears. SHANK goes back under stage and reemerges with earphones. He shoots. KEVIN dives behind stage upstage left. BRUCE falls through top trapdoor onto middle platform. He shields himself with top trapdoor, releases mechanism in middle platform. SHANK shoots. BRUCE falls through second trapdoor into pit below scaffold. SHANK approaches. Shoots again. BRUCE disappears.

KEVIN appears upstage left. Peers into scaffold pit.

> KEVIN: He's dead.

SHANK takes off earphones.

> KEVIN: He's dead.

KEVIN begins to climb scaffold. SHANK raises gun. KEVIN descends.

SHANK rids himself of gun. Goes to exit theater. Sees audience. Builds whatever he is feeling (anger, grief, shame, etc.) Berates himself. Goes to audience. Asks audience member to call him stupid. Coaches audience member to really call him stupid. When he's satisfied, coaches audience to hit him. Once he's satisfied, he thanks them.

> KEVIN: Fie, my lord. Fie!
> A soldier and afeared?
> My hands are of your color
> But I shame to wear a heart so white!

KEVIN crosses upstage right, puts gun upstage of stage, wipes off hands and walks to center stage. *Spotlight on.*

> KEVIN: Out, out damned spot! Out I say!
> *Spotlight off.*
>
> (to booth) Could you put that back on?
> *Spotlight on.*
>
> Out, out damned spot! Out I say!
> *Spotlight off.*
>
> (to booth) Could you put that back on?
> *Spotlight on.*
>
> Out, out damned (mouths) spot! Out I say.
> One, two! Why then tis time to do it!
> Hell is murky
> But who would have thought the old man
> to have so much blood in him?

BRUCE appears from under scaffold, trying to get Kevin's attention. SHANK charges the stage to reach him. BRUCE disappears under the stage.   KEVIN sends SHANK back to the audience to watch her scene. KEVIN takes her place upright and begins again, walking into the spotlight center stage.

> KEVIN: Out, out damned (mouths) spot! Out I say.
> One, two! Why then tis time to do it!
> Hell is murky
> But who would have thought the old man
> to have so much blood in him?

BRUCE appears again, this time in the stage left hole in stage (where platform #1 used to be). Again, SHANK charges to the stage to reach him, calling for him. BRUCE disappears under the stage. KEVIN identifies the scene that SHANK is playing as the banquet scene and quotes lines from that to send SHANK back to the audience.

KEVIN walks into the spotlight center stage.

> KEVIN: Out, out damned (mouths) spot! Out I say.
> One, two! Why then tis time to do it!
> Hell is murky
> But who would have thought the old man
> to have so much blood in him?

BRUCE appears again, this time in the downstage right hole in stage. KEVIN sees him.

KEVIN wants BRUCE to get off the stage so she can do her scene.
BRUCE wants to give KEVIN blood from one of his gunshot wounds for her scene.
SHANK wants to apologize to BRUCE, and also help with the blood.
BRUCE gets more and more blood for KEVIN from his wounded leg.
SHANK brings a whole bowl of blood from under the stage onto the stage.
SHANK covers KEVIN'S body and head with blood.
KEVIN escalates her need to get blood off her in context of the scene.
BRUCE and SHANK play extensively with blood.
KEVIN escalates further her need to rid herself of blood.
BRUCE, SHANK and KEVIN escalate intensity of play and violence until they and the stage are covered in blood. They separate from each other and look out to audience.

Bucket #3 up.

> CLOWNS: When shall we three meet again?
> In thunder, lightening, or in rain?
> When the hurly-burly's done
> When the battle's lost and won
> That will be the ere the set of sun
> Where the place? Upon the heath
> There to meet with Macbeth.

The scaffold crashes down. Two stage platforms rig to flip and cave downward.
The stageright clown disappears under stage.
The stageleft clown disappears under stage.
The center clown looks at destroyed empty stage, looks up to crown, looks out to audience.

Lights out.
Lights up. Music. Curtain Call.

APPENDIX VI
500 CLOWN FRANKENSTEIN ACTION SCRIPT
(LONG VERSION 2007)

STAGE PRESET
Door upright; table offstage; table leaves offstage; podium, *Frankenstein* novel and Bruce's hat together offstage at Kevin's entrance site; Electric candle or real candle with matches with Bruce; Matches with Shank; Matches with Kevin

Kevin enters with podium, novel and Bruce's hat

Kevin welcomes audience, sets podium and hat, and introduces the book to audience

Shank sets table and leaves on stage

Bruce enters with candle

Kevin exits with book trying not to be noticed

Bruce sees lights on audience are on and lights on stage are off

Bruce exits

Bruce calls for Shank

Bruce and Shank locate each other

Bruce tells Shank problem with lights

Shank corrects the lights (usually by going to lightboard in audience)

> ***Shank turns off house lights.***
> ***Blackout or dim unnoticeable light.***

Shank cues Bruce to re-enter

Shank tries to hide himself and in process pushes table in front of door

Bruce enters with candle

Bruce gets trapped between door and table

Bruce asks Shank to help him

Shank lifts Bruce up

Shank carries Bruce on shoulders to podium

Bruce dismisses Shank

Bruce can't find book

Shank takes the candle from Bruce to find the book

Kevin enters through table with book

Shank gives her light to begin reading

Kevin sends Shank to Bruce

Shank brings the light to Bruce

Bruce recites the words from the book he remembers

Bruce sends Shank back for more words

Shank brings the light to Kevin

Kevin reads

Shank brings the light to Bruce

Bruce recites the words from the book he remembers

Bruce sends Shank back for more words

Shank brings the light to Kevin

Kevin reads

Kevin holds onto the candle continuing to read

Bruce demands that Shank bring him the light

Kevin demands that Shank go and bring Bruce the words

Shank brings Kevin, the book, the candle and the table to Bruce

Bruce or Kevin blow the candle out or turn electric candle off

Shank gives them stage light

Shank brings up general wash, bright.
Brings houselights up to half (or so)

Kevin introduces the cast:

      Bruce will play the doctor; Shank will play the assistant;

      Kevin will play Elizabeth, Clerval, William, the professor, etc.

Bruce announces "Scene One: My Laboratory" and exits

Kevin exits

Bruce enters periodically to check if the laboratory is set for Scene One

Kevin enters periodically to let the audience know more characters who she will play

Shank learns that he is to set up the laboratory table

Shank wrestles with the table (pulls it over him, rotates it)

Bruce escalates frustration that laboratory is not built

Bruce attacks table and Shank

The table falls on Bruce

Shank and Kevin pull it off Bruce

Kevin plays multiple roles in this scenario

Bruce tries to get into his laboratory (now in new configuration)

Bruce enters the laboratory through the window

Kevin plays the ladder down which Bruce descends

Bruce ends up sandwiched between table top and table base

Shank pushes table and Bruce under laboratory lights

Kevin plays the carpet

Shank screws in the lights

BX cable lightbulbs are on

Shank and Bruce pull table top up with Shank stuck atop

Kevin perceives this tall creature to be the monster

Kevin flees in screaming hysteria with book and candle and exits

Shank and Bruce watch Kevin exit, coordinating Shank's head and torso movements with Bruce's feet and leg movements

Bruce announces "Scene One: My laboratory"

Shank gets stuck on table top trying to get off table

Bruce and Shank develop assistant/master relationship at the table

Bruce approaches podium to move on with the story

Kevin throws the book on stage (from some high up place in theater)

Bruce asks for the little light

Shank tries to give it to him

> Blackout; one light; another light; another light (Bruce saying "get the light,
>
> no not the light, get the light, no not the light, get the light, the little light)

Shank takes stage and house lights out
Brings up different lights ending with a blackout.

Kevin enters with candle

Bruce, Shank and Kevin work to get Bruce set up at podium with candle and book

Bruce tries to read but cannot

Kevin prompts him with the words:

> "The churchyard was to me merely a receptacle of bodies deprived of life…"

Bruce kills Kevin with blowdart (imaginary)

Kevin's body falls

Bruce tells Shank to bring the body to the laboratory

Shank turns on the light and brings Kevin to the table

Shank brings up laboratory light

Kevin protests vehemently – she doesn't play the body

Bruce pressures Shank to bring body to the laboratory

Shank figures out a way to do so

Bruce insists that the entire body fit on the table

Shank tries to fulfill his wishes (rodeo tie up)

Bruce introduces the table leaves

Kevin gets a leaf

Bruce kills her with blowdart

Shank tries to install second leaf in table

Shank has difficulty (locks leaf into position #1)

Shank pushes table to upright position

Kevin plays William a small boy in reaction to 'monster' (vertical table)

Kevin also plays Justine rescuing William

Bruce shoots Kevin with blowdart; she catches it; Bruce shoots Kevin; she catches it; Bruce shoots Kevin more; Kevin dies

Bruce orders Shank to bring the body to the laboratory

Bruce takes over setting up the table

Shank brings Kevin (the body) to the table

Kevin protests

Kevin changes the scene

Kevin begins scene in which Victor returns from Ingolstadt

Kevin prompts Bruce to play the scene

Shank holds up the table by standing underneath it

Bruce climbs Shank's body to get on table with Kevin

Kevin prompts Bruce to play the scene

Shank groans beneath the weight of the table

Kevin hears a monster in the house: "There's something in the house"

Kevin runs away in silent film hysteria

Bruce blames Shank for ruining his love scene

Bruce orders Shank to bring the body to the laboratory, back to Scene One

Shank goes to get the body

Bruce jumps off the table

Table falls over Shank

Kevin enters

Kevin and Bruce scold Shank

Bruce, Shank and Kevin put the table together

      Shank is sandwiched between leaf and table

      Table comes down on Bruce

      Seesaw happens with table

      Kevin puts in second leaf

All three stand upstage of completed table

Bruce orders Shank to bring the body to the laboratory

Bruce pressures Shank who pressures Kevin

Kevin gives a piece of her costume

Shank gives the costume piece to Bruce

Bruce lays the costume piece on table

Kevin proceeds to give many pieces of her costume

Shank gives them to Bruce

Bruce names the body parts

Kevin morphs into the 'assistant'

Shank gives Bruce his hat

Bruce refuses it

Kevin gives Bruce Shank's hat

Bruce accepts it

Shank and Kevin compete to be the assistant bringing as many body parts as possible

Kevin gives Bruce Shank's hand

Bruce and Kevin lay Shank on the table and force him to be still

Kevin prompts Bruce to infuse the body with life

Bruce electrifies Shank by using the lightbulbs above the table

Bruce and Kevin clear off to either side of the stage

Shank wakes up

Shank looks back and forth to Bruce and Kevin; they react to him as the monster

Shank strangles Bruce and Kevin and they lay on the floor

Shank steps away

Bruce and Kevin send him into the Village while their *Frankenstein* characters tell him not to go

Shank does not know what to do or where to go

Shank makes contact with an audience member

Kevin and Bruce coach the audience into being villagers; Kevin reads from novel

Kevin and Bruce coach audience to kill Shank

Bruce and Kevin convey Shank back to the stage

Kevin abuses Shank verbally

Bruce abuses Shank physically and verbally

Kevin prompts Shank: Cursed cursed Creator, why did I live …

Shank steals the book

Kevin tries to get the book back

Bruce tries to get the book back

Shank rips a page(s) from the book

Bruce chases Shank all over the theater

Kevin gathers the torn pages and begins reading from them, trying to justify the chase

During chase Bruce flips over the table and lies injured on floor

Shank exits

Kevin kills Bruce with blowdart

Shank enters

Kevin announces Final Scene

Shank tries to get Bruce to chase him (to play with him)

Bruce lies lifeless in Shank's arms

Kevin commends Shank on scene-playing and directs him to exit

Kevin directs Shank to set himself on fire and tosses him a matchbook

Shank exits lighting a match

Kevin gathers book together, turns to final page:

"Polluted by crimes and torn by the bitterest remorse, where to find rest but in death"

Kevin says: "Blackout" *(Blackout)*

Curtain Call

APPENDIX VII
500 CLOWN FRANKENSTEIN
(STAGE MANAGER'S SCRIPT 2007)

2007 production at Steppenwolf Upstairs Theater
  Created by 500 Clown
  Directed by Leslie Buxbaum Danzig
  Performed by Molly Brennan, Adrian Danzig, Paul Kalina
  Set Designer and Master Builder: Dan Reilly
  Lighting Designer: Ben Wilhelm
  Costume Designer: Tatjana Radisic
  Stage Manager: Angela Renaldo

STAGE PRESET
Door upright; table offstage; table leaves offstage; podium, *Frankenstein* novel and Bruce's hat together offstage at Kevin's entrance site; Electric candle or real candle with matches with Bruce; Matches with Shank; Matches with Kevin

KEVIN works with audience (10 min to GO) - - - brings podium and hat to stage, talks with audience; SHANK pushes table on stage from behind up right curtain to stage right of door, SHANK also carries leaves on.

Footsteps of BRUCE are heard upstage right. KEVIN exits. BRUCE opens door with candle. Exits immediately.

   BRUCE: Shank

   SHANK: Bruce

   BRUCE: Shank

They find each other.

   BRUCE: The light, get the light

   SHANK: Right

SHANK goes through audience to board, apologizes to audience. Turns off house lights. Blackout.

   SHANK: Go

SHANK approaches stage. Trips in darkness over edge or slams into wall. In chaos, slides table in front of door. Knocks on door to cue Bruce's entrance. Hides himself by falling off stage or slamming into wall again.

Footsteps of BRUCE are heard upstage right. BRUCE opens door and is blocked by the table.

      BRUCE: Shank!

SHANK crosses to table, crawls inside table with BRUCE. SHANK lifts BRUCE up on top of table legs

      BRUCE: Shank! Shank I need the floor, no not my leg, get the floor.

SHANK gets BRUCE onto his shoulders backwards.

      BRUCE: Go.

SHANK moves stage right.

      BRUCE: No stop!

BRUCE attaches candle to SHANK's head like a joystick. BRUCE directs SHANK (backwards) to stage left and SHANK lets him down at the podium.

      BRUCE: Science!

BRUCE dismisses SHANK who exits again flinging himself off stage or into wall.

      BRUCE: Shank, the book. Where is the book Shank?

SHANK takes candle from BRUCE to look for book.

Table flips open. KEVIN emerges in frame of table holding the book. Taking the candle from SHANK and reading from the book

      KEVIN: I had been the author of unalterable evils

SHANK crosses with candle

      BRUCE: I had been the author of unalterable evils

SHANK crosses to KEVIN with candle

      KEVIN: and I lived in daily fear, lest the monster whom I had created should perpetrate some new wickedness.

SHANK crosses with candle

        BRUCE: and I lived in daily fear, lest the monster (forgets words here, perhaps is coached by SHANK) … wickedness

SHANK crosses with candle

        KEVIN: I had the obscure feeling that all was not over, and that he would still commit some single crime, which by its enormity should almost efface the recollection of the past. There was always scope for fear so long as anyone I love remained behind….

BRUCE indicates that's enough text for one round. KEVIN continues to read, won't give candle to SHANK.

        BRUCE: Shank! Get the book! Get the light!

        KEVIN: Go! No, Go!

BRUCE starts to countdown, SHANK pushes table with KEVIN on it to BRUCE.

BRUCE takes the candle, blows it out or turns it off.

SHANK runs up into the house.

        SHANK: Go! (Lights up)

        KEVIN: Ladies and gentlemen, the story of Frankenstein.

        BRUCE: This is the story of Frankenstein.

        KEVIN: Featuring Bruce as the doctor

BRUCE "enters" as Doctor

        KEVIN: Featuring Shank as the assistant

SHANK "enters" as Assistant

        KEVIN: Featuring Kevin (KEVIN steps forward) as the Elizabeth; I will also play Clerval, good friend of Victor Frankenstein; I will also play Victor Senior, father of Victor Frankenstein; I will also play William a small boy; I will also pay the Irish tavern keep, I will also play the sea captain, yar …

BRUCE: Scene one, my laboratory.

KEVIN: I am not in this one (exit)

BRUCE: Shank, my laboratory!

BRUCE exits through door, Shank starts to get the table in place. Is interrupted.

KEVIN: I will also play (names character)

BRUCE enters through door, sees table is not set up yet. Exits.

SHANK works on table set up. Is interrupted.

KEVIN: I will also play Justine, killed by an angry mob.
          I will also play the angry mob.

BRUCE enters through door, sees table is not set up yet. Exits.

SHANK works on table set up. It falls over.

BRUCE enters through door.

BRUCE: Shank, no, set this up…my laboratory….

BRUCE tries to stand table upright by kicking at legs. He escalates this, ramming table into SHANK, pinning SHANK between table and wall. SHANK pushes table back to its place and in process it falls on top of BRUCE.

KEVIN: (reading from book)
          Never had I seen a man in so wretched a condition. - - - I will also play
          this part

KEVIN lies atop SHANK to add her body weight so they can push table off BRUCE.

Table ends up on its feet, with table top in vertical position. SHANK braces it. KEVIN plays the landlady.

BRUCE knocks

KEVIN: Come in!

BRUCE: It is I Victor

KEVIN: Oh yes come in

BRUCE: Ope the door...

KEVIN and BRUCE improvise dialogue.

KEVIN: Come in through the window

BRUCE jumps to top of table and slides down KEVIN'S body.

KEVIN: I will also play the ladder

SHANK lifts KEVIN out of table. BRUCE sits on table base, table top lands on his legs.
SHANK slides table into place center stage and climbs on it to screw in lightbulbs above.

KEVIN: I will play the carpet

BRUCE lifts up table top to free his legs, trapping SHANK atop table.

KEVIN: (Reading from book)
              It was a dreary night in November that I beheld the accomplishment of my
              toils

KEVIN looks at SHANK/ BRUCE with candle (SHANK'S head and torso are seen high up,
BRUCE'S feet are seen below). She screams, coaches audience to get out, flees from stage.

SHANK and BRUCE watch her exit, coordinating feet and torso. BRUCE climbs out of table.

BRUCE: Shank, Scene one, my laboratory

SHANK does jump maneuver to get off table top as it flattens.

SHANK does hat trick to get hat on his head. BRUCE tries to do hat trick and cannot. SHANK
assists him. BRUCE takes the credit.

BRUCE: Science!

BRUCE approaches podium to see where they are in the story.

KEVIN throws book onto table from high up spot in theater.

BRUCE: Shank the light

SHANK: (goes to lightboard) Go!

SHANK first gives a blackout, then various single lights, each of which is not the light BRUCE wants.

SHANK: GO!

BRUCE: No the light! Shank the light!

SHANK: Oh, This one…. GO!

BRUCE: No the light! Shank the light!

SHANK: Oh, …. GO!

BRUCE: No Shank the light! Shank the light! The little light Shank!

KEVIN appears high up with light. BRUCE tries to reach light. Moves podium nearer to where KEVIN is (high above him). SHANK runs onto stage, moves table, lifts BRUCE onto table, puts podium on table, jumps up and puts BRUCE on his shoulders, holds podium for BRUCE to read

BRUCE tries to read. KEVIN takes over.

KEVIN: The churchyard was to me no more than a receptacle for bodies deprived of life.

BRUCE blowdarts KEVIN. Sandbag falls to ground.

BRUCE: Shank, Scene One, bring the body to my laboratory.

SHANK lets BRUCE down

BRUCE: Science!

SHANK drags KEVIN onto stage. SHANK drags table under lights, runs into house, puts on laboratory light.

BRUCE: Science! Shank bring me the body.

SHANK lifts KEVIN onto table. KEVIN wakes up.

KEVIN: Oh I am not the body. I play (names her various roles)

KEVIN breaks free, KEVIN and SHANK have some kind of wrestle or stand-off. SHANK starts hat trick and throws hat at KEVIN. KEVIN falls

BRUCE: Bring the body to the laboratory.

SHANK picks her up puts her on the table. BRUCE insists that her body lay flat on table. Her head or feet keep sliding off.

      BRUCE: Shank the feet… no Shank the head.

SHANK jumps on to table and folds KEVIN up into hog tie

      BRUCE: Oh the leaves! Shank get the leaves!

SHANK crosses to leaves, KEVIN wakes up and follows.

      SHANK: No Kevin, you are the body

      KEVIN: No, I can get the leaves.

BRUCE blowdarts KEVIN. She falls to ground.

SHANK puts long leaf in, struggles with it, locks it in place so it gets stuck, shifts table so it stands up and makes a loud sound. KEVIN awakes and sees oversized tall table.

      KEVIN: No please Monster, I am only a small boy

KEVIN scurries on her knees away from monster to stage left.

KEVIN improvises scene playing William and Justine trying to flee from the monster. Meanwhile, BRUCE tries to blowdart KEVIN, but she keeps catching his darts and throwing them away. Finally, BRUCE loads up a machine blowdart gun and riddles her with darts. KEVIN falls to the ground.

      BRUCE   Science! Shank, my laboratory! Bring me the body!

      SHANK: No …

BRUCE pulls leaf down

      BRUCE   Shank, Scene One, you get the body! I'll get the table.

BRUCE levels table, SHANK lifts KEVIN'S body onto table, KEVIN wakes up.

      KEVIN: No, Shank I don't want to be the body, No please Shank! (escalating crying and dismay) No, please I don't want to be the body, please don't make me! I don't want to be the body….. Scene 5! *Lights change.* Scene 5, Oh Victor you are home from Ingolstadt!

BRUCE doesn't know the scene or who he is. KEVIN gives him various information, coaching him through the scene leading to him sitting beside her on the table.

KEVIN: Do come upstairs darling, I have been waiting for you for so long. Up the stairs, I can't wait to see you darling, please

BRUCE climbs SHANK'S body like stairs up to the table. They sit beside each other and KEVIN continues to feed BRUCE his part.

KEVIN: Its been ever so long since you have been gone to university, dear, oh how I have missed you!

BRUCE: Yes, who are you?

KEVIN: Oh, please tell me all the things you have done at university.

BRUCE: I …

KEVIN: Oh, but you must not tell me of the things you have learned at university. It is forbidden that you speak of the terrible awful things that took place there…surely you cannot share them. Shhh (places finger on BRUCE'S lips) … you must not say those things …

BRUCE takes KEVIN's finger into mouth and then consumes her entire hand.

SHANK: (growing tired at holding up table on his back) End of scene… (says over BRUCE and KEVIN'S dialogue)

KEVIN: (hears SHANK) Victor there is someone in the house…. Victor….Victor there is some thing in the hou…. (jumps to floor) …

KEVIN sees SHANK and continues with slow motion silent movie reaction to monster, mouthing her words and shrieks, crosses stage right, trips downstage and falls off the edge of the stage.

BRUCE: Darling? Darling? (Stands on edge of table) Shank, you destroyed my love scene! Shank, Scene one, my laboratory.

SHANK: No, let's do another scene.

BRUCE: Shank, I am counting to five….five, four …

SHANK: No don't count, no Bruce!

SHANK steps forward, BRUCE steps off table, SHANK turns and table falls over SHANK (he stands in space between different table parts).

       KEVIN: (climbing onto stage) This is not the story of Frankenstein!

       BRUCE: Shank! This is not my laboratory!

SHANK starts to put up the table, holds onto the top, as BRUCE pushes it up. SHANK rides the table up. As soon as its up, KEVIN releases leaf and it falls onto SHANK, table falls onto BRUCE

       BRUCE: The table is on me for the second time!

SHANK tries to help, slides table off BRUCE onto its feet. LEAF falls down, BRUCE hangs onto it. SHANK slides down table. BRUCE slides in leaf, SHANK barely escaping getting caught. KEVIN slides in second leaf, SHANK barely escaping getting caught. They slide table under lightbulbs. BRUCE takes the middle position between KEVIN and SHANK.

       BRUCE: Scene One, my laboratory! Shank bring the body to the laboratory.

BRUCE ducks below table, SHANK shifts stage right toward KEVIN. KEVIN steps away. SHANK follows.

       SHANK: Kevin

       KEVIN: No.

       SHANK: Kevin.

BRUCE comes out from table and crosses to SHANK. KEVIN crosses downstage to audience.

       KEVIN: I will play Elizabeth, I will play Justine killed by an angry mob, I will play the angry mob, I will play a small boy, I will play the professor at Ingolstadt, I will play Clerval good friend to Victor Frankenstein, I will play the Irish tavern keep, I will play the sea captain, I will also play the carpet ………. (full list)

Overlapping with her list, BRUCE pressures SHANK to get her to play the body.

       SHANK: (continuously to KEVIN) Just a piece of the body …

Until, KEVIN, by accident, repeats what SHANK has been feeding to her …

       KEVIN: and a piece of the body.

(To the audience) For you this evening I will play a piece of the body.

KEVIN violently slices off a piece of her costume. SHANK brings it to BRUCE,

BRUCE names it as a part of the body and places it on the table.

      BRUCE: We need more.

KEVIN cuts off arm piece, hat, skirt, and slowly morphs into Assistant. SHANK brings each piece to BRUCE who names the body part and places it on the table. When KEVIN has no more to give, SHANK gives BRUCE his hat. BRUCE rejects it (its SHANK'S hat). KEVIN takes the hat and gives it to BRUCE as the assistant. BRUCE accepts it. Same thing happens with SHANK'S coat and shirt. SHANK becomes increasingly panicked that KEVIN is taking over as assistant. SHANK goes into audience and brings back objects, which BRUCE names and puts on the table as body parts.

      KEVIN: Master, look what I found! (gives BRUCE SHANK'S hand)

      SHANK: Bruce, no that's my hand. No Bruce!

BRUCE "drills" SHANK to table until he no longer can move. KEVIN retrieves book at podium. KEVIN feeds BRUCE the following text from book.

      KEVIN: I collected the instruments of life around me that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet.

BRUCE jumps onto table and stands on SHANK'S body, moistens his hands with his sweat and reaches for light bulbs. Lights start to flicker. BRUCE conducts electricity into SHANK'S body. BRUCE flings his body off table and stands against stageright wall. KEVIN stands opposite against stageleft wall.

SHANK slowly wakes up and sits facing audience center stage. KEVIN and BRUCE slowly step toward him. Each time SHANK looks to them, they react with various levels of fear and violence, reacting to SHANK slapping them, punching them, stomping on them, slamming their heads, burning their eyes, etc. Finally KEVIN and BRUCE are strangled by SHANK, falling to the floor. SHANK, mystified, tries to walk away, but BRUCE and KEVIN's arms form a barrier. SHANK tries to step out over their legs but they keep him between them. They stand up and lock him out of an imaginary house.

      KEVIN: Go on, get out of here.

SHANK starts to walk downstage towards audience.

      BRUCE: Don't go into the village.

SHANK recoils upstage.

This back and forth continues. KEVIN and BRUCE coach SHANK to go out into the audience (village), but each time he does, they react as characters from the novel begging him not to go into the village. SHANK grows increasingly confused. Finally, he moves toward audience and by accident touches an audience member. BRUCE reacts, claiming SHANK has attacked an audience member. SHANK protests he has not, moving further into audience and away from BRUCE.

KEVIN: (reading from book and improvising) He finally arrived at a village. He had hardly placed one foot within the door, before the children shrieked, and one of the women fainted. The whole village was roused; Light him on fire, destroy the monster, kill him….he is ugly…poke him with a pitchfork, anti American, homosexual…

BRUCE and KEVIN coach the audience to attack SHANK, while SHANK tries to find his friends in the audience.

KEVIN: Until grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missile weapons he escaped into the open country….

BRUCE drags SHANK onto stage. BRUCE tries to show off the creature he has created. KEVIN reacts to the creature in the voices of many characters, accusing him of the horrible things he has done. BRUCE tries to defend him by pushing him to be better – stand taller, open eyes, stop flinching, chest out, shoulders down, etc.

KEVIN   (from book) Cursed, Cursed creator why did I not extinguish the spark of existence which you had so wantonly bestowed? I know not; despair had not yet taken possession of me; my feelings were those of rage and revenge. I had the obscure feeling that all was not over, and that he would still commit some signal crime, which by its enormity should almost efface the recollection of the past. There was always scope for fear so long as anyone I love remained behind …

KEVIN: Victor this is what you did in Ingolstadt, this abomination…

BRUCE: Yes, no look…stand up straight…

KEVIN: Not following directions

BRUCE: Stop flinching

KEVIN: Not listening, making a slappy sound

BRUCE: Don't close your eyes, smile, look out there, stand up, listen to me, look out there, you must stand up

BRUCE becomes increasingly violent, punching SHANK, physically abusing him…

KEVIN: Shank say, "Cursed creator…" Shank say, "Cursed, cursed creator…"

SHANK: No I am the assistant….

KEVIN: Shank, "Cursed, cursed creator why did I live?"

SHANK: No!

BRUCE: Stand up (increases his assault)

KEVIN: Shank say it, "Cursed, Cursed creator why did I live?"

When SHANK is pushed to his limit, he shoves BRUCE to floor and takes book from KEVIN.

SHANK: No more!

KEVIN: Shank, "Cursed, Cursed creator why did I live?"

KEVIN names the page its on. SHANK turns to the page and rips it out of the book.

KEVIN: That's the story of Frankenstein

BRUCE: No Shank, no Shank! Shank stop it, put down the book.

SHANK starts to tear pages and BRUCE lunges at SHANK causing him to leave the stage. BRUCE chases SHANK into the audience, as SHANK continues to rip out pages of the book, letting them fall on the audience.

SHANK: (to the audience) Here's the story, you want the story…

BRUCE chases SHANK off-stage. KEVIN collects pages and reads from what she finds, trying to justify the chase. SHANK and BRUCE re-enter, still in chase. They counter each other on either side of the table until BRUCE dives over table towards SHANK. SHANK exits. BRUCE crashes to the floor injuring himself.

BRUCE: Kevin, help me.

KEVIN collects pages and makes her way onto stage. Seeing BRUCE injured, she pulls blow dart (imaginary) out of BRUCE's coat, loads it, and shoots BRUCE. SHANK re-enters.

KEVIN: Final scene.

SHANK crosses slowly to lifeless BRUCE, taunting him with the book.

SHANK: Come on, come on, you want this?

SHANK hits BRUCE in the chest with the book. BRUCE remains still.

SHANK: Come on…get up….come on get up…You don't give up. You don't get to give up

SHANK starts to sit BRUCE up, trying to bring him back to life…. hitting, slapping, pulling him up, tries hat trick, "little light" …

SHANK: Okay Bruce look…okay come on Bruce…Science…open your eyes…okay okay okay look…. Bruce…

KEVIN: Shank, that was really good …You can go now!

SHANK: Bruce! Bruce!

KEVIN: Shank, good, go.

SHANK lays BRUCE down, gets up and crosses stage left.

KEVIN: Set yourself on fire.

KEVIN tosses him a matchbook. SHANK picks it up, exits lighting a match.
KEVIN at podium, puts book together, opens to final page. Reads.

KEVIN: Polluted by crime and torn by the bitterest remorse, where could I find rest but in death. Blackout.

Blackout.
Lights up.
Curtain Call.

APPENDIX VIII
500 CLOWN CHRISTMAS
(2007)

2006-2007 production at Chicago's Storefront Theater
  Created by 500 Clown, John Fournier and Chad Southard
  Music composed and written by John Fournier
  Directed by Leslie Buxbaum Danzig
  Performed by Molly Brennan, Adrian Danzig, Paul Kalina
  John Fournier (piano, saxophone, vocals); Ted Sirota (percussion); Matt Ferguson (bass)
  Lighting Designer: Ben Wilhelm
  Stage Manager: Angela Renaldo
  Sound Designer: Mike Griggs
  Sound Engineer: Phil Canzano

STAGE PRESET:
Giftboxes on stage filled with various props; piano, percussion, bass, saxophone; 3 microphones; harness rig; ukulele rig; coffin offstage; cups on cup planks under audience; wireless mic in "Alone" booth.

CLOWNS welcome audience members, hang up their coats, coordinate seating, introduce them to each other, circulate the card for the band, hand out programs. STAGE MANAGER gives cue to start. SHANK exits. KEVIN and BRUCE collect programs. BRUCE and KEVIN exit. BRUCE starts fog machine. SHANK carries on drummer. Drums begin. SHANK creates more fog for Bassist entrance. SHANK follows FOURNIER on with fog machine, creating more fog. CLOWNS enter and cross to mics.

SONG #1: It's Christmas Time Again

    You get an itch and it leads to a burn
    There is a lesson that you need to learn
    Just like a wheel that forgot how to turn
    It's Christmas time again

    You want the love but you need the money
    To be a bee drowning in its own honey
    Just like an old joke that never was funny
    It's Christmas time again

    You walk the Earth for hundreds of days
    When you're well you play when you're sick you pray
    Life is a hooker that you never can lay
    It's Christmas time again

Oh oh oh oh
Oh oh oh oh
Oh oh oh oh
It's Christmas time again
(repeat)

SHANK clips into harness, BRUCE starts cranking SHANK up, KEVIN flies ukulele in. KEVIN joins AUDIENCE, SHANK tries to reach ukulele, can't reach, propels himself into flying movement, finally reaches it, starts playing ukulele, asks for microphone, gets it, struggles to hold it while playing, music leads into next verse. KEVIN and BRUCE return to their mics to sing, SHANK struggles in harness with ukulele and microphone.

Joy is rider on a mystery train
Joy is some roadkill on the side of your brain
Joy soars above you like a beautiful dove
Joy holds your hands wearing boxing gloves
Joy hides from you like a petulant child
Joy is a deuce when the aces are wild
Joy is a Cadillac you never can start
Joy is out of stock at your local K-mart
Joy avoids you like an ex-girlfriend
Joy is a package God rarely sends
This is a tale for those who pray
To find a little joy on Christmas day
Find a little joy on Christmas day
Find a little joy on Christmas day

You get an itch and it leads to a burn
There is a lesson that you need to learn
Just like a wheel that forgot how to turn
It's Christmas time again

SHANK hangs above with mic and ukulele. KEVIN flies ukulele out, goes upstage to get ladder to help SHANK down. BRUCE pulls on SHANK. JOHN begins intro to next song. KEVIN and BRUCE move their mics into a upstage closer to SHANK to sing. SHANK flips upside down in harness to sing into his mic.

SONG #2: Don't be Such an Asshole

This story needs a moral
Every life yearns for a moral
A reason why we came here
A reason why we're gone
So me and these chains came to tell you
Just before life turns your light out

The moral of your story in a song

Don't be such an asshole
Don't be such an asshole
Don't be such an asshole
Don't be such an asshole
Be kind to everybody
Even if they're assholes
Don't be such an asshole
No one likes an asshole

Take all of your money
Give it to the poor
I found out much too late
That's what gold is good for
Poor people are not perfect
Some of them are assholes
Although our take was bountiful
You will be held accountable

Musical interlude: BRUCE takes stools out of giftbox. KEVIN lowers ukulele for SHANK. KEVIN takes toy piano out of giftbox. BRUCE sets up mic for SHANK. FOURNIER coaches BRUCE to get his instrument. BRUCE goes to audience to get an instrument (purse, keys, shoe, etc.)

SHANK plays ukulele, KEVIN plays toy piano, BRUCE plays found object.

KEVIN puts piano away in box, flies ukulele out.   BRUCE returns object. Chords begin to start final musical section with words to Carroll of the Bells.

Don't be a such…..
Don't be a such…..
Don't be a such…..
(repeats with multiple parts)
Asshole

BRUCE brings ladder to SHANK and climbs up to rescue him. BRUCE and SHANK get tangled and stuck in ladder and harness. KEVIN starts cranking them down. BAND plays cover of "Benny and the Jets." As CLOWNS come down ladder, it converts from straight to a-frame. KEVIN takes it and sets it up as a Christmas tree and starts to gather all the giftboxes underneath it. SHANK and BRUCE help. As song finishes, KEVIN retrieves card from audience and presents it to band with all the audience signatures on it.

Gift giving, BAND plays Christmas standards. KEVIN gives SHANK a giftbox. It's a holiday-themed sweater vest. He puts it on. KEVIN and SHANK give BRUCE a gift. BRUCE refuses.

He is Jewish. BAND plays Dredel, Dredel, Dredel. Instead of "Merry Christmas," gift-giver says "Happy Hanukah." BRUCE accepts. It's a Christmas sweater. He puts it on. CLOWNS give audience member a gift. It's a sweater. CLOWNS give another audience member a gift. The box is empty. CLOWNS gather objects from audience to put in giftbox and regive the gift. KEVIN opens a giftbox on stage – it's a plank with 3 glasses on it. SHANK fills the cups with his shaker. BRUCE gathers the mics together for a toast.

SONG #3: So Christmas You're Back Again

> So Christmas you're back again
> Seems like you just went away
> But here you are with glad tidings to send
> As you bring one more year to a merciful end
> I always loved you as a child
> My favorite day of the year
> But as the time passes from season to season
> I find myself searching for meaning and reason
> And when you show up with your slogans abounding
> The world can still feel so damn cold and confounding
> But I'll always love you my dear old friend
> When you loudly declare "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men"
> Toward Men

CLOWNS drink. CLOWNS notice the audience does not have a drink.

SONG #4: Christmas is the Best Day of the Year

> Christmas is the best day of the year to be drunk

CLOWNS pull out planks with cups from under risers and seltzer from giftboxes and serve to audience. JOHN and BAND continue the song.

> Prance around the living room in your underwear and a Santa cap
> Piss off your family
> If you bother to see them at all
> Deck a few halls
> Do a little wassling
> And have yourself a ball (you deserve it)
>
> Christmas is an excellent day to down a bottle of wine
> A little Andy Williams
> A little Jimmy Stewart
> A little Jack Daniels makes the holiday shine
> Slow dance with your sister

Make your mother cry
Slur your speech
Stumble around
Tell a couple wonderful lies

(ho ho ho Merry Christmas)
God Bless us one and all

When you've finally passed out underneath the Christmas tree
Another Silent Night has sailed away to the banks of sweet memory
And you've drunk all your tidings of great joy
Thank God for Christmas
Man I love Christmas
Christmas is the best day of the year

Song repeats as needed to ready AUDIENCE for toast. CLOWNS refill their plank. All toast together.

Following toast, CLOWNS with AUDIENCE assistance clean up. BAND plays along. Cups go into gift boxes and planks are set in ladder to build the tree. BRUCE and KEVIN realize the tree needs trimmings, put on coats and exit. SHANK is alone, brings up audience member to dance to percussion. Percussion escalates. SHANK returns audience member to seat and tries to stop DRUMMER, who persists and persists, until SHANK drags him off-stage. SHANK pushes button to make automatic percussion, gathers all microphones centerstage.

SONG #5: Alone

It's Christmas Eve and I am alone again
But me and my imagination will make it to morning
Imaginary friends never scream at you
Imaginary friends never sneer
That's the best part about being alone
You feel empty but you don't feel fear

Every time the world treats me badly
I put on my brave face and I play along
But inside my chest I feel
My heart growing colder
I wait for the warm embrace
All I ever get is the shrug of the shoulder

Musical interlude. BRUCE and KEVIN enter with bags of tree trimmings, try to join SHANK at mics and realize it's a solo. They retreat to band area and sing back up. When SHANK hears their back up, he signals that they should stop, it's a solo.

I'm sailing to a place where no one can harm me
I'm arming my ship to the teeth to handle the rough seas
My ship won't bow to distress calls
My ship will be called No Mercy (echo No Mercy)
And inside my ship of gold and silver
No one gets a chance to hurt me (oh oh oh oh)

You can learn to be alone
Learn to like to be alone
Learn to love to be alone
To be alone

KEVIN and BRUCE join SHANK at mics to riff on song. SHANK searches for a place to be alone that takes him up to the balcony. (Order of jam: BRUCE and KEVIN together; KEVIN sings "On my Own" from *Les Miserables*; by the time SHANK reaches wireless mic on balcony, BRUCE and KEVIN sing together). SHANK gets on wireless mic to assert its his song but still can't get some space to sing alone. SHANK exits and continues to sing on wireless mic in stairwell and back hallways of the theater. Song ends.

BRUCE exits to find SHANK. KEVIN is alone on stage, decides its time for tree trimming. Gets help from audience. BRUCE continues to look for SHANK on and offstage. BRUCE finds SHANK and chases him back to the stage. SHANK hides. BRUCE grows increasingly angry that SHANK is trying to be alone in this together time. KEVIN thanks tree trimmers and lets them return to their seats, to get out of the fray of BRUCE and SHANK'S argument. KEVIN sets up mics. BRUCE drags on SHANK to his mic.

      KEVIN: Smile

SONG # 6: When you're Dead

Socrates split when his boyfriend fed him the poison pear
Beethoven's portrait is in my parlor filling my home with his angry glare
The memories are here but they don't care,
Though their portraits are everywhere, they are gone.
They are gone.

Whatever happens to us next they already know
All we want is to leave behind something cool to show
To those yet to come and those yet to go
In tales of triumph and afterglow, we were here.
We were here.

We once rode the sunlit horizon on a golden mare
We had many cocktails under the wake of Beethoven's angry stare
And every punk poet and garbage man understands there is a plan

Every beginning must come to an ending.
To an ending.
Ending.

When you're dead when you're dead
Five little words bounce around in your head
The last five words you ever said
Haunt you forever when you're dead

When you're dead
When you're dead
When you're dead
When you're dead
(repeat)

I could've been kinder
I coulda been so much kinder
I could've been kinder
I coulda been so much kinder

SHANK on keyboards and JOHN solo on saxophone.
KEVIN and BRUCE on vocals.

So long, so long bye bye farewell (repeats).
Bruce: When you're dead when you're dead when you're dead when you're dead
Shank: When you're dead when you're dead when you're dead when you're dead
John: When you're dead when you're dead when you're dead when you're dead
Kevin: When you're dead when you're dead when you're dead when you're dead

KEVIN does Joplinesque jam with SHANK and BRUCE supporting, riffing on all the things that happen when you're dead. She peaks at vocal energy and then gets physical, committing various suicides with mic cable. KEVIN dies.

Song ending: BRUCE comes in too early. FOURNIER gets upset with him. BRUCE shoots himself. SHANK with FOURNIER complete song.

Every punk poet and garbage man understands there is a plan
Every beginning must come to an ending.

SHANK stands on stage alone. Reprises his solo, clustering the mics together. Band joins him pushing song to more upbeat place.

Alone Reprise:

It's Christmas Eve and I am alone again

But me and my imagination will make it to morning
Imaginary friends never scream at you
Imaginary friends never sneer
That's the best part about being alone
You feel empty but you don't feel fear

During this – BRUCE comes back to life and exits. Re-enters carrying coffin with Christmas bow on it.   Sets it upright. SHANK stops solo. SHANK and BRUCE put KEVIN in coffin.

SONG #7: FOURNIER'S Solo

> Why do I miss you at Christmas time
> All we ever did that day was fight
> The turkey was always dry
> Your Mother's a bitch
> And you never gave me one sweater that ever fit quite right
> In the summer I have the sea for company
> In the spring a stiff drink and a book to read is all I need
> In the fall you never call and I don't care at all
> But there's something in the snow and the crowded shopping malls that gets me
> Round about midnight on Christmas Eve
> After all my relatives have finally gone away
> I sit by the tree
> I stare at the star
> And I wonder where you are

BRUCE and SHANK stand in silent aftermath of FOURNIER'S solo. BRUCE and SHANK move to audience to apologize for the bummer tone of the show. Have idea to sing a duet, but they don't have one prepared. Move the 3 mics together and place mic in front of KEVIN'S coffin.

> BRUCE/SHANK: Merry Christmas Kevin.

Doors of coffin swing open and KEVIN emerges in blue dress with angel wings.

SONG #8: Blue State (KEVIN solo)

> Merry Christmas from a blue state
> Happy holidays to you
> I bet you didn't see this coming back in 1992
> And if you're like me you're wondering
> If we're gonna make it through
> But that's just the state you're living in
> When you're in a state that's blue

In a state that's blue
But ….
Take a look around Christmas is everywhere
Gaudy colored lights on all the trees
The last couple of years I've had the feeling
Christmas might be chasing me
When it catches me it holds me tight
With poignant and painful memories
This Christmas Eve I can't help feeling
Santa's sleigh run over me

KEVIN indicates to treetop. Mirrorball descends as star on tree.

Merry Christmas from a blue state
Come what will and come what may
Gather round and raise your glasses
Let us toast to better days

BRUCE/SHANK remind her they've already done the toast.

Let us … pray

BRUCE, SHANK and KEVIN figure out how to pray.

SONG #9: Finale Intro

God bless us all everyone
All creatures who live 'neath the beautiful sun
No matter how hard it gets
If all your stuff turns to shit
Remember there's always someone out there who has
Got it so much worse than you
Hard to believe but it's true
And you wonder what can I do
You say to yourself what can any one person do
What can I do what can I do
What can I possibly do
Well (BRUCE) I'll tell you what you can do…

BRUCE starts explaining "what you can do" – turns into physical/vocal jam on all the things one can do. He concludes with "you can dance" – cues BAND to begin. KEVIN and SHANK on back up.

SONG #10: Dance Like a Monkey (BRUCE solo)

> You gotta dance like a monkey if you want to dance
> You gotta dance like a monkey if you want to dance
> You gotta dance like a monkey if you want to dance
> You gotta dance
>
> You gotta wiggle your rump and scream and shout
> Everybody knows what I'm talking about
> You gotta shake your money maker like a Los Angeles Laker when you dance
>
> You gotta burst your bladder (ya ya)
> Climb up Jacob's ladder
> Fly over the moon
> On a red balloon
> Call up Alger Hiss
> Make your little sister lisp
> Tell the one about the mango
> Teach a pig to tango
>
> There's no fee for breaking free to break fee there's no fee
> There's no fee for breaking free to break fee there's no fee
> (SHANK) There's no fee for breaking free to break fee there's no fee
> (KEVIN) There's no fee for breaking free to break fee there's no fee
>
> You gotta dance like a monkey if you want to dance
> You gotta dance like a monkey if you want to dance
> You gotta dance like a monkey if you want to dance
> You gotta dance

KEVIN, BRUCE and SHANK guide audience to stage for dance party.

> Get up out of your seat
> Move your big guerilla feet
> Respect your foe
> Let the gibbon go
> Let your head unscrew
> Like the mandrills do
> Set your mind free
> Touch your inner chimpanzee

Dance groove on stage with performers and audience.

> Save your sorrow for tomorrow tomorrow there'll be sorrow
> Save your sorrow for tomorrow tomorrow there'll be sorrow

Save your sorrow for tomorrow tomorrow there'll be sorrow
Save your sorrow for tomorrow tomorrow there'll be sorrow

You gotta dance like a monkey if you want to dance
You gotta dance like a monkey if you want to dance
You gotta dance like a monkey if you want to dance
You gotta dance

BRUCE, SHANK and KEVIN guide audience back to seats.

You get an itch and it leads to a burn
There is a lesson that you need to learn
Just like a wheel that forgot how to turn
It's Christmas time again

Blackout.
Curtain Call.

APPENDIX IX
COMPANY TASK LIST 2006

	Adrian Danzig	Leslie Danzig	Paul Kalina	Molly Brennan	*Angela Renaldo
Finances		Nonprofit	Budgets		
		Taxes	Capital Campaign		
Promo-tional	DVD Production	Press Packets	Audience Devl.		Photos
	Marketing	DVD Copying			
	Website Mgmt.				
Produc-tion	Contracts	Publicist	Load in/Strike	Merchandise	Props
		Hiring	Lighting Design	Costume Design	
		Box Office	Sound Design	Pre/Post Music	
		Documentation	Scenic Design	Lobby Display	
			Rehearsal rental	Program	
			Opening night		
Contracts	Agents	Internal			
	Venues				
	Negotiation				
	Drafting				
Contact	Pursue venues - Natl, internatl, education	Pursue venues - education		Student e-mail list	Patron e-mail list
Educa-tion	Residency	Workshops			
	Alignment of ideas	Classes			
		Residency			
		Talkbacks			
		Panels			
		Teaching coordination			
Admini-stration	Insurance	Lead phone contact		Business cards	Calendar
		Track activity and operation			Coordinate group contact
		Filing and office organization			
Touring	Sales/obtaining venue	Press packets	Truck and storage rentals		Travel
			Technical director		Lodging
Ongoing	Artistic devl.	Artistic devl.			
	Staying aware of our artistic wants and needs	Checking in with hub people about ongoing ideas and projects			

*Angela Renaldo was 500 Clown's Production Stage Manager from June 2006 – August 2007.