CLOWNS EX MACHINA: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENDER AND CLOWN

by

KIMBERLY A. BATES

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Theater Arts
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

June 2012

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Kimberly A. Bates

Title: Clowns Ex Machina: An Investigation of the Relationship Between Gender and Clown

This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of Theater Arts by:

John Schmor	Chair
La Donna Forsgren	Member
and	
Kimberly Andrew Espy	Vice President for Research & Innovation/Dean of the Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2012

THESIS ABSTRACT

Kimberly A. Bates

Master of Arts

Department of Theater Arts

June 2012

Title: Clowns Ex Machina: An Investigation of the Relationship Between Gender and Clown

Historically, women have been largely discounted from the public comedic arena, typically serving as the butt of the joke or other various comedic fodder. As a female comedian, I became interested in how gender played into the performance of comedy, particularly in clown work. This case study follows an all female clown troupe called Clowns Ex Machina, based in New York, and investigates the impact of generating clown work in an all-female environment by all-female performers. The work that they do not only validates female participation in clown, but it also shows that the female experience is a human experience, and that gender lines do not have to prevent empathic identification.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Kimberly A. Bates

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION:

University of Oregon, Eugene

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, Theater Arts, 2012, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, Theater Arts, 2008, University of Oregon

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Physical Comedy and Movement Technique
Improvisation for Actors
Clown
Women and Gender Studies

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Instructor (GTF), University of Oregon, Eugene, 2011-2012

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

New York Research Award, Miller Research Foundation, 2011 - 2012
Academic Grant, Mark's Family Foundation, 2011 - 2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Professors Schmor and Forsgren for their assistance in the preparation of this manuscript. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Ms. Kendall Cornell and the women of Clowns Ex Machina who offered their experience and strength as women comedians, freely and willingly, for the content of this investigation. The research for this project was made possible in part by the Miller Research Foundation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In *The Essential Crazy Wisdom*, Wes Nisker remarks that, "the clown falls over for us, and stands up for us, too" (Nisker, 33). This clown is an "everyman" figure, always falling and failing, reminding us that, "we plan our days only to find that the days have other plans" (32). The clown, along with the jester, the trickster, and the fool, work together to introduce what Nisker terms "crazy wisdom" into the social consciousness. As the name implies, crazy wisdom works against conventional wisdom, which is "just the commonly agreed-upon lies of any given era" (Nisker, 12). Conventional wisdom is the unexamined life, and crazy wisdom is meant to challenge that:

> If crazy wisdom knows anything, it is that we don't know. We don't know who we are, where we are, or what this life and universe are about. … In order to hear crazy wisdom, we need to somehow shut off or turn down the grinding noise of the rational, analytic gears. Crazy wisdom requires that we get at least a little bit out of our minds. (19)

It is the anti-wisdom, the constant turning upside-down and inside out of engrained beliefs, roles, and systems of power. These characters are related to one another, from the same "family tree", if you will, and they are often conflated. Their differences lie in the way that they have historically functioned within a society.

Jesters are the ultimate social critics, leveraging wit and wordplay to dissemble lies (34). They expose the fallacy of the status quo, the falsehoods told by powerful establishments, and have a keen irreverence for the contemporary social scene. Jesters are directly connected to current events, drawing our attention not

only to timeless truths but also to what is happening in our world today. They "get away with dangerous revelations by making them funny" (35), and for this reason, the jesters in the courts of Kings and Queens were often the only ones who could speak candidly to royalty and escape with their heads intact.

The jester's weapons are her words. Her skewering revelations are delivered with *wit*, a "quick inventiveness of language… taking pleasurable liberties with meanings" (Stott, 55). We have found pleasure in wit for centuries, enjoying the comedic banter of Oscar Wilde and the poetic prowess of Shakespeare's fools. During the Restoration, playing with social and linguistic artifice was the coveted quality of a learned man (or woman), the mark of high social status (56). Not only does the jester use words to reveal truth in a way that is pleasurable, but she also uses wordplay to reveal the double meaning of words themselves. Jesters are the purveyors of puns, confounding the listener's expectations by re-contextualizing both social assumptions and language itself.

Like the rest of the characters, jesters live somewhere between the material and the divine. Typically low on the material social ladder, the jester is paradoxically "above" her contemporaries, using her wit to elevate and distance herself from the minutia of human existence. This distance creates perspective, and this perspective is the jester's crazy wisdom. Today, we can see the jester in stand-up comedy, in shows like The Daily Show and The Colbert Report that deal strictly with current events and use sarcasm and word-play to slash through entrenched value systems. The social function of the jester is to keep assumptions up in the air

and injustices out in the light. "In the worldly realm of relative truths, jesters are the champions of crazy wisdom" (Nisker, 41).

The trickster is harder to spot these days, and show up primarily in cultural mythology. In folklore, tricksters are sometimes cast as the creators of all material being, the source of all our troubles (41); other times they are simply the creators of mischief and mayhem. Quite simply, the job of the trickster is to break the rules, and she "violates the most sacred of prohibitions" at every opportunity (Stott, 51). Tricksters are not confined by – or simply do not care about – boundaries: social, conceptual, or physical. For this reason, tricksters are able to cross the lines between life and death, and, like her sister the jester, the lines between the material and the divine. The crazy wisdom of the trickster is a marriage between divine wisdom and the basest of human desires. Often driven by the desire to fill physical cravings – for food or sex – the trickster's escapades turn into cautionary tales for her victims.

We delight in the trickster because she can break all the rules we wish we could break. We fear the trickster because she is hard to spot, and her lessons are delivered with veracity and cunning. It is no coincidence that many tricksters take the form of an animal – Coyote in southwestern Native American cultures, cartoon anarchists Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck in the Warner Brothers cartoons, and Puck in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to name a few. The function of the trickster is to remind us that we are not so civilized that we are free from our "animal" nature, and that "just beyond the boundaries of our civilized encampment,

the trickster howls at night to remind us of the chaos that lives all around" (Nisker, 47).

Somewhat less abrasive than the trickster, the fool is no less "tricky" when it comes to confounding assumptions and expectations. While the trickster hunts incessantly to satiate her cravings, the fool operates from a place of innocence, the antithesis of worldliness and hedonism. The fool appears as "a symbol of contradictions and quandaries" (Stott, 46). Foolishness is often confused with idiocy or stupidity. It is, instead, the expression of "the ambiguous, doubled, and inverted ideas of wisdom and folly that existed in the medieval period" (47). Foolishness was considered to be the dominant characteristic of humanity, and was not cured but rather aggravated by knowledge.

Nisker breaks the character of the fool into two parts: the foolish fool and the holy fool. The foolish fool is the one we see when we look in the mirror. We try, and fail, to perfectly adhere to social conventions around us, sure that everyone else is somehow able to master the things that elude us. The holy fool, by contrast, never tries to fit in (Nisker, 48). The holy fool lives apart from us, sees that all of life is part of the Grand Illusion (49), and urges us not to take it, or ourselves, too seriously. The following story is the perfect example of how the fool functions in our society and our mythology:

> There once was a wise farmer who knew about the impossibility of knowing and about the arbitrary nature of human judgment. One day, the farmer's horse escaped and ran away. Seeing this, his neighbor remarked, "My, that's too bad!" The farmer simply replied, "Maybe." The next day the farmer's horse returned. Seeing this, his neighbor exclaimed, "What good luck!" The farmer simply replied, "Maybe." The next day, the farmer's son broke his leg trying to tame one of the wild horses. "Oh, what a shame!" said his neighbor. Once again, the farmer

> replied, “Maybe.” The next day a recruitment officer came to town, gathering young men for the war. The farmer’s son was spared, having broken his leg. “How lucky!” said his neighbor. Again, the farmer replied, “Maybe.”

This story can go on forever. In short, our limited knowledge of the workings of the universe makes it impossible for us to “know” anything, and so our faulty judgment makes fools of all of us. The holy fool reminds us that, since we cannot really know anything, and since all of life is an illusion anyway, it is best to relax and enjoy the ride. Nisker posits that many historical religious figures fall into the category of the holy fool, challenging conventional wisdom and leading rebellions again materialism and self-indulgence. They typically agree that, “false identification with the self fosters fear, hatred, and greed, which in turn result in violence and war” (57). Both the foolish fool and the holy fool have paradoxically escaped folly by embracing their foolishness, and turning into a tool by which the veils of illusion can be lifted.

These characters have distinctive traits, but in all cases they work to shake up assumptions and keep us guessing. They try, in their own ways, to show us that our folly is divine, that our foibles and our baseness are the things that unite us.

I am the daughter of a trickster and a wit. The house I grew up in was full of teasing, joking, and lots of laughter. My dad the trickster would periodically play a prank on my mom, my sister or I (such as putting clear Scotch tape over the ear and mouthpiece of the home phone, or gluing our lunch money to the bottom of our lunch bags), and then we would retaliate with some befitting crime (like putting water balloons in his slippers or swapping the sugar for salt in his morning coffee),

in an endless delightful cycle. To this day, pranks and jokes are fair game, and I'm sure the scores will never be settled. Favorite stories of mishaps and mess-ups are told and re-told over dinners and at gatherings, celebrated with laughter. From a very early age I learned the value at being able to laugh at human folly, my own included.

Both of my parents are clever and cunning, but my mom is a bit subtler. She is generally a champion of the underdog, using verbal wit to cut through ignorance or to level the playing field. In fact, it was my mom who made me first aware of a relationship between gender and comedy, although I doubt it was her intention to do so. When I was about 8 or 9, she and I were watching a stand-up comedy show on TV one evening. The comedian was talking about how strange it was that ladies' shaving razors were pink, and went on to surmise that the color of the razors could possibly explain why women took such long, fearless strokes while shaving their legs. Since the razors were pink, women (according to him) thought they were safer. "You make a chainsaw pink, it's still a chainsaw!" he quipped, and I started to laugh. I turned around to look at my mom who was sitting on the couch behind me, and was surprised to see that she was not laughing. "God, we know they're razors. If we shaved our legs the way men shave their faces, we'd be in the shower for days," she said. I don't remember what else the comedian said after that. My mind was grappling with the implication of her remark. It slowly sunk in that the joke was predicated upon an assumption that women took long, sweeping strokes with shaving razors because they assumed the color pink made them safer. Would a woman have made this joke? My mom certainly didn't think it was funny; in fact she

had countered the assertion with her standard wit, skewering insensitivity in the humor. To be fair, I should note here that I still find the suggestion that women think pink razors are safer just absurd enough to be funny. But, I also believe that the reason I find the joke funny may differ somewhat from the reason a man might find the joke funny. When I think of his joke, all I can see is *his* naiveté, his foolishness in assuming that women are so easily fooled by the color pink. Yes, the joke is insensitive; but then, most comedy is. Comedy is not meant to be gentle or sympathetic. It necessitates a kind of brutality that is difficult for some people to forgive. As Steve Martin famously put it, "Comedy isn't pretty." Women have not historically been recorded as participants in comedy because they have historically been sheltered from the base and lewd nature of comedic genres. At one time, women were thought to be too pure to fully comprehend lascivious humor, let alone produce it themselves (Martin and Seagrave, 20). If women were included in comedy, it was generally as the butt of the joke, "the nag, the gossip, the randy widow, the henpecking housewife, the shrew, etc." (Finney, 2), further distancing them from the creative end of comedy. This is not to say that female writers and producers of comedic material did not exist; certainly they did, in the form of travelling performers, writers, and Vaudevillian comics. Capitalizing on their experiences in the domestic sphere for comedic fodder, writers like Emily Dickinson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Gertrude Stein produced humorous works that appealed greatly to their female contemporaries. Because this humor had to do with a socially "female" experience, it was assumed to be separate from "male" humor (i.e. domestic humor was cleaner, more innocent than the worldly, sexually

charged humor of men). This assumption is not entirely true, of course, but the fact remains that historically there has been a division between female humor and male humor. If a lady wrote from her experience as a housewife, her humor was un-relatable to men. If she ventured into the lascivious territory of male humor, she was considered a fallen woman, exchanging the image of feminine propriety for admittance into the world of comedy (Finney, 3).

Over the years, I have continually come back to this question: as a woman, what exactly is my place amidst the jesters, tricksters, fools and clowns? It is no surprise that I was drawn to improv and comedy. I joined an improv comedy troupe in my first year of college and was immediately hooked. Making other people laugh is a powerful feeling, and within a couple of years I was excelling, winning the praise of my peers and audiences. I was constantly hungry to learn new forms, and read each piece of literature on improv comedy I could get my hands on, including Viola Spolin's foundational "Improvisation for the Theatre". Spolin was my first introduction to the idea of the empty space – that an improv artist can create entire worlds out of thin air.

After college I moved to New York City and continued to train in improv comedy and physical comedy. In New York I was introduced to the *commedia dell'arte*, a highly physical, semi-improvised style of street theatre popular in Italy in the 1600s, and found that it spoke to both my improv training and my dance background. In addition to improv and physical comedy, I dabbled in stand-up comedy, attending various open mics in Manhattan when I could. My love of

comedy was deeply entrenched, and when I made the decision to go back to graduate school, I knew I wanted to continue to explore comedic genres.

But I have never forgotten that pivotal moment at home with my mom. After nearly a decade of improv training, I felt as if I was competing constantly for some amorphous approval, for someone to continually affirm my gifts and approve of my participation in comedy. I witnessed firsthand the strange dynamic between men and women in the improv arena, and began to wonder why it was that I felt something was missing in my comedy. I started to sense that I had sacrificed some of my own voice in order to mimic something I thought I needed to be. Whether that "something" was more "male", or if it had features that we socially think of as "male" (aggressive, confident, commanding), I only knew that it felt very much like a mask that I would put on before each show.

In my first year of graduate school I took a class called "Presence and Resistance", which dealt primarily with clown. This was my first encounter with clown work. Clown is a subtle and potent comedic mode, both gentle and ruthless in its honesty. I suddenly became aware that the improv "persona" that I had spent years developing, the very same persona that always felt slightly false and gimmick-y, was only a shadow of my true comedic potential. In order to fully participate in the honesty and the exquisite failure of the clown, I had to drop that entire pretense. I had to draw from something that was real – not something that was "male" or "female", but simply something that was *me*, that was human. A great weight was lifted, and an entire world opened up before me. I was re-introduced to the little girl

who imitated her teachers for the pleasure of her friends, who looked with awe at the world around her and saw endless possibilities.

With crystal clarity I saw that clown had a completely different relationship to gender than any other comedic mode. I brought the subject up constantly, with colleagues and mentors, even with my own family, and I realized that this was to be the subject of my research. A friend suggested that I contact Christopher Bayes, a teacher of clown and physical theatre at Yale Drama. Bayes responded in a general way to my questions about gender and clown, but his most valuable contribution was to point me towards Kendall Cornell, the founder and director of Clowns Ex Machina, an all-female clown troupe based in New York. After exchanging a few emails with her I set up a trip to fly to New York in order to interview her and some of the troupe members, as well as observe a little of their work.

Cornell is an extraordinarily straightforward woman. She exudes a confidence that is neither domineering nor affected, and speaks with candor and passion about the work she does with her troupe. It is obvious that she enjoys watching the women in Clowns Ex Machina grow into themselves, as performers and as people in the world. The troupe members are equally enthusiastic about the work that they do, almost unanimously agreeing that involvement in Clowns Ex Machina has changed their lives. What follows is a case study of her and of the troupe, with special attention to how they leverage social assumptions about gender in their clown work, and to what end.

CHAPTER II

THE TROUPE

In 1993 Kendall Cornell had her first encounter with the genre of clown. Having extensive movement, dance, and theatre training under her belt, she had begun to participate in some "comedic theatre projects" that piqued her interest in sketch comedy, parody, and Shakespearean comedy (App. C, 147). She learned of a clown workshop/master class being offered by David Shiner, and attended as an observer. The studio that hosted the workshop had talked about the use of costumes and "other strange things", and Cornell remembers thinking it was going to be an odd day (App. C, 147). Her first impression of the space and the participants of the workshop made her uneasy, seeing them in their various eclectic costume pieces, getting ready to work; but once Shiner began talking about clown and showing examples of clown acts, the experience was like a "frying pan to the head". The work she saw touched something in her, and she saw a "truthfulness and openness" that not only made sense to her, but also took her by surprise. "Before that my intention had been to do straight (and serious) theatre," she recalls (App. C, 147). After that workshop, she began to eagerly and earnestly pursue her own training in the genre of clown. First Cornell found her way to world-renowned clown master Philippe Gaulier. For decades, Gaulier has taught thousands of students who flock to study with him. His *École Philippe Gaulier* (which translates to Philippe Gaulier School) was located in London from 1991 until 2002. Gaulier was a student of legendary Jacques Lecoq, another clown master, but he feels his approach

to training differs somewhat from his teacher. While Lecoq developed a specific method for generating movement-based theatre, Gaulier's way of teaching is designed to leave as little trace of his involvement as possible (Cavendish, *The Telegraph*). "I look at the person and say, 'This way is good for you. This place is full of possibilities.' I don't teach a special style; what I teach more is a wonderful spirit. People have to find a way of being beautiful [meaning anyone in the grip of pleasure or freedom] and surprising" (Cavendish). Cornell describes Gaulier's approach to clown as pedagogical (App. A, 100), letting each student learn through his or her own unique experience. The training was at turns brutal and invigorating, and Cornell recalls that Gaulier "flattens everybody, basically, he flattens you all down to nothing, so I really learned a lot about everybody's individual ways of being stupid/funny, all their charms, there was no one particular way to do it. You know, somebody might be funny when they're super boring, somebody might be funny when they're aggressive, somebody might be funny when they're very active, somebody might be funny when they're very still. So, that sense that there are as many ways to be a clown and as many charms of being a clown as there are people. You have to find what that is [for yourself]" (App. A, 130). She describes Gaulier as a "great humanitarian" as well (App. A, 101), noting that he didn't treat anyone differently based on their gender or even their skill level. This created what she describes as a "level playing field", and provided a safe platform for her to begin her study of clown. "In terms of clowning," she remembers, "he also talks a lot about the feeling of the 'bad student'. You know, coming on stage with a certain vulnerability and that sense of, am I gonna get thrown off stage or, you know, that sensitivity. I

learned a lot from him about the role of the authority figure, whether it was the teacher or the audience" (App. A, 130). She took her first workshop with Gaulier at his school in 1994, training with him on and off until 2000. In 1996 she brought him to New York to teach a workshop in which she assisted him. "I hadn't been in his class for a number of years," she says, "but then he was here and so I went to visit and went to just sit in on class one day, and it was really interesting for me to see that, people – they were doing an exercise where they had to come on stage and do whatever the heck they had to do, and they would come on stage and just walk, BANG, right into their own wall. Their *own* wall" (App. A, 130). This experience of observing and assisting in workshops developed her skills as a clown teacher, and revealed to her the many different "walls" that people have. She saw that it was her job, in the role of the teacher, to spot these walls and help her students to move beyond them. Cornell still uses exercises she learned during her training with Gaulier, though she has adapted them to fit the needs of her troupe.

In 1995, two years after witnessing her life-altering clown master class, Cornell attended another workshop offered by Shiner, this time as a participant. She continued to assist him in his workshop for a number of years after that, and would eventually collaborate with him on a commissioned piece for *Cirque du Soleil*. Cornell remarks that, while both Shiner and Gaulier use the same basic principles of clown, their approaches are different (App. A, 101). Shiner began as a street performer in Chicago, self-taught to an extent, and performed in the streets of France and Germany. He was "discovered" at a circus festival in France, and has gone on to collaborate on many shows with Cirque du Soleil. Shiner's approach,

therefore, is reflective of his "school of life" training, comprised of intuitive bits of knowledge gained from years of performance. As a street performer, Shiner had to always hold in mind the living relationship to the clown and the audience. This kind of experience and wisdom are reminisce of the itinerate *commedia dell'arte* troupes of Italy, who performed high physical and improvised comedy in markets and at street fairs, for an incredibly diverse range of audiences. Sometime, the audiences these troupes performed for did not speak their language (as must has been the case at times for Shiner), and it was at these times that the troupe had to try to find and employ a basic "human" connection, using more physical comedy and pantomime to communicate the follies of their characters. If they failed to entice an audience, then they would fail to make their wages and therefore go hungry. The high stakes of street performance are strong motivation indeed to find that elusive yet inspiring living relationship. This connection is what attracts performers and audiences alike to clown; it requires both parties to fully share in, and be committed to, the present moment.

Shiner taught Cornell about the spiritual aspects of clowning as well, showing her how to become her own authority in her work. "David's work was very much about like, getting really powerful in one's self and knowing, what do I have to say, who am I on stage in a certain way, and how can I be in front of the audience," she says (App. A, 131). He showed her that the clown was meant to be a social mirror, and that although the clown never gained status over her audience, she was still at the helm of the journey. "Suddenly I could bring my actor self into it," she recalls, "and I do have that power as an actor, and I suddenly understood about the size of it.

You know, it's not small […] That's what I was saying about the self, you know, my size as a female being, my biggest dreams, my biggest aspirations, to put those on stage and have people laugh. Because then you're talking clown" (App. A, 131).

Their approaches being somewhat different, Cornell naturally took different things from her training with Gaulier and Shiner. At a certain point, however, she felt her growth plateauing. Having been told that her clown was supposed to be an extension of herself, she wondered why she did not feel herself in the work she was doing. The question for her became, "How does this really work for me? They say "this", but how does this really work for me … For me, it was really going back to the basics of what is clown, why does a clown exist, what's the function of the clown, and how can I make it work for me as a woman?" (Appendix A, 100). It was not necessarily any one particular thing about her training with either Gaulier or Shiner that led her to feel alienated as a female. Rather, it was a collection of smaller instances that brought her attention to the fact that her gender changed her experience of clown training. On one occasion, for example, during a workshop with Shiner, the group was standing in a circle doing a movement exercise. When Cornell entered the center of the circle and started to move, a fellow male participant yelled, "Take it off!" "He [was] just a ding-dong, you know? But it's just like, 'So, I can't explore the way I want to be able to explore because you all got all excited?' Whether it's male or female or just mostly males, you're all getting excited in a certain way, and that's not freeing me, in a way. And David basically – he would get frustrated because he was like […] I don't know, I don't know what to tell you. Because, how could he? He doesn't know. And so, there were just a number of

instances like that where, it was like, I can see this exact thing where I'm trying to explore myself, and […] I need a little bit calm, I need a little calm and I need a little space, and my space is being invaded" (App. A, 101). Feeling she could not fully express herself without risking unwanted attention, this perceived restriction became a block to growth. In response, Cornell began organizing clown workshops with only women. The all-female atmosphere eliminated the worry of invasive, sexual remarks, and allowed the women to more easily follow their impulses. The workshops became a lab space, free from the male gaze where these women could explore what it felt like to engage in the vulnerable and fully present act of clown without male/female social tension. Ultimately, it allowed Cornell and her colleagues to finally bring their fullest, "biggest" selves to their work.

What began as a series of workshops blossomed into a fully formed, all-female clown troupe in 2005/2006. The troupe first formed under the name "Kendall Cornell's Soon-To-Be-World-Famous Woman Clown Troupe". By her own admission, the name was too "unwieldy" (App. A, 99) and, while it may have expressed certain tongue-in-cheek hopes about the group's future, it soon changed to Clowns Ex Machina (CEM). The name immediately invokes the ancient Greek theatrical concept of the *deus ex machina*, or as it is more commonly translated, the "god from the machine". In ancient Greek drama, the figure of a god would be lowered onto the stage, as if descending upon the mortal world, and proceed to neatly resolve all the entanglements of the plot. More colloquially, *deus ex machina* refers to any improbable plot device introduced to tie up loose ends. The name "Clowns Ex Machina" suggests this same improbable solution, introduced into a

social narrative to resolve the entanglements of life itself. In short, it is not the gods who will solve life's predicaments; instead, send in the clowns. "I sort of thought the idea of this other entity, sort of rushing on stage solving the problems, but in their own clown ways," Cornell says with a grin. "Not working it out in the same way, but sort of exploring it, or, I guess the way we talked about earlier – taking it apart in new ways, as opposed to tying it up in a predictable way" (App. A, 119).

The troupe first performed *Clown Pageants I* and *II* in September and October of 2005, respectively. Cornell describes the pageants as

> shows with a particular structured improv format – a combination of structured individual prototype acts and come improvisation. I was the MC/ringleader – much like I am in class – so I was conducting the show and interacting with the clowns – calling them out and calling out directions and asking questions and giving them cues. That way their beginning clown acts and clown performances were sure to be successful. (App. C, 149)

These pageants were part of a broader festival, hosted by Six Figures Theatre Co. in their Artists of Tomorrow Festival. March 2006 saw *Clown Pageant III* in Six Figures Co.'s Spring Fling. A special commission from Cirque du Soleil was performed at the premiere of "Événement Spécial" in April of 2006. Their first full-length production, *Not Just For Shock Value: A Femmes-Clown Assemblage*, premiered in 2007, leveraging popular mythologies to explore the female experience in love, dating, family, and mobility. In 2008, *Clowns by Dead Reckoning* premiered at La Mama club, and in 2009 the troupe performed *Clown Axioms*, sub-titled "A gory, romantic tale told by clowns". *Clown Axioms* appropriated popular fairy tales and fairy tale themes, pulling them apart from a modern female perspective. CEM's most recent show, *Clowns Full-Tilt: A Musing on Aesthetics*, premiered in November of 2011 as

part of La Mama's 50th anniversary season, as a clown exploration of representations of female beauty in art, TV, and popular media.

In all cases, the group makes public performance part of their developing process. As in the case of the itinerate *commedia* troupes and Shiner's own experience as a street performer, these public showcases allow the performers to take their audience reaction in, and use it in real time. An audience that is unresponsive or distracted is an immediate indication that the requisite connection is missing. The clown can then use this live feedback to make adjustments to her performance, to try new and different ways to engage her audience and to allow them to feel the living connection. In this way, public performance becomes as important as the work done in a studio environment. During rehearsals and workshopping, Cornell places emphasis on the idea of "heart opening", of bringing one's fully vulnerable self to the work as a means to connect with the audience.

Troupe membership has shifted over the years, though there are a couple of women who have been with the group since its inception. Virginia Venk took a workshop from Cornell in 2005, and shortly thereafter joined CEM as one of its members. Asked what is was about clown that drew her in, Venk replied, "It was a lot harder than I thought…And it takes a lot of practice, you know? Takes a lot of practice to be that open and out front with the audience" (App. A, 78). A lover of the work of Lucille Ball, as a girl Venk would re-write episodes of "I Love Lucy", dress her brothers up, and perform them, imagining herself as one of the first female clowns to come into the popular public eye. Venk has a very "Lucille" quality to her – quiet, unexpected, and open, with an extremely expressive face. During the clown

jam that I observed, Venk was quiet and careful. Cornell gave them the task of becoming "the best" at something, and in a true homage to Lucille Ball, Venk came on as the best "apologizer" to ever have lived.

Julie Kinkle has also been a member since the 2005 workshop with Cornell. Unlike Venk, Kinkle is gregarious and talkative, openly sharing her passion for clown. "The first clowns I saw were these clowns called Mump and Smoot, they were from Canada … And I remember when I saw them I thought, 'Man, […] if I could get paid to do that, people that do that for a living, I can't believe they have that job!'" (App. A, 78) Kinkle's early training was in improvisation for the theatre – not necessarily comedic improv as it's more popularly known, but rather improv as a technique for actor training. After moving to New York, she was exposed to comedic improv, and although she excelled at it, she always had in the back of her mind that original encounter with Mump and Smoot. Much like Cornell, she was drawn in by the sincerity of the performance that she witnessed that day, and was forever altered by it. "I always felt a little bit fake doing funny improv," she recalls, "and I always like not worrying about being funny [with clown]. I always wanted scenes to be real when I did improv, and I'd always say, like, well who cares, if it ends up being funny, then it will be funny. I didn't want to jump on the game or force a game" (App. A, 79). Kinkle's own earnestness comes through in her clown work, creating clowns that reach towards the audience continually, searching for that connection.

Kathy Horejsi was first introduced to clown work in the 1980's, and trained at Barnum and Bailey's Clown College. After several moves she and her family landed in New York, and with her kids in school all day and her husband working

full-time, Horejsi found herself with an abundance of free time in a strange city. "I was looking around and I found Kendall's workshop listed in…something," she recalls, "and it was still a big deal for me to take the train into Manhattan by myself. I was really intimidated by, like, everything. Like, 'Oh my god, you know how to rent a studio? That's amazing!'" (App. A, 80). Horejsi appreciates the aspect of clown that allows her to bring herself "with the volume turned up", as she puts it. The clown world is a different world, and something she is able to do at any point, regardless of other artistic projects she is working on.

Kinkle is not the only woman in the troupe with improv training, nor is she alone in her feeling that improv comedy feels forced, and fake, when compared to clown work. Carla Bosnjak, one of the troupe's more recent member, remarks that, "Improv is like constantly being a smart-ass, whereas clown is like constantly taking that away" (App. A, 83). Bosnjak had an early affinity for Carol Burnett, aspiring to be like her and to make people laugh. She went to school to become an actor and studied mostly drama, but always found herself drawn to comedy. By chance, she was working at the La Mama theatre in 2009 when CEM performed Clown Axioms, and she was immediately enthralled. "I was setting up, I was helping them with the lights and stuff, with their show, and I was the one, when they all left, I'd be on the stage sweeping, dreaming of… [laughter], 'One day it will be me up there…' And then I told Kendall if any of these ladies starts coughing or [laughter] limping, please call me, and finally she did the workshop and I dragged my sister, uh, with me, and then… Yeah. My dreams came true" (App. A, 77). Bosnjak's sister, Diana Lovrin, smiles at this memory. Lovrin joined the troupe at the same time as her sister,

having convinced Bosnjak to accompany her to the 2010 workshop. "I like the fact that the clown's world is limitless. You can use anything. And it really just plays on your imagination. Anything is possible, and that's what I enjoy about it" (App. A, 81).

Michaela Lind is also a relatively recent addition, along with Lucia Rich. Like the rest of the troupe members, Rich is a trained performer and actor, and has an MFA in physical theatre from the London International School of Performing Arts. It was in this program that she was first introduced to clown and, like her compatriots, was immediately hooked. "I loved that it was so personable, you know? I mean, each person's clown was so specific to their personality, and so you really get to see somebody, see into somebody and see their specific form and body, really moving from their individual out and into something that is universally… touching" (App. A, 76). She also makes a point to say that she has had amazing and fulfilling experiences working with men as well. "I've had very positive experiences working with, you know, also with male teachers and with men. It's not like, my experience has been all bad. I mean, what we do is lovely, and I think it is different, but you know […] I think there is something that relaxes for me, I was just thinking about it, when I'm with all women. […] Women have gotten together and been creative together, you know, whether it was working with their hands or quilting or doing something creative together. You know, and that sticks around because there's something important about it" (App. A, 89).

A general nodding of heads around the table indicates that the troupe agrees – their work is not about militantly opposing or demonizing men or the valuable work

of male clowns. As Rich points out, there is something ancient and comforting for women to come together in a creative capacity, and CEM wants to honor that tradition; however, they are not interested in excluding men from their experience; in fact, it is quite the contrary. "I think one of the things that we're doing, that I'm trying to do is, we're making work in a women's environment and then putting it on stage," Cornell says, "and so we're saying here's work that we made amongst ourselves in terms of what interests us, or me. And you *all* get to look at that, what is it, when it's made with just women. As opposed to a room of mixed men and women that makes something else. And I think there's a value in that" (App. A, 115). The value is not only in exploring the difference between what an exclusively female clown troupe can generate versus a mixed gender group, but also in bringing the work into the public eye. In this way, Cornell and the members of CEM actually want to bring both male and female audience members into their experience, to show both men and women what they have opened up and discovered. That they utilize social assumptions about female gender roles and behavior is only natural, since they are, after all, women, and they can only draw from their own experience as a starting point. The result is that an audience member can, regardless of their gender, and if they are willing, enjoy and laugh at CEM's explorations of those social assumptions. It ceases to be a battle between men and women, and begins to be a unifying, human experience. Lind, who studied for years as a performer and a clown, relates a story about her training: "I trained in a Russian theatre school, from Moscow, and they're all men, you know? Smoking cigars and basically telling the women what not to do and what to do. I went to St. Petersburg Theatre School, they

said, 'Women clowns, they are like vaginas with teeth'" (App. A, 85). This anecdote elicits explosive laugher from the group. "Vagina denta!" Cornell chimes, evoking another roll of laughter. Instead of this remark becoming a roadblock or the starting point for a vendetta, it is appropriated and folded into the group's sense of play, and immediately it becomes valuable fodder for a round of banter about "vagina denta". This is, in fact, a perfect example of how these women approach the "gender question", in both their clown work and in life. It's impossible to say whether or not the troupe members would feel the way that they do about clown and it's transformative power if they were training in a mixed group, but it is clear that they feel a debt of gratitude to Cornell for creating an all-female space. "I have to say," Lind says, following her anecdote, "that working with only women, and with a female leader, has really helped me tremendously as a performer, in the way of just trusting myself more, and just letting myself mirror my own problems and deal with them outside the rehearsal studio" (App. A, 85).

Indeed, the troupe trusts Cornell implicitly. "There's us," says Kinkle, "what we're bringing, but Kendall sees things and has a sensibility" for what works (App. A, 87). Years of experience have given Cornell the ability to pilot rehearsals, to know what is useful, and to know when to put on the breaks. She must decide which personal experiences benefit exploration, and which ones block it. Clown work is extremely subtle and personal, and there is a fine line between playing *with* tragedy and playing tragedy. These women know the difference, and they feel safe enough with Cornell and with each other to walk right up to the line. "It's good when [a clown] is in pain, but it's a clown level of pain," says Cornell. "If she's actually

violated, it's not fun. That is what clown is, knowing the difference" (App. A, 108). The clown level of pain that comes from failure is a delicate place to be, especially in front of an audience. "When the clown makes a mistake, or feels upset," says Kinkle, "that's a good moment, because that's when you feel the most connected to the audience, when you're allowing them to see… I just made a poopy on the stage [laughter] and now you guys are looking at it, or whatever. It's just… you have to be able to be embarrassed in front of them. And it's hard to get up there and be open to, 'Well, it might not work out'" (App. A, 83).

The group generates new material in a workshop-like atmosphere, using improvisation to explore fixed ideas, or "prompts". The prompt is generally a simple, broad concept, although their first show was even simpler than that. Newly formed, Cornell took the members of CEM and began what she calls "pure exploration". "What are two women clowns on stage? What are three? Four?" she says of their first development process. "It was truly a limitless thing, let's just see what can come out of this" (App. A, 105). Subsequent shows began with a slightly more concrete idea. *Clown Axioms* had its roots in the mythos of fairy tales, and each of the vignettes explored the different way in which women have figured into the fairy tale world. One vignette, for example, was based on the moment that Jack, from Jack and the Beanstalk, returned home with only three beans to show from the sale of their cow. The women took turns acting out possible reactions his mother might have had, from shocked stupor to comical outrage. Their most recent piece, *Clowns Full-Tilt*, explored the connections between beauty and constraint. When asked where she got these ideas from, Cornell laughs. "I'm a thinker. I'm a deep,

deep thinker," she says, smiling (App. A, 109). She spends time meditating on topics, making notes and jotting down ideas, and chooses pieces of music or artwork that relate. Cornell takes the music and/or artwork into the studio as a prompt and lets her troupe explore them. The nature of the "food" for the clowns to riff from (images, videos, stories, music) is really important to the process. "The choices and evocative quality of the 'food' can really affect what we get – and it's important that I make sure that what I bring into the studio is really on target" (App. C, 148).

In development, she acts as the "MC", the outside voice of higher status that can coach the women as they work. "Women's status is so much more complicated," says Cornell, "so much more subtle" (App. A, 100). This does not mean, of course, that there are not complex status relationships at work between men and women, or within a group of all men. Here, she is referring to the group dynamic, to the way that the troupe members confront their perceived status within the group, and also to their perceived status socially. Women have historically been asked to assume a lower social status to men, and the social roles that they fill are continually measured against a set of criteria that end up placing higher social value on the roles that men fill. There are exceptions to every rule, and history is dotted with women who have challenged these assumptions and paved the way for an alteration in the valuation of social roles, as well as the "gendering" of roles. However, centuries of lower status are a fact of women's history, so ingrained that still today women struggle with how to elevate their social status without negative repercussions. Consider, for example, any contemporary female politician who has made her voice and her opinions very public. Women engaged in politics not only expose

themselves to the standard level of ridicule leveled at male politicians, but are also often accused of "ball-busting", of compromising their femininity to participate in a "masculine" social role. Cornell is sensitive to this history, and to what it means for women involved in clown work. Even in an all-female environment, the presence of a "voice of authority" can be akin to oppressive status assumptions. To address this, Cornell pays close attention to the specific needs of each student clown, and to how the student reacts to the voice of authority (which I will discuss in further detail in the following chapter). Some students require and respond well to an aggressive dominance, as it drums up the requisite feelings of failure and low status needed to engage in clown work. For others, this approach results in a shutting down and closing off. The question for each troupe member becomes how to engage in acts of failure without internalizing the clown status as actual social status.

The group had an interesting experience allowing a male clown, named Patrick, to come and jam with them. "He wasn't even a very masculine clown," recalls Kinkle, "he was more animalistic" (App. A, 84). Everyone agrees that they had a good time playing with him, but that it was a "different" experience. Just the introduction of one new element – and a male element at that – changed the group experience. This makes sense, of course – group dynamics form in particular ways, and any foreign element is going to throw the group dynamic into a slightly different sphere. Because of that, it is impossible to say whether what they felt was a result of Patrick's gender (his "male energy", if you will) or simply his being a foreign presence in the midst of a cohesive group unit. Regardless, it is interesting to note that they all felt a general shift in the dynamic, using terms like "power struggle" and

"sexual tension". "I've done [clown] work with a lot of [men]," says Rich, "but it always ends up being some sort of sexual joke" (App. A, 86). Lovrin points out that this tension goes both ways – that it is not necessarily strictly the men who bring these assumptions to the table, and Cornell agrees, recalling a remark made by colleague and clown teacher Chris Bayes. "[H]e teaches workshops all the time," she says, "and he said… 'I would really like to see a workshop where men and women are on stage, a clown workshop, where it doesn't end up being a couple', you know? A romantic thing" (App. A, 86). It makes sense that this male-female sexual tension and romantic relationships would come into play during a workshop with men and women; after all, it is a prominent relationship and one that everyone can relate to, regardless of gender identification or sexual orientation (in other words, all of us can recognize and identify with sexual tension and romantic negotiations). In her work with CEM, Cornell is interested in moving past these "easy" relationships, the obvious dynamics between men and women. The scenarios generated during their jam session with Patrick included very different status struggles from the work of the troupe. During one exercise, Cornell had three of the tallest troupe members play models, and set Patrick as the designer. "The question was who can have the higher status, the models or the designer?" says Cornell, "And what he ended up having to do, because he's a small guy, and they were all the tall ones, you know, it was put stuff [over their faces], so they couldn't be seen. That was ultimately how he would win. Win the situation" (App. A, 86). This exercise revealed a supposition that female power and status is connected to beauty. Having revealed this, Cornell would then want to move past the conjecture and into alternate dilemmas and

solutions. What if their power was not that they were beautiful or tall, but that they out-strut him, for example? This would necessitate a different clown solution from covering their faces. Conversely, in a different exercise, the women lowered Patrick's status by turning him into a puppy and putting a leash on him. "Yeah, I remember that," Cornell says, laughing. "That was the one where I was like, 'Okay, stop'… It was a power thing" (App. A, 86). It can be enjoyable and valuable to see various status relationships played out, between both men and women and within an all-female group dynamic. However, for CEM it is not enough to stop there. In the case of their jam session with Patrick, Cornell continually stopped them, urging them to slow down and push through the "easy", generic assumptions about male/female relationships in order to open up something new. This is the same strategy she uses in rehearsals to help the women look past the obvious.

The period of play, of generating material, varies in length depending on the piece, and it is during this time that more specific themes emerge. Cornell's job is to track the theme and bits that are generated, and to create something like a cohesive show from them. Not that the shows have a linear plot or move in one continuous direction; rather, they are a collection of vignettes, the product of culling and refining the workable material from their rehearsals. They can all tell now when something begins to gel, when it clicks into place and becomes a set piece. Cornell puts the pieces of the puzzle together.

The creation process has had its own evolution as well. "The first work I was doing was just very intuitive," Cornell says, "and the method of inquiry was hit and miss (a lot of hits) and I didn't know what would come out of it" (App. C, 147). She

made note of which exercises and methods were good generators of material and expanded those, and continued to develop specific exercises and games to try and get at what she wants. A lot of it was learning to trust the creative impulse, to follow it and include it. "I've learned to trust my images and seeds of ideas as important directions to pursue (and not be put off if it doesn't work right away)" (App. C, 148). The games and methods used in rehearsals also depend greatly on the specific strengths and skills of the troupe members. At times, the troupe has included many members with extensive improv training, and so Cornell made use of that in rehearsal and generated clown pieces that had room for improvisation. Currently, Cornell remarks that the group likes more structure. They can feel her vision of the material more strongly, and feel that vision steering their creative process (which, she admits, can also feel constraining to some of them). "I think that it is not that the process changed that much. For me, I still think everything is open-ended and I am looking for the tone that is truthful and resonating – but [now] I have some vision and experience of how the troupe functions artistically" (App. C, 148). Cornell hopes that eventually the troupe will grow to include a repertory of pieces that they can cycle through and tour (in additional to generating new material), and that they will continue to attract larger audiences and reach more and more people. She also hopes, of course, that eventually the troupe will be self-sustaining financially. The troupe rehearses in studio space that is donated to them, either through a patron or through the venue in which they are performing. All of the troupe members hold other jobs – some of them related to performance, but not all – and all of them perform in different modes of theatre (acting, dance, music, etc.) In a self-sustaining

model, these women would be able to focus more of their time and attention to the growth of the troupe. It would also potentially generate a troupe of women clowns who could then create and shape their own work, granting Cornell more latitude to continue exploring her solo work. Although she continues to train in other areas of performance – she takes acting classes and dance classes, for example – she no longer attends clown workshops for the purpose of training. "The last time I went to a workshop," she recalls, "which was a fine workshop, in the middle of the workshop a little voice in my head said to me, 'Whatever you're looking for, Kendall, it's not here. I realized … I'm waiting for the teacher to tell me or push me farther or give me and I'm always disappointed because I'm always looking for [someone] to finally tell [me] I'm graduated. You know? I'm looking for something. And I think that's also, for me, a female problem. A female problem of, somebody else please tell me that I've graduated" (App. A, 120). Cornell practices being her "own authority", being the one who decides what she needs for growth and how best she can go about getting the help she needs, instead of waiting for someone else to give her permission to move forward. This makes her a solid leader for the women in CEM, as well as an example for them. Cornell hopes that participating in an all-female clown troupe will help these women find their own authority, their own unique perspectives told in their individual voices.

Now and then Cornell will hold a workshop for women who want to grow their clown training or who want to try clown for the first time. She also uses these workshops to find new members for the troupe. Members are selected carefully according to Cornell's perception of the group dynamic. Some women come to her

with a natural clown "vibe" but not a lot of training. Others have training but no sense for collaboration. In the end, it's a matter of openness, of a willingness to play and grow (App. A, 103). The workshops are geared less towards generating perform-able material, and more about exposing women to the clown world. I had the pleasure of attending Cornell's most recent workshop in January, as a participant, and was able to see in action many of the aspects of her clown training that we had, to that point, only discussed abstractly.

I noticed right away that, with the exception of some participants who seemed already to know each other, the atmosphere was tentative and tense. This is usual for any group of people meeting for the first time, and the absence of men in the workshop did not seem to diminish the awkwardness of those first few moments of greeting. There is something noticeably different about the quality of tension in a group of all women. The usual charm tactics tend not to work in the same way (although I find a good sense of humor is disarming regardless of the gender of my listener), and respect is earned differently. Seeing as how all of us either knew Cornell by reputation or from her work, I suspect that we all wanted the environment to feel as safe as possible for one another, to honor the dynamics that we imagined must be present in her work with CEM. So, although it was a little bit strained and shy at first, each of us made an effort to warmly greet and welcome one another. It was as if an unspoken agreement was made to try and leave the power games at the door.

The workshop lasted only two days, about four hours each day. The day began with a warm-up, designed to both break the ice and bring our focus into the

studio and to the task at hand. We formed a circle, Cornell put on some music, and we were given instructions on how to move, alone and with each other. Right away, Cornell began giving us gentle "nudges" – a question here, a suggestion there. The suggestions were designed to keep us present and honest to what was happening, and to prevent us from "muscling" or trying to manage the reactions of those watching us. Our only task was to listen to the music and move to it impulsively. When we moved into smaller groups, and eventually went up by ourselves to be coached through an exercise, Cornell displayed the kind of exquisite attention that she described to me in her story of the dance troupe. Each person received side coaching that was very particular to them, and Cornell has a keen sense for the various kinds of "walls" that people run into (App. A, 103) I was surprised and a little flustered when she picked up, almost immediately, on my "safety blanket", which is going into "cute" or "charming". Time and time again, she urged me away from being coy, sometimes gently, sometimes forcefully, and invited me to simply honor what was actually happening between me and the audience.

That first day, Cornell gave us all tiny, round red noses. She explained that the red nose was the smallest mask there is, and that we were to treat it with great respect (i.e. no putting it on our chins or playing catch with it or chewing on it, etc.) When the noses were on, we were in play. When the noses were off, we were watchers. I had heard from other clowns that the receiving of a red nose from a clown teacher was a kind of "rite of passage", the mark of a certain level of skill, so I was surprised to be handed one on this first day of a workshop. When I asked her about this clown nose tradition, she smiled a little. "If that is something that appeals

to you, then, great. For me, it is a tool. It is part of the training. You have this nose, this is your mask. This is the distance that separates you, Kim, from you, clown." This speaks, of course, to Cornell's feelings about getting permission, about needing someone else to tell her – or anyone, for that matter – when they have "graduated". The red nose was a functional and necessary part of her training. It was, indeed a great psychological hook for me, an easy way to transition from myself into a different "clown" mode of performing.

Over the next two days, Cornell focused primarily on two fundamental concepts of clown with us: the audience connection, which has already been touched upon, and failure. In the workshop, Cornell continually drew our attention back to the audience, telling us to check in with them, to find out from them if we were succeeding. Most of the time, we were not succeeding, and Cornell would coach us, urging us to let the audience see us acknowledging our utter failure. This moment – the moment that Kinkle describes – is indeed a magical moment, where something secret and identifiable opens up and is instantly shared. "This is not that thing where your mother said, 'Oh, honey, don't worry – they're not laughing *at* you, they're laughing *with* you.' No, they're laughing *at* you," Cornell explained with a twinkle in her eye. The feeling of being totally vulnerable and completely failing in front of people I barely knew was both a terrifying and thrilling experience. It is an amazing thing to feel that kind of vulnerability and walk away the better for it. Once we all had that experience with one another, the dynamic of the group changed. It relaxed, it had the feel of camaraderie. It did, indeed, feel incredibly safe, and by the second day many of us were lamenting the end of the workshop, wishing it were at

least one week long. I realize now, looking back, that part of the joy I felt after her workshop had everything to do with having been really "seen". Just as Cornell's dancers were delighted that someone had seen their humanness clearly enough to imitate and parody it, it was affirming to have Cornell and the other women in the workshop see bits of me that I typically keep (or try to keep) hidden from the general world. More than that, it was liberating to see how the bits I try to keep hidden were precisely what I needed to show in order to really create a connection.

Even from my limited experience in her workshop, I can see how this kind of work would attract women to Cornell and to her troupe. Clown work is particularly well suited to burn through stigmas and stereotypes, and for a woman this can be a particularly freeing experience. Cornell's hope is that the women who come to work with her walk away with a sense of their "full, sacred selves", a sense of who they are that is inclusive of their experience as women, but also *beyond* their gender. "[F]or me it's extremely rewarding to work so closely with [these women]," she says, "and watch that mental… every day, step farther and farther. What they want […] and how to help them do that. And how to help them step through their own stuff and step into their best creative freest selves" (App. A, 123). It's challenging work to guide a person through this territory, and Cornell has found that she must keep some loving distance from her troupe in order to not get fully caught up in their struggles. She practices patience, understanding that clown work is a kind of alchemy that opens people up to a deeper truth, and in the process may reveal that "they don't want what they think they want" (App. A, 124). Right now, she feels good about the dynamic of the group, and makes note of a cohesion and maturity

that has developed. During a talkback for their last show, she felt tired and spent, and asked the troupe to field questions while she moderated. "They were so fantastic," she says, her face lighting up. "I mean, they were so articulate and so – you know, talked about the experience and talked about the process and in a very clear way to the audience. And I was like, aw, this is great. Everybody's together. They got it together. We're on the same page" (App. A, 124). Cornell is satisfied if she can see progress, if she feels her women are willing to grow and learn and push past boundaries. She hopes that she can give them the same heart-opening experience that she received from her mentors, and provide them with a new sense of confidence and ability.

CHAPTER III

THE CLOWN OUT OF THE MACHINE

I've spoken already about the jester, the trickster, and the fool – three of Nisker's harbingers of "crazy wisdom". They exist in the world to challenge our truths and rattle our self-imposed cages. The clown is no different in this respect, being something of a hybrid of the jester, the trickster, and the fool. *The Cambridge Introduction to Comedy* defines the clown as a manifestation of human vices, of the "unapproved side of the moral compass" (Wietz, 110). We recognize the archetypal markers of clown – red nose, baggy pants, etc. – but we also see clowning in "extravagance of gesture, facial expressions, and what we might call a humor of innocence" (111). Jacques Lecoq remarks that a clown is the embodiment of personal weakness and failure. According to Lecoq, "We are all clowns, we all think we are beautiful, clever and strong, whereas we all have our weaknesses, our ridiculous side, which can make people laugh when we allow it to express itself" (Lecoq, 145). For Cornell, the clown is a pressure valve, a reliever of tension, and a reminder that we are gloriously and perfectly imperfect. "The social role of the clown is to break up those tensions," she says, "of life and death, the ominous clouds that are coming. It's too much to handle all that, so we need this entity that shows us our imperfection" (App. A, 113). Not only does a clown dispel the fallacy that we must be perfect creatures to live well and happy in this world, but she makes our imperfections a delight to us. The clown brings into the light those things we thought we had carefully hidden – the fact that we locked our keys in our car or that we misread the recipe and used baking powder instead of baking soda – and then

goes about showing us that we are not alone in our imperfection. As we sit in an audience and watch one of our fellows bumble around, we laugh, together. This laughter is an ancient, primitive signal that everything is okay. It reminds us that our imperfection is not abnormal; in fact, in the case of the clown, it is highly desirable. This is the crazy wisdom of the clown.

Part of the fun of clown is watching a strange logic at play. In her workshop, Cornell talked about how the clown's logic does not sync with what we generally accept to be a logical response to a given situation. She used the example of a hat falling off one's head. For a typical person, if their hat fell off they would simply bend over and pick it up. But for the clown, it is never that simple. The clown's hat falls off, and it's immediately a problem. This is what she means when she talks about magnifying problems: the clown takes that which is trivial and maps onto it the emotions that we usually reserve for things that are much more important; or things that *feel* much more important to us. The clown shows us that the very act of placing importance on a thing is a choice. We choose to make one thing more of a problem than another. Why is that? Is it because we are taught that certain things matter more than others? Or is it that we perceive the consequences of one thing to be greater than the consequences of another? After all, in real life, what great consequences come from dropping your hat? In the world of the clown, the reaction that we ordinarily reserve for the greater consequence is mapped onto something that, for us, is of next to no consequence. Then, we watch as the clown moves through the very familiar emotions of wrestling with a great crisis. This is incongruity at work – we laugh at the incongruity between the situation and the

clown's reaction to it. We see that there is no real threat – another important factor in creating an atmosphere that permits laughter – and at the same time we identify instantly with the very human feeling of wrestling with a thing, and ultimately the feeling of failure.

In all these definitions, a direct relationship to the audience is invoked. As Wright puts it, "Being reactive to the audience is the discipline of the theatrical clown" (Wright, 180). In terms of status, the clown has a paradoxical relationship with her observers, placing her at once below them, yet also at the helm of the experience. In other words, the clown must make the audience feel as though they are superior to her, even as they identify with her and her pain. The moment of failure is the "magic" moment; the audience identifies with the clown's "uphill struggle", and asserts their superiority to the clown through laughter (Weitz, 111). High status clowns are enjoyable because we recognize their pomp and strutting as flimsy covers for their insecurity and failure. This constant cycle of identification of and with failure is mitigated by the clown's indomitable sense of hope; that just around the corner is her greatest and most impressive success. The rule for the clown is "try, try again."

This moment of failure is termed alternately the "drop" or the "flop", and both refer to the same thing. Lecoq first began exploring clown in his "theatrical levels of play" in the 1960's, and relates this story as it is connected to the "flop":

> 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 they had been trying to show us, but at the person underneath, stripped bare for all to see. We had the solution. (Lecoq, 143)

The solution is to surrender to human folly. This is the height of the clown's sincerity, and when the clown is brave enough to be honest about their folly, their fears, and their mishaps, they give us permission to be honest about ours as well.

Cornell recalls a moment that crystallized for her the role of a clown:

> I work with this dance company, and a number of years ago they were doing their season over in the Joyce Theatre and so they were in the theatre doing class and they were having a lot of problems like, someone was getting injured and there was just so much tension, they were really suffering. So here we are in the theatre taking dance class on the stage, so all the bars are set up on the stage, and I started in the middle of class, "Oh, here's so and so doing his part, here's so and so doing this moment," and I started imitating bits of their program. By the end of class, they were all sitting on the edge of the stage or down in the house, which was empty, and I was onstage by myself doing imitation of all of these different moments, and they were just laughing so hard. I mean, first of all, we were in this theatre but it was totally empty and it was them, they were the audience, and they were going, "Do more, do more!" And they were just heaving up all of their…it had been so stressful and so tense and they were able to go, "Somebody saw me and saw a little thing I did," you know what I mean? The choreographer – she wasn't there for any of this, but, they had just become like pieces of meat for her because she's like, get it done, get it done, and here comes someone who says, "Oh, I saw that funny thing you did, and this is the way you did it, and I saw that you're worried about your zipper because you start with you back to the stage so…" You know? So, the sense of being seen somehow, being mirrored and seen, which I suppose is a very psychological thing. (App. A, 114)

These things – the things that we think nobody else sees, what Cornell calls the "hidden things" – are the seeds from which she draws her clown work. The clown must carry this exquisite attention into all of her work. This is precisely why Cornell

encourages her troupe to "slow down", to not gloss over anything. For her, the magic is in the minutia, the little things that are the in-roads to human frailty, insecurity, and *being* without the trappings of social grace. John Wright proposes that, "Clowns don't act; they play the audience" (Wright, 103). The use of the word "play" can have two meanings here: on the one hand, it refers to the game, the playground atmosphere that the clown shares with the audience. On the other, it can refer to a sense of imitation, the idea that a clown "portrays" the audience in recognizable situations that are boiled down to the silliest moment.

The women of CEM love giving this kind of attention to their work and to the world around them, but the reverse is also true. The world and the people in it love to be observed that closely, as well. How else can you explain the delight of seeing these secret things revealed in public? Cornell remembers one woman who saw one of her solo pieces – a clown called The Man-Eater. The Man-Eater was on the prowl for men, trying every possible way to attract a mate and failing miserably. After this particular show, a woman came up to Cornell and said, "Oh my god, it's just like that! It's just like that!". This woman, a friend of a friend of Cornell, had recently been through a divorce and was facing the daunting prospect of re-entering the dating scene. "I don't know what exactly she meant," Cornell says, laughing, "but she had the experience that someone had captured some of this stuff that [you] try to keep totally hidden and … it's something that is not [usually] articulated or is hard to express" (App. A, 114). For this woman, Cornell's clown captured the essence of a woman struggling to fit herself into a picture of beauty in order to appeal to the opposite sex. Often this is a harrowing process for women, constantly comparing

themselves to magazines and celebrities. Seeing her angst played out before her and being allowed to laugh at it dissolved the tension and stress around the idea of dating. This is what Nisker means when he talks about the clown falling down for us and standing up for us, too. By embodying something that is hidden, that is usually not brought to the fore, the clown is able to simultaneously expose our embarrassment while also dissolving it.

The clown does not relate solely to her audience, however. Like the jester, the trickster, and the fool, she exists somewhere in between the human and the divine. The pressures of simply being alive can feel overwhelming at times, and can become "too much to handle," say Cornell, "and so we need this entity that shows us ourselves in our imperfections" (App. A, 113) to remind us, like the fool, that our job is not to be perfect. "I believe that, because of that, the clown sort of connects us earthly creatures with a more cosmic or heavenly or bigger force. So the clown walks in a different set of dimensions in a way, on stage, both relating to the audience and to the heavens" (App. A, 113).

Equating imperfection with the divine is a radical idea in an ordered and structured world that values and strives for perfection, especially to the people who rely upon those orders and structures to shape their existence. And yet, history shows that we have always found ways to turn the "order" upside-down. We have always looked for ways to unlearn what we have learned, to give ourselves permission to buck the status quo, even if only temporarily. From the 11th to the 15th centuries in France, for example, people inverted Biblical teachings during the Feast of Fools. Cornell notes a particular part of the celebration, the Feast of the Ass,

as a prime example of how people take something that is sacred and turn it on its head, for the fun of it. During this celebration, a girl with child on a donkey would be led through town to the church, where the donkey would stand beside the altar during the sermon, and the congregation would "hee-haw" their responses to the priest. This act effectively dissolves, temporarily, the tensions between the sacred and the profane, relieving the pressure of divine perfection by invoking divine foolishness. Horlacher says that the relief generated by laughter is not only a result of a physical release, but also of the "acknowledgement of the never fully knowable or controllable foundation of human existence" (42). Clown work is designed to keep the foundation of human existence up in the air.

It is also designed to help us slow down. The pursuit of material success requires speed, and as the holy fool has already pointed out, this rushing towards achievement can result in great conflict and strife for us. Both performing clown and witnessing clown performance requires putting on the breaks. Each teacher of crazy wisdom slows time down in a way, but whereas the jester brings us into the current social and political climate, the clown pauses to examine things that are more timeless and universal. "They see smaller pieces of life," says Cornell, "[like] the difficulties of opening a door or the difficulties of oh, I'm suddenly, the spotlight is on me and I don't know what to do … it gets magnified, the clown magnifies these moments. They're tense in our individual lives, you know? They're not the 'great drama' but they're an internal drama, and [clown] sort of magnifies that. It's just another layer of time slowing down" (App. A, 113). This is the clown's gentle way of showing us that the "great drama" – or the Great Illusion – that we struggle against

is not worth the fight. Instead, the real struggle is with our own humanness, our folly. And, once again, laughing at our folly is a unifying experience, a reminder that we are not alone on this ship of fools.

What does this mean for an all-female clown troupe? It means that, in order to capture the sincerity of the clown, their work must draw upon their own experiences of human folly. They can expand upon their experiences, and combine them with imagined scenarios and solutions, but it is vital that they begin with something that resonates on a personal level. This experience naturally must include the fact of their gender, among other things, as well as how their gender affects their relationship to the world and the world's reaction to them. In the development process, in their exploration, they slow down and open up the assumptions that are under investigation. Among some of the topics they explore are motherhood, family relations, beauty, the female voice (actual and metaphorical) in public and in private, women's relationships to one another, even dead babies. Cornell points out that clown work is not all about innocence and naiveté. "[C]lowns are not always happy, birthday party. There's a piece of devilry, there can be a piece of devilry in there too," she says (App. A, 137). CEM is very interested in challenging the notion of "female goodness" – the assumption that women are naturally morally superior to men, that in their innocence they cannot naturally conceive of violence, brutality, or lasciviousness. One of Cornell's favorite pieces from their most recent show, *Clowns Full-Tilt,* is a bit called "Done Wrong". In it, the women stand in a line, simply, before the audience at the front of the stage. They are handed a microphone, and one by one they go down the line and tell the

audience something that they did that was very, very bad. Cornell recalls with a devilish smile:

> [T]hey're talking about really bad, nasty things, like, I stole money from my father while he was undergoing cancer treatment, stuff like that. And all in their own way, like […] I was a candy striper at the hospital and on my lunch breaks I would go to the nursery and switch the blue and pink blankets, you know? So, for us, it took a long time, getting the right tone and making up creative stuff, but on stage, here they are, showing the capacity for just sheer badness. Inventive, creative badness, with no moral boundaries. That's also part of being a *human being,* and I'm really glad that we can make that fun, too. How often do you hear women get the chance to just, with fun, be inventive about how bad they could be? Push their little brother down a hill, or whatever. That's part of our human experience, we recognize it right away. But we don't do it, you know. What did somebody say? Somebody said, 'I try on bathing suits without my underwear on.' And the Russian woman, she's got a really deep voice, she goes, 'I told my dad that my mom was talking to another guy, and… he got mad and killed her'" (App. A, 118).

Harkening back to the joy of watching the trickster break all the rules, this piece allows us to vicariously delight in their "naughtiness". More than that, the twinkle in the eyes of these women clowns gives us permission to enjoy the thought of our own "naughtiness". Each of us has, at one time or another, fantasized about breaking the rules. In this case, they are not only breaking a rule, but breaking through a gender assumption as well. Part of the humor lies within the inversion of the assumption – the rest is the joy of identifying with our "bad selves".

Related to the breaking open of female goodness is the exploration of female aggression and violence. In *Clown Axioms*, for example, a clown came on stage wearing an apron, suggesting the image of a 50's housewife. She revealed a butcher knife from behind her back, and began pantomiming hacking herself to pieces, eventually baking herself into a delicious "kinder pie". The gruesome image of a

woman literally sacrificing herself to feed her family is echoed in another piece in *Not Just For Shock Value*. Several clowns appeared to be making their way a great distance, crossing the treacherous plains. They became tired, and very soon they were in the grips of a great hunger. With no other options, it was decided unanimously that they would eat Grandma, since she was old anyway. Grandma cheerfully agreed to this, and they set about preparing her for consumption. In both cases extremely violent acts are appropriated not strictly as a parody of the act itself, but also to suggest that women are not, as we have been led to believe, all that "naturally good". They are human beings, capable of primal violence in order to survive. The violence is exaggerated, which is important to note. As Wright aptly puts it, "Violence and comedy go well together. Blood and comedy do not" (Wright, page). (This point is debate-able when you examine the success of Monty Python in using obscene amounts of blood, but here, too, the blood is not realistic blood, it is magnified in a clown way to remind us that no one is in real danger.)

Also part of *Clown Axioms*, the women developed a piece wherein a mother sweetly cradles her newborn babe. Moments later, interrupting this sweet moment, five very pregnant women on stilts come in and begin circling the new mother. Instead of the typical "cooing" that occurs when one sees a baby, these women begin to throw "You're so ugly…" jokes at the baby and its mother, speaking with rugged "pirate" voices. This almost assaultive inversion of expectation immediately questions both the "joys of motherhood" and the assumption that all women not only want babies of their own, but love to see others' babies as well. The grotesque exaggeration of pregnant women on stilts is meant to convey the discomfort of

being pregnant, of feeling as if you are huger and wider and taking up more space than anyone around you. There is no strong anti-motherhood statement being made, however. Rather, this vignette merely brings to light the secret pangs of women regarding pregnancy and motherhood. Many women, including myself, have felt shame at being unsure of whether or not we wanted to have children. I've even been asked, in an accusatory tone, "Don't you *like* children?" The pregnant clowns on stilts take up these assumptions and attitudes, and by slowing down and focusing in on one archetypal moment, they begin to reveal that, like everything else, the assumption is an arbitrary construct. The fact that women are *able* to give birth does not, in fact, translate into a *desire* to have children. Not only does CEM invert the assumption, but they magnify it as well. The cherries on top of this comically grotesque image are the jokes, which become the antithesis of stereotypical infant adoration.

The notion of women as asexual beings was explored in a very clown way as well. As I mentioned before, *Clown Axioms* utilized fairy tale mythology. In one piece, Venk entered the stage alone as Cinderella. She carried a high-heeled shoe with her, a kind of stand-in glass slipper. Slowly she made her way through the audience and asked various men to help her with the slipper. Handing them the slipper, she began to stir with excitement. She raised her foot slowly, seductively, and as he slipped the shoe onto her foot she closed her eyes and held her breath in anticipation. A moment later she opened her eyes suddenly, and gave the man a very disappointed look. She tried again and again, each time more frustrating than the last, until she finally gave up and left the stage. A few things are at work in this

vignette. The clown magnification works in conjunction with a metaphor that is layered upon a commonly known fairy tale story. In the fairy tale, Cinderella is dreaming of the day when she can escape the drudgery of her life and be happily married to a handsome man. In the end, Prince Charming finds her by fitting a glass slipper to her foot, and the tale ends with an assumed "happily ever after". In CEM's version of the story, a dissatisfied Cinderella is now searching for a fulfilling "shoe" experience, Prince Charming presumably having fallen short. We are reminded of the dangers of the "fairy tale ending" – the conjecture that passionate love and marriage is somehow an ending to which each of us is racing. This picture of Cinderella also dispels the myth that women are not concerned with physical satisfaction, that they are more interested in matters of the heart. Perhaps this is true for some women – then again, perhaps it is true for some men as well. Seeing Cinderella in a desperate state for some good "shoe action" throws assumptions about male and female sexuality up into the air, and opens them up for play. Finally, Venk's clown Cinderella interacts directly with the audience, allowing them to directly participate in the re-shaping of the mythos of Cinderella.

So far the examples I have given are indicative of material generated from a particularly female experience of female issues. Yet in their work, the troupe continually tries to arrive at a more universal place that is entertaining to both men and women. As Cornell remarked in her interview, they are not just performing for women. They are performing for other people. Yet they are a group of all-women clowns, so their material will be the material generated from a female experience of the world. This worldview – the "female" worldview – has been largely relegated to

the private sphere. CEM's work champions the act of women bringing their experience into the public sphere, and using it as the basis for clown work that speaks to more universal themes of the head and the heart. Cornell is not interested in CEM being the voice for all women. Their intention is not to be representative of female experience as a whole. If this were the case, they would be committing the very kind of damaging generalization of women that they are working to dismantle. The breaking up of female stereotypes through clown is CEM's way of keeping these things in question. Like the holy fools before them, these women are not providing any answers; instead, they are inviting us to slow down and look closely at what we think we know, and to learn to embrace our folly. In this way, the line between "men's issues" and "women's issues" dissolves, even for a moment, to reveal to us those things that are simply "human issues".

CHAPTER IV

THE BODY

The body's relationship to comedy in general is based in "actuality" – that is, the body as it actually is, and the discrepancy between the real and the ideal body. The comedic body is interested in the fallacy of the idyllic body, which tends to deny or ignore the various bodily functions that have been framed as socially improper and relegated to dark, private corners of existence. Andrew Stott writes that the "body in comedy is the medium through which humanity's fascination with its instincts and animal nature is explored" and as such is "exaggerated…distorted, disproportionate, profane, ill-disciplined, insatiate, and perverse" (Stott, 83). This exaggerated body works against and is a response to a culturally cultivated ideal: a body that does not excrete or fornicate, a body that is under complete control of its owner, and a body that is a physical reflection of moral goodness and perfection. The primary method by which a society governs and shapes the body ideal is through shame. "Feeling ashamed," writes Stott, "or developing a heightened sense of delicacy about nakedness, table manners, flatulence, and other 'unpleasant' biological facts, requires disciplining the bodily functions to fit the codes of etiquette and avoid being shunned" (85). As such, we learn from an early age to mask the imperfection of the body, to dress it and scent it and master it, and in this way we are able to rise above it. The connection between bodily perfection and the divine is strong, reinforced by countless fables, mythology, and spiritual parables throughout history. In Christian teachings, for example, man was made in the image of God; a physical reflection of the divine. This body ideal reinforces the impression that

one's physicality is an outward expression of one's inner moral fabric, so that "beautiful" is equal to virtuous and good, and "ugly" is synonymous with bad and evil.

The deformity of the comedic body, therefore, is related to those things that we think of as base, primitive, and "uncivilized". Comedy "bypasses civility to return us to our body" (Stott, 86), and reminds us of our corporeality, our mortality, and our fragility. The comedic body is therefore predicated upon a common social understanding of the idyllic body that it corrupts. Comedic performance that explodes and magnifies the imperfections of the body as well as socially taboo bodily functions is termed "the grotesque". The grotesque is a combination of "the real and the fantastic" (Stott, 87), and the clash between the two shows up in the form of the comedic body. For Mikhail Bakhtin, who wrote extensively on the merits and usefulness of the grotesque as the purest form of popular "carnivalesque" expression, the grotesque body not only subverts the idyllic body but also stretches its realistic limitations, reaching beyond its boundaries and "interacting with the world on a sensual level" (87). Grotesque imagery and performance celebrate the "baseness" of the body, producing, in effect, mixed feelings of horror (at being confronted with such baseness) and identification (at recognizing one's own baseness in the grotesque). Here we see a clear connection between the grotesque and buffoon, which is a component of clown work that springs from the pre-civilized self. Buffoon is a manifestation of the body at its basest, completely unaware of social conventions and decorum. This body is driven by carnal cravings, both the sexual and physical appetite, and the buffoon honors

bodily function whenever and wherever they happen to occur. Lecoq uses the buffoon in his actor training as a transformation exercise, and a means to explore the edges of human interaction. He asks his students to use pillows and various props to dramatically alter their shape, so that their entire body becomes a kind of mask (Lecoq, 117). According to Lecoq, the buffoon does not originate from anywhere realistic, or anywhere expected. "Their function is not to make fun of a particular individual, but more generally of everyone," he writes, "of society as a whole. *Bouffons* [the French word for buffoon] enjoy themselves, for their whole life is spent having fun imitating aspects of human life. Their great delight is to make war, fight, tear each others' guts out" (118). The buffoon is an inversion of social etiquette in the extreme, including hierarchical systems of power. In the world of the buffoon, "the one in charge is the most feeble-minded" (119). With the body masked by cloth, foam rubber, clothes, objects, lengths of string – anything is acceptable – the transformed shape must move and behave in a different way. Like the mask of the face, the masked body is free to perform in ways and do things that are out of reach to the socialized body (117). Lecoq points out that the territory of the buffoon is fluid, and I would argue that this is true of all the modes of clown and comedy that have been discussed so far (121). The buffoon can easily travel into the grotesque, and both have a flowing dialogue with the clown. All modes are capable of rich investigations of the body, particularly in terms of the body's relationship to society. The buffoon's primary interest is in inverting corporeal expectations and social behavior, and the grotesque embodies a clash and struggle between the reality of the body and cultural conventions based on the body ideal. The clown can

dabble in both of these territories, exaggerating various body parts and functions in a subtler way to open up beliefs about body behavior and propriety. Since no body functions in perfect accordance with the ideal, the failure of the clown body (like that of the grotesque body and even that of the buffoon) is identifiable and familiar.

The body as the site of failure shows up in clown work almost naturally. Since the clown has an important and even divine relationship to failure, she can rely upon the limitations of her body and on her inability to control her body to generate failure and engage in the "flop". Henri Bergson posits that we expect the body to not only behave well but also to be pliant and fluid. The comedic body confounds this expectation by becoming "mechanical" (Bergson, 13). The entire art of slapstick is predicated upon the transformation of the pliant body into something rigid, unwieldy, and unyielding. Running into doors and walls, magnified physical violence such as slapping or kicking, even tripping over one's own feet are just a few examples. These actions go against the expectation of the body's ability to smoothly maneuver its surroundings. What is more, the humor in slapstick is not only connected to our delight in seeing transgressive physical violence (in a non-threatening manner) played out in front of us, but also to the disruption between better judgment (social expectation) and the actions of the body (Stott, 96). Therefore the clown can utilize a wide range of physical affects to perform and augment the realistic body, the body that farts and excretes and trips and lusts.

CEM's most recent show, *Clowns Full-Tilt*, explored notions of female beauty. The original idea for show was broader, and began with an exploration of the two-dimensional representations of women in film, television and print. "What happens

when you try to make something two-dimensional that's not, you know?" says Cornell, "[when] you flatten it out, an image of a woman for a commercial is sort of [a] very ready-stereotype" (App. A, 135). As they pursued these threads, Cornell continued to introduce music and imagery to catalyze the making and shaping of connections (such as prison, or "chain gang" music, television commercials, and classic, well-known works of art). At one point, she brought them old video of children playing playground games in a kind of "post-World War II" schoolyard setting (App. A, 135). "I was like, that's right! The schoolyard, it's like a prison," she says, laughing, "[and] somehow all of this made sense in terms of, like, a civilizing aspect of going to school and the institution of these buildings with the big fences and games." The starting prompts of constraint and two-dimensional representation gelled into specific explorations of beauty, socialization and civilization of the body, and both the benefits and consequences of trying to fit into particular imagery and expectations.

The metaphor of the schoolyard poses a particularly interesting approach to the body through clown work. The educational institution is where children learn to socialize with one another – where they learn vocal manners as well as proper physical behavior. This education is necessary to the successful integration of these "future adults" into mainstream society (though the Holy Fool might argue that children in school are fools in training); however, it also points to behavior that is being repressed through punishment, shame, and guilt. It is no mistake that we have come to equate the unrestrained, undisciplined body with the "barbaric" or "primitive" (this equation is likely fallacious, but it is also an historical truth that the

primitive, uncivilized body is *assumed* to be more sexual, vulgar, and violent). In order to curtail the unrestrained impulses of the body, we have developed social systems to teach "correct" body behavior. Therefore, the image of children playing in the aftermath of war – literally playing in and around the decay of destroyed civility – conjures a lovely relationship between the need for behavioral boundaries and laws, and the joy and life that can spring forth when those boundaries are dissolved or suspend (as in the world of Bahktin's carnival, or the trickster). It is in this metaphorical rubble that CEM found its inspiration for *Clowns Full-Tilt*.

In spite of the structures implemented to socialize the body, it is still corporeal, and can never completely escape its impulses or desires. In her solo work for *Clowns Full-Tilt*, Cornell developed a clown called the "Poor Sophisticate". "[S]he was, you know, really wanted to be sophisticated and cultured and she loved art, but she had terrible accent and a lot of malapropisms, and just really not what she wanted to be," says Cornell (App. A, 136). She describes the sequence of events, of how her clown became continually "orgasmically" excited with the art around her, with the music, and finally with a guy in the audience. Each time, she tried hard to control her excitement, knowing that it was in direct opposition to the picture of civility and sophistication that she was trying to portray. "[F]or me it was real mix of somebody who is very body and crotch/hip oriented and yet, you know, she's… reaching for this very beautiful aesthetic. And then when she sees a guy in the audience and she just becomes all a flutter. She's not even a flutter, you know, her crotch is a flutter," Cornell says, laughing (App. A, 136). This picture of female sexuality directly confronts the assumption that women are largely emotive

creatures, concerned more with matters of the heart than the body. This may, of course, be true of some women – then again, it may be true of men, as well. The Poor Sophisticate enacts a level of female libido that is considered almost fantastical, and it remains unclear if the comedy in this clown lies in the absurd idea that women could have such a sex drive, or in the delight of seeing the truth of female lust brought into the light. For me as a female, I appreciate the nod to the truth – that women are carnal creatures, ever bit as capable of intense physical desire as are men. Cornell's clown appeared periodically throughout the show, flirting with her male "target" audience member, trying hard to impress him while in constant negotiation with her excitement, and finally coming onstage pregnant. "It always gets a huge laugh," recalls Cornell, "as soon as the audience sees her and sees that she is, you know, pregnant. It's just the absurdity of it" (App. A, 137). Notwithstanding the display of the very permanent consequences of unrestrained female libido, this moment is laughable because the audience knows the "target" could not possibly have done anything to create such a state – for a number of reasons. The outcome of The Poor Sophisticate's excitement is delightfully outside the boundaries of what is possible, and by breaking open this boundary with her impossible pregnancy, the clown stirs up questions about female sexuality, responsibility, and behavior.

Clowns Full-Tilt also took up social propriety regarding nudity in public by incorporating full-body "nude suits" into the show. "[T]hey had these nude body suits with nipples, they were fantastic looking nipples," says Cornell, "I mean, there they are in all their glory, except they're not in all their glory, you know what I

mean? [I]t was heightened in a certain way, and then, because they're not actually naked, the audience is sort of be free from some fear, or whatever, and instead able to be with that feeling" (App. A, 117). The feeling that Cornell refers to is the simultaneous shock and delight at seeing, not actual nudity, but a parody of female nudity acted out before them. Cornell points out that we all have a strong reaction to seeing skin on stage. She gives the example of a recent dance performance wherein the dancers were naked for the entire show. "[P]eople said, having them nude throughout the whole show and having them do these different skits and different kinds of styles of stuff, eventually, as an audience member you start looking beyond their nudity. And so I'm like, yeah, and you have to have a *whole show* before they start looking beyond the nudity" (App. A, 138). Like it or not, there is something very visceral and potent about the naked body in public, and the effect is often so overpowering that nothing else can get in until the observer comes to terms with the public appearance of nudity. This makes it hard or even impossible to play with the notion of nudity, especially female nudity, which has been historically guarded in the name of moral and social purity. To bypass this distraction, CEM used naked body suits that instantaneously suggested the naked female form (using no other physical markers outside of the very realistic plastic nipples), so that they could investigate female nakedness at the clown level of play. They came on as if they were proud of their nudity, without the risk of being actually naked, which produced the comedic "gap" between reality and the clown's imagination.

The effect of this parody on female nakedness is that it brings the female form in line with a universal corporeality. The naked female body is made accessible, devoid of either shame or deification. The female body functions as it does, and is allowed its own reality separate from social mythology and propriety. However, this effect is paradoxically only possible because they are not actually naked. "The way the 'nudies' first come on stage," explains Cornell, "there was a piece with […] three clowns were listening to this […] sort of religious music, and it was sort of growing glorious thing […] and they were just turning, slowing turning with their arms upraised, and started slowly take their hat off and throw it, and scarf. They were starting to disrobe, and […] when you put it in the theatre […] the stopping point has to be a little earlier. Otherwise, then the audience starts to have a whole other experience, you know what I mean? [I]t's an interesting line" (App. A, 138 - 139). Shortly after the three clowns began to disrobe, the music stopped, breaking them out of the reverie. They became suddenly aware of (and ashamed of) their nakedness. At that moment, three clowns in nude-suits came bursting onto the scene, leaping and jumping, joyful and free. As the first three clowns gathered their clothing and scurried off, the three nude-suit clowns pranced and preened, confronting the audience with their "nakedness". In this moment, the clown's pride in her naked form is comically undercut by the reality that she is not actually naked and is not actually confronting nudity directly. Instead, the body suits with their plastic nipples ask, "*What if* I were actually naked right now? Wouldn't that be shocking? Wouldn't that be laughable?" Clowns in nude suits showed up throughout the show, in various every-day situations. One interlude staged several clowns in

nude-suits standing around smoking cigarettes, very casually. Another clown in a nude-suit came on with a towel wrapped around her, as if on the way to the shower. She navigated through the naked smokers, asking if they would please excuse her and let her by, and then she continued on her way. It's a simple scenario that is made comically absurd by the introduction of the idea of nakedness. In fact, imagining almost any every-day interaction naked produces the requisite gap between social propriety and reality to create a comedic effect.

CEM's parody of nudity brings up compelling questions about the difference between male and female nudity as it pertains to comedy. I would argue that any actual public nudity – male or female – triggers a closing of the mind as a defensive reflex, and given that clown work is predicated upon a clear connection with the audience, actual nudity in clown could quickly become a roadblock. Still, it is interesting to note that, historically, male nudity has found its way into comedic narratives since the ancient Greek comedies in the Festival Dionysus. The "phallus" was the source of male power, but could easily and quickly become the source of male folly if given to the base and un-checked desires of the flesh. Once again, the closer we get to the "primal", instinctual impulses of the body, the more we see the comedic potential in the space between this bodily reality and the socialized body ideal. And yet, the naked female form is largely absent from this comedic equation. CEM's inclusion of naked body suits eliminates the pressure on the audience of having to grapple with actual public nudity, so that they can incorporate notions of female nakedness into comedic scenarios. The female clown in this case makes use of social stigmas surrounding nudity in order to draw them out and question the

validity is such stigmas. The parody of nudity creates enough distance from actual nudity to allow for reverence, while still providing a frame in which an audience can laugh, not just at female nudity, but also in the clown's misplaced pride in her bravery at being publicly nude.

I do not mean to suggest that the naked form is strictly sacred – that is for each individual to determine for him/herself. But, I do want purposefully to avoid diminishing female nakedness (and nudity in general) to a strictly laughable state. The idea here is that female nakedness is brought in line with a general "human" nakedness, and is not separate from male nakedness in terms of reverence or shame. In order to achieve this goal, the clowns of CEM must directly question the legitimacy of the shame surrounding female nudity in addition to the cloistering veneration. For example, one frolicking interlude involving the nude-suits ended with the clowns flitting off-stage, and one bewildered clown in a nude-suit shyly made her way on stage. She was clearly uncomfortable, believing her fake-nudity to be shameful and private. She edged on, quickly flashed the audience, and scampered off. The sequence is comical because it is a level of privacy reserved for actual nudity, played out using a parody of nudity, as well as a parody of the assumption that the naked body should be hidden from public view. The clowns do not resolve the question of whether or not public nudity is shameful; they simply keep the question up in the air. By doing do, they make the female form something it rarely ever is: laughable. With assumptions suspended (or even, in this case, inverted) the clowns are free to explore different methods of interacting with the naked female body, in order to bring it back into the realm of that which is simply

"human". A short vignette involving Kinkle and Rich, for example, did nothing more than explore slang terminology for breasts. Rich was hunched over, her clown drifted into the territory of the buffoon, and she latched on to Kinkle's chest, calling out slang words through an impish giggle. "Boobies!" she said with glee, "Tatas!" Each time, Kinkle patiently corrected Rich, adopting the air and voice of an erudite lady. "Bosom," she suggested as an alternative to "tatas". Rich would have none of it, and each attempt to refine her attitude towards breasts resulted in a greater amount of groping and coarser slang. The vignette became a battle between reverence for female anatomy and an impertinent, lascivious fascination with breasts. In the end, the irreverence won out.

The troupe explored a variety of archetypal commercials about feminine beauty products, and found that the commercials carried "stock" characters with them: impossibly long eyelashes for the mascara commercial, plump, full lips for the lipstick commercial, long, shining waves of hair for the shampoo or hair-dye commercial. "The Battle of The Blondes" began with two clowns stepping on stage and facing-off. They started to lightly toss their long, blonde hair around, tussling it and striking poses for an unseen camera. As the competition increased, the clowns whipped their hair more frantically, eventually bouncing and throwing their entire bodies around, calling out, "Better, blonder, bouncier, bouncier!" (App. A, 139) The act of "out-blonding" each other gradually took its toll, and the vignette ended with the blondes collapsing on the floor from exhaustion. In this case, the clowns were toying with the message that is delivered by hair product commercials (specifically that the shinier and fuller your hair is, the more sexually attractive you will be) as

well as the women who buy into the message. Their portrayal is extreme, of course, and tiptoes into the realm of the grotesque it its absurdity and its frolicking violence. One cannot help but wonder, however, just how far down from this extreme do most women live? "The Battle of the Blondes" becomes something of a cautionary tale in this light, a warning not to get caught up in the fallacy of portrayals of female beauty on television.

Another vignette titled "Face Washing Firing Squad" mapped the mundane act of washing one's face over the top of a firing-squad line-up. The clowns slowly made their way into a line, looking very much like people on their way to death's door. They stood in terror for a moment, until one brave clown stepped forward and, tentatively, began to wash her face. Seeing that everything was okay, the other clowns joined in. "People laughed, I don't know [why], it was so weird," says Cornell, "I guess they get it. They get it, the washing your face, if you use the wrong product" (App. A, 140). The penalty for using the wrong face wash is a blemished complexion, as many women who have tried switching brands of facial soap will attest. The face is a public part of the body, and so bad skin is apparent to anyone who sees. This vignette plays upon the social shame that is associated with bad skin, a shame that is so intense that it can, in this case, make face-washing feel like a life or death experience. In bringing this shame to the fore and juxtaposing it with an actual life-threatening scenario, the clowns put bad skin into perspective. What is more, they do successfully remind us that facial blemishes are not abnormal, that we all share the same fear of not being attractive.

This experience of sharing in a common experience is extremely satisfying for an audience. Nothing dissolves shame faster than knowing or being reminded of the fact that our fears are not unique. One piece, titled “I’m Dry”, began in a classroom setting. “In "I'm dry" they are raising their hands high, and when I call their name they proudly give random factual-sounding answers (geography, literature, science, etc.) and finish by saying ‘And I'm dry!’, referring to their armpits,” Cornell explains. “Then at one point someone answers ‘Anti-perspirant!’ and everyone looks a little upset with her and guilty (she's let the cat out of the bag). Their answers [become] some truth-telling about the secret products they use/things they do [in order to get closer to the beauty ideal]: ‘tummy tuck tights, colored contacts, water bra, tweezing all over, colon cleanse, bulimia’” (App. C, 145). The clowns were very distraught at being put on the spot and having to tell their beauty secrets. One clown could not contain herself, and in her guilt and shame would blurt out secrets without being called on. Cornell remarks that this vignette is likely funny because their shame contrasts so perfectly with the pride they begin with, and we enjoy watching them squirm at being on the spot. I would also add that this vignette is funny precisely because it exposes secrets, and the act of exposing a secret is, regardless of the consequences, always a relief. The clowns in “I’m Dry” relieve the tensions of pretending that women don’t use a myriad of tricks to achieve a certain kind of beauty, and the laughter from the audience is a confirmation that we all know and recognize these secrets.

It is important to note that most commercials selling feminine beauty products are geared towards selling sex (yes, it is cliché to say so, but it also

happens to be true). The sexually appealing woman, as pictured on TV, has soft, flawless skin, full lips, big doe-eyes with impossibly long lashes, long hairless legs, large breasts, a slender figure, and a perfectly coiffed mane of hair. This ideal describes a minority of the female population; yet women all over the world grapple with their societies' picture of perfect female beauty, subjecting their bodies to anything from cosmetic corrections to plastic surgery that re-shapes their bodies and faces. These commercials prey on the human desire to mate, particularly geared towards heterosexual women interested in deciphering what heterosexual men find attractive; all of this in order to re-create an image that is, for the most part, pure fantasy. Challenging this ideal is nothing new. Women's movements throughout modern history have fought to break the spell of the feminine beauty ideals, using parody and protest, even burning bras, in order to challenge the unrealistic proto-type. "We don't do anything that obvious," says Cornell of Full-Tilt. "People have done that before. 'My clothes are constricting me because I'm a woman.'" (App. A, 140). Full-Tilt came at these ideas from a different direction; from a "clown" direction, if you will. Rather than simply stop with lambasting popular media for their portrayals of women, the clowns begin by exploring the female attempt to reach the beauty ideal. In some cases, as in "The Battle of the Blondes", they tried and failed in the clown sense of failure, but never completely gave up. The clown's endless hope and perseverance in this context is almost heart breaking, since we know she will never achieve the impossible goal. In other cases, the clowns began with the assumption that they had already reached the beauty ideal. In their parody of a perfume commercial, a vignette titled "Egoist", the clowns

sauntered around seductively, and spoke in French accents. Each clown delivered a product slogan in her sultry French voice. "[O]ne of them said, 'Rouge: for the eyes, and the pube.' You know, she says it over and over, like, 'Mascara, for the eyes, and the pube.' And it's just, it's a preposterous idea," says Cornell, laughing a bit herself at the absurdity of the slogans, made all the more absurd by the elevated accents (App. A, 141). This vignette is a wonderful example of how the failure of the clown works to dissolve mythologies: not only do the clowns fail at portraying the beauty ideal, but in most cases the French accent is a complete failure as well. "One woman, she was not so good with her French accent," she recalls, "and she always want[ed] to make it, like she thinks she'll be funnier if she sort of makes it more American-y, like she'll be the one who is sort of not got the good accent. And I said, okay, you can do that, but you have to say 'crème', instead of 'cream'" (App. A, 141). It is important that, no matter how terrible the accent, the clown continue to believe that she is doing well. Her belief that she is succeeding gives her somewhere to fall for the flop. The clown's pride in her classiness and her fashionable accent is contrasted by her failure, and we laugh with the pleasure of seeing this pride toppled.

All of the vignettes in the show come together to create a heightened reality; a grotesque reality, if you will, where assumptions are not only exaggerated to the point of absurdity, but also upturned. Instead of narrowing in on one aspect of the beauty ideal as the site of constraint, the entire show was framed in constraint, taking place in a broken-down, post-battle prison-like atmosphere, so that every vignette was linked back to the over-arching theme. The implications of this are disturbing; it suggests that a life lived in the pursuit of the female beauty ideal is a

life lived in extreme constraint and degradation. But *Clowns Full-Tilt* is fraught with joy and laughter, and for this reason: when the fallacy of the beauty ideal is dissolved, there is liberation from chasing the lie, and with this liberation comes the possibility of embracing a different notion of female beauty. In *Full-Tilt*, the women of CEM suggest that the female body is no more or less sacred than any other body, neither to be hidden in the shadows of shame nor placed on an un-reachable pedestal. Although the body image issues they tackle are specifically rooted in their own experiences as women, they are recognizable to us all as universal experiences.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The social function of a clown is to break up tensions and dissolve boundaries. She does this in order to create a liminal space, free from the restrictions of prescribed social mores, religious taboos, and gender roles. In this liminal space, the possibilities are endless, and it is the clown's job to direct our attention to new ways of seeing our community, our rules and regulations, and ourselves. When the line between the sacred and the profane is dissolved, it begins to look as if there is no real difference between them. The body that trips and farts and grows hair in strange places is still sacred, even as is it profane. The more exaggerated the portrayal of the profane body (through the grotesque or buffoon), the more clearly we see the image of something otherworldly emerge. Similarly, as the clown magnifies our follies for us or brings our deepest secrets out into the light, she reveals that our foolishness and our shame are also sacred, because they are a part of all of human experience.

I should have known that an investigation into gender and clown work would yield surprising results. When I began this case study of Clowns Ex Machina, I was fairly certain that I would find a group of women whose agenda was to up-turn a patriarchal mode of clown training and re-claim the genre for all of womankind. To be sure, the women of CEM are proud of the work that they do and they are adamant that they could not have grown into the clown artists they are today if they did not have an all-female environment to train in. But they are not the militant feminists that I initially expected I would meet. I would describe them, instead, as great

humanitarians. By bringing women's issues into the public eye, and by doing it through a comedic genre, they are giving legitimacy to the female experience. However, they are also making their female experience accessible to all people, male and female. "My desires are to free up expression," says Cornell, "in myself and in other women. And put that on stage. And I think that has an effect on everybody who sees it" (App. A, 112). These women bring all of themselves to their work, especially drawing upon the trials and pains of being a mother, a daughter, of being single or being married, and of simply negotiating with social expectations of women day to day.

Of course there are people who won't get their work. "I do think there's probably […] some men in the audience who might say, 'This doesn't apply to me,' you know?" Cornell says, "Like, this will not speak to me, this can't speak to me, this won't speak to me. I can imagine there would be some person who would be closed off to that. But in a sort of […] theoretical situation, the way that I would clown to that person would be different than the way that I would clown to somebody else. Because that person would be resistant to what I had to say" (App. A, 116). There is always the hope that their work will reach everyone, so that more and more people will see the similarities and not the differences. The specifics of male and female experience are different, and seeing the specifics of female experience played out in an open, honest, clown way can engender empathy, regardless of the gender of the observer. More than that, the "human" quality of the clown that surpasses gender makes her performance potentially comprehensible to everyone.

Much progress has been made for women in the last 70 years in terms of gaining us access to a greater breadth of jobs and education, greater control over our bodies and sexuality, and greater freedom of self-expression. Yet 70 years is the blink of an eye compared to centuries of subjugation, confinement, moral and religious discipline, and exclusion from the public sphere. I must be careful here to qualify this statement by saying that strong, powerful women have existed throughout time, in the form of matriarchies, or persuasive spouses, or pioneering entrepreneurs, scientists, mathematicians, politicians, authors and countless other occupations. When I say exclusion, I refer to their absence in written history, though contemporary historians have begun to add the female voice into various historical canons. Women carry in their collective consciousness a hard-won admittance into many social arenas, comedy being just one of them. So, for a group of women to come together and devise works of theatre with clown performance means a great deal in terms of bringing the female voice into the public.

By creating Clowns Ex Machina, Cornell has already had a great impact on an entire generation of female clowns. She is not interested in claiming that her way of training is "better than" or "more effective than" any other school, and she is thankful for the training that she received from Shiner and Gaulier. Currently, however, she is providing one of the only places in the world where women can train in the performance of clown in an all-female atmosphere. In my research, I came across only one other all-female clown troupe in the U.S., based out of San Francisco. Circus Finelli was founded in 2005 by a group of women studying at the Circus Center. (I find it incredibly intriguing that this group formed on the West

coast at almost exactly the same time that Clowns Ex Machina became a formally organized troupe.) They named their group after their mentor, Judy Finelli, who founded San Francisco School of Circus Arts in 1984. Circus clown is somewhat different in form and content from CEM's clown work. My experience of circus clown is limited only to what I've seen, but there is definitely a difference in the "size" of it. There is more spectacle involved in circus clowning, and it tends to include more physical humor and acrobatics. The experience that Cornell provides for women clowns is different, regardless of whether or not it is "better" or "more effective", and the difference in experience has so far had a profound impact on many of the women who have trained with her. Current troupe members talk of a greater confidence, a deeper empathy, and a sense of freedom in their clown work that transfers into their day-to-day lives. The women of Clowns Ex Machina have not only developed their skills as comedians, but have also helped each other to awaken to and embrace their "full sacred selves". "You know the place, that place of sort of constant exploration," says Cornell, "like a child would have[…] that you're always moving forward and always sort of something else, something else, something else. And I don't know whether it's a gender thing or just a human thing to sort of shut that down. [I]s it more difficult for women to open that up? In a way, you know, are we socialized off in a direction that's not about our own development? Our own inquisitive mind […] I don't know" (App. A, 96). Based on the reaction of the women in her troupe, Cornell has been successful at creating this space of wonder and exploration. "I think part of the reason this troupe has been so successful is really because of Kendall," says Venk, "we can be truthful, we can be

honest, but it's her that is the tipping point. She knows the timing of when to push you into where you need to be, and you're suddenly playing in something you never thought you'd play in, and you're just playing and it's working. So I don't know that we'd be so funny if it wasn't for her. She has an *unbelievable* eye for what's funny" (App. A, 94). Kinkle and Bosnjak second Venk's opinion, expressing an appreciation for their teacher that borders on sentiment. "Now that we've all gotten mushy mushy," says Bosnjak, "Kendall I think you're fantastic! [Troupe laughs] But really, the power of being in a group, and then being addressed as a clown, and everything is possible in this world, and then […] she'll mention something that you would never even think of, and then it sparks a new thing, and a new thing, and a new thing […] [S]he's in the world of the clown, everything is possible, everything is full of joy, and wonder, and that's a pretty amazing place to be in" (App. A, 95).

It all boils down to this: the safety they feel has everything to do with the trust they have in Cornell, and the absence of any male presence that might be perceived as judgmental or as an obstacle to claiming authority and status as performers. Bosnjak jokes that she does not worry about trying anything – letting her stomach hang out or having body odor. "I think I would have been a lot more stiff in a group of men," she says. "I would've had to hold in my stomach a little bit more or, or make sure [sniffs her armpits]" (App. A, 97). Kinkle posits that women try to impress men in a different way, regardless of the presence of sexual attraction. This has to do with who has, historically, held more social public power, and how women have found tactics to acquire power from men, and to elevate themselves into corresponding positions of power socially. It makes sense, then,

that having an all-female environment to work it allows for more freedom of exploration, which is ultimately Cornell's goal.

The group is certainly interested in the question of gender in their work; more specifically, they recognize that gender is an issue at play, and that it factors in to the work that they create. However, for the most part they do not approach the creative process directly from questions of gender. "I don't come because I want to work on a specific [female issue]," says Venk. " I come to […] be as open as possible so that Kendall might see where I can go that's funny, and grow and be funny. […] But I don't necessarily come in with an agenda. I just more come in as a vessel that wants to work" (App. A, 95). They are not concerned with how the material will e received by men – in fact, they are adamant that the reception is not necessarily their responsibility. Kinkle explains that there are times when an audience does not want to interact, when they look away and shut down because they are uncomfortable with being in the spotlight (App. A, 94). "[The audience response is] not your responsibility," says Bosnjak, "your responsibility is to consistently bring truth" (App. A, 94). She believes, along with the other members, that real honesty is what ultimately transcends gender. Once again, it is not that gender does not matter. The perspective that the troupe and Cornell enter into their work with is already gendered; but it is also *individual*. To say that the troupe somehow represents the "female perspective" is reductive. They are interesting in including gendered perspective in order to try to move beyond them into something bigger, something different. "[A] friend of mine told me a long time ago […] that he had worked with some old guy clown, who […] said, it's the women who are going to

move this art form forward," Cornell says. "And I do think that's true. Because, the men have sort of gone around in a circle. They're repeating themselves. […] And the traditional clowning – you know, people say, clowns […] are asexual […] like children. Well, children are not asexual. And what does that make me, you know? If they have no gender, what does that make me?" (App. A, 110) Cornell works to hybridize her training with Gaulier and Shiner into a clown experience that does not discount gender, but that opens it up and makes it accessible to all people.

So then, does the work generated by Clowns Ex Machina do anything to shift or alter gendered assumptions about women? Only if you are paying attention. Only if you are open to the live connection of the clown, and are willing to accept her failure as human failure. It is important to note that, in all cases, the starting point of opening up assumption is with the original assumption. Is their work humorous because the idea of women being bad is absurd? Does the work actually reinforce gender assumptions by predicating absurd humor upon them? Or does their "Done Wrong" vignette explode the assumption that women are typically passive, good, and morally upright? This case study is only the tip of the iceberg. The existence of this group, and also of Circus Finelli in San Francisco, is indicative of a period historical shift that took place in the mid-to-late 70's. At this time we see a growing emergence of women into the performance of clown (in the all-inclusive sense of the word), improv, and stand-up comedy. This shift is intriguing to me, and I believe it bears further investigation into the ways in which women sought training and broke into various comedic fields.

It is hard to discount the fact that, because they are one of the only all-female clown troupes in the country, CEM is something of a novelty. The unusual nature of the group could quickly become a gimmick, were it not for the fact that they are also talented, entertaining, and fun to watch. In an age where we are inundated with information and images at an almost constant rate, the broader social impact of the work that they do is difficult to measure. However, regardless of the overall social impact they have on notions of female behavior, CEM inarguably has laid an important foundation for the development of a rich and vibrant female comedy/clown community here in the states. I predict that Cornell and her clowns will have a ripple effect, and that as they continue to work and perform and possibly tour, they will open up paths for countless more women who want to participate in clown, but are waiting for permission. If, along the way, they manage to alter the way that women are viewed or treated in this society, all the better. For now, it is inspiring to know that there are dozens of women who believe, without a doubt, that they have a right to participate in comedy, and that what they have to say matters.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Interview with Clowns Ex Machina
7/12/11
At TAI Studios, 150 W. 30th (btwn 6th & 7th Aves.)

Me: I think… It looks like it's going. So I'll just set it here in the middle… Oh, good thinking! Smart! [Julie sets the tissue dispenser on its side so I can set the recorder on it].
Diana: We'll have to test it after five minutes.
Me: Well I did a little sound check when I got here… But just for… Just because I have to… You guys know I'm recording, right? [general laughter] I mean, you can see the recorder in the center of the table there…
Diana: I don't know how comfortable I feel about that that… [more laughter]
Me: And, uh, I will only be using this information for my master's thesis. And my personal diary. [Laughter] And nothing else. So, uhm, I think what I would like to do actually is go around the table and get people to tell me your name, and I'm gonna make a diagram…
Diana: Diana
Lucia: Lucia. L-U-C-I-A.
Michaela: Michaela.
Me: And you go by Kayla?
Diana: MI-chaela. MI-chaela.
Me: Yeah… It's…She introduced herself as Kayla… So I figured…
Diana: Oh! I'm sorry! I'm like, you're not hearing what I'm saying… [general laughter]
Me: [joking] I'm sorry, I'll change it, I'll change it!
Kendall: You call yourself Kayla?
Michaela: No, no, I… People don't hear when I say MI-cheala…
Me: Ohhhhh, Michaela! No, I wanna…I wanna use your *name*…
[general laughter, chatter]
Carla: I'm Bob…
Me: [laughing] Okay, Bob…
[more general laughter and chatter]
Carla: No, it's Carla.
Me: Carla. And… Ginny?
Ginny: [nodding] Yes, Ginny.
Me: Oh, I haven't spaced it correctly… [laughter]
Kendall: Ginny's now sitting on that side of the table.
Me: And…?
Julie: Julie.
Me: Julie. Wow, this [chart] is not proportionate… [laughter]. Okay. That's all right. So, uhm, I thought that, just to… in order to kind of get people talking I wanna ask

you guys just some biographical questions first. And I think the best way to do it would just be to go around the table. And we can start with you [to Diana, she laughs] with this one, uhm, because I want to hear from everybody. Hopefully we'll warm up with that and then we'll dive into some more, like, theory process whatever. Uhm… So, Diana…
Diana: Yes.
Me: Uhm what… When were you first introduced to clown work? What got you interested in it?
Diana: Uhmmm, I think it was a workshop in Novem… Was it November [to Kendall]? Something like… no… March? I don't know, a couple months ago? I was introduced to clown work, actually, through my sister [indicates Carla], uhm, she was … She worked with Kendal previously,
Me: Oh, you're sisters? [Carla nods]
Diana: On, uhm, tech work on some of her shows and she was like, "You should really come," – Oh no, it was about March, so she said, "You should really come, you just quit your job, we're gonna have fun, we're gonna piss our pants," and I'm like, "Sure, it sounds like a good time!" So, uhm, I had a great time and then Kendall mentioned auditions and –
[door opens, Kathy comes in, general greeting of Kathy]
-- And that's, uh… And the rest is history.
Me: And is there a particular reason… Did you kind of know about this group, then, and the work they did beforehand because… [Indicating Carla]
Diana: I only knew through what she told me, you know, like, "It's so great, it's so funny, you have to see it," but, what they actually did, I had no idea what I was getting myself into! [general laughter]
Me: Yeah.
Diana: And I'm still learning! You know, it's –
Kendall: Diana went totally on faith. [laughter]
Diana: Carla led me blindly.
Carla: Its years of thought control.
Diana: Its pretty true!
[general laughter, chatter]
Me: Cool, thank you. And… Lucia [I butcher the pronunciation of her name, Lu-See-Ah]
Lucia: Lucia [Lu=sha].
Me: Lucia, sorry about that.
Lucia: Uhhmmmmm…. I think the first time I saw clown work I was in school, doing physical theatre, and the year above me did a workshop, that last part that you study in this two-year program was a section on clown, so I saw their show, and I was like, "What is that? I love that, I wanna do that!" I was really astounded, just, I mean, I thought it was the funniest thing I'd ever seen, I was like, you know, pissing in my pants [Carla and Diana laugh], and it was just so "stupid", and it was just like… Sometimes Kendal says, you know, people watch clowns and their like, "What are they…? I don't…? I can't describe it, like what are they doing? I don't know what they're doing but it's funny,"…

Kendall: It's like when I go, "Oh yeah, she did this thing [gets lost under the laughter], and I don't know, something with her hair, and it was so funny…" [more laughter]
Diana: That's exactly what Carla said, and I said, I was like, "That sounds great!"
Lucia: And I love that it was so… so, uhm, personable, you know? I mean, each person's clown was so specific to their personality, and so, you know, you really get to see somebody, see into somebody and see their specific, you know, their form and body, like, really moving from their individual out and into something that is universally… touching. And, just to point out, like, clown to me is not necessarily always funny. Sometimes its poignant, sometimes its touching, sometimes you cry. But it's about getting to a level of sensitivity and…uhm… something that's moving. Something that's moving. At either end of spectrum, whether it's tears of laughter or tears…[general laughter, hard to hear what she's saying, but it touches on an inside joke with the group that Lucia cries very easily].
Lucia: I tend to cry a lot.
[more laughter]
Lucia: I get anxiety.
[everyone is laughing really hard at this point]
Kendall: You're pissing your pants, not only from laughter, but from horrible fear.
Lucia: Yes!
[more general laughter]
Me: And so, how long have you been a part of this group?
Lucia: Uhm, also just really recently, uhm, just the last couple of months.
Me: And how did you come to find out about it?
Lucia: Yeah, Kendall was introduced to me through another actor friend when I went to see one of her shows, and then…
Me: Okay, so you were kind of aware of the work that they did and –
Lucia: Yeah, I just saw one smaller show, but… Yeah.
Me: Good, thank you.
Diana: I'd like to also add that I hated clowns. [laughter] The only clowns that I saw were clowns at parties, you know…
Me: Have you come around on that, or do you still hate them?
Diana: No… [she laughs, getting the joke] I love clowns, now I do, I just don't like the party clowns.
Me: Whenever… When I would tell people what I was doing, you know, like, "Why are you going to New York?", like people who aren't in theatre or, you know, I'd be like, Let's see… "I'm going to interview clowns." And I know… I know immediately what pops into peoples' heads and I think, "Do I bother trying to explain what that actually is, cuz it's so, like you're saying, like that's what I found attractive about it [blah blah blah, I ramble on for far too long.] Okay, MI-chaela.
Michaela: Uhm… [quizzical look, can't remember the question]
Me: Uhm, so, okay…
Diana: [laughing] "What was the question?"
Me: When were you first exposed to clown work, what attracted you to it? Well that's a different question, so, when were you first exposed to it?

Michaela: I moved here from Sweden and then I heard about New York Clown Festival…? I think it was the first year it went on… I had no idea so I just went there, and I thought some were great and some not so great, but, it was great. So I met with person who was then involved with [can't understand what she says] and that's how we were introduced.
Me: Okay. And I think you were saying you also joined the group in March?
Michaela: Yeah, yeah.
Me: And is there something particular that attracted you to it? That you can put a finger on? I know it's hard to articulate, but…
Michaela: Yeah… It's so much easier to feel emotions with clown… That's what attracted me… Yeah. And you're allowed to *look* at the audience. And be with them. Yeah. I shit my pants, [laughter, can't hear what she says after that], but, it's okay…
Me: Uhm, Carla. Same question.
Carla: Damn. Uhm, I have always wanted to be a clown, then I went to school to become and actor –
Diana: No no no no, wait, what do you mean, "Always"?
Me: Since you were very little, or…?
Carla: Since I was a kid, I wanted to make people laugh. I wanted to… to… I wanted to be Carol Burnett. That's who I wanted to be, and, uhm, and then I went to school to become an actor and I realized that the drama part was fine but I think, I felt like I wanted to explore the comedy. And then I got, uhm, a really fantastic amazing job at La Mama [looking right at Kendall, who starts to laugh], and, uhm, I met Kendall. So I was setting up, I was helping them with the lights and stuff, with their show, and I was the one, when they all left, I'd be on the stage sweeping, dreaming of… [laughter], "One day it will be me up there…" And then I kept, you know, trying to find groups and stuff, and I did a lot of improv stuff, and it was very male-dominated, and it was very difficult. I remember doing a couple of shows where I just felt like, "This is really scary," it was too, ugh, it was too much. **[11:57]**And then I told Kendall if any of these ladies start coughing, or [laughter] limping, please call me, and finally she did the workshop and I dragged my sister, uh, with me, and then… Yeah. "My dreams came true."
Me: And that was also in March?
Carla: That was in March, yeah. In my head I was in the troupe, like, years ago [laughter], I was around for so long…
Me: Okay, good. Uhm, Ginny?
Ginny: Well, I didn't do the, uhm, show in March [ ] but… I do think, if we take, spinning off what you [indicating Carla] said, I used to take all the, uhm, Lucille Ball shows when I was little, and make my brothers, uhm, I would totally re-write them and I would be Lucille Ball, and I would perform them, like, for my parents, but… I remember from very early on I was totally in love with her, so… But then, I pursued theatre and, uhm, and… This was in 2005…? Something like that, I saw… My friend said, "Oh, [become one of these Shakespeare people] and we have to learn everything that needs clowning," and I thought, I didn't even really think about it, but we… She called Kendall and I think we wound up going to see your [indicating Kendall] clown pageant which just happened to be around the corner, and I just went, "Oh my GOD, this woman is so, so knows funny!" I mean, you know? She just

GETS it. And, uhm, my friend didn't pursue it but I took a workshop in the summer, which was keeping me from killing myself at my job so it was great, put the red nose on. Then I took another one, and then all of the sudden Kendall said, "I'm gonna write the rehearsal schedule, please let me know." I was like, does she mean me? I mean, I didn't know if I was supposed to be in the show… She finally wrote it, and my name was there, and I was like, oh my god! So, I've done a few shows, since then, and… Uhm, I think what attracts me to it is, first of all, it was a lot harder than I thought, and I [coughing, over top of Ginny], and I worked with a master who would teach me, and it takes a lot of practice, you know? Takes a lot of practice to be that open and out front with the audience. Uhm, to find what's funny, find that little gems, what's funny. But, uhm… So, I still do theatre but the clowning is a way to grow and also I guess it brings me back to those Lucille Ball days!
Me: Yeah. Thanks. Yeah, that's interesting actually, the … Mmmmm, nope I'm gonna finish with this first, I will spin off into different worlds if I don't keep myself focused. So thank you.
Ginny: Sure!
Me: No, don't tell me – Julie!
[general laughter as I try to covertly peak at my chart]
Me: I'm quizzing myself!
Julie: Uhm… The first clowns I saw were these clowns called Mump and Smoot, they were from Canada, I saw them in Texas … And I remember when I saw them I thought, "Man, that's like, if I could get paid to do that, people that do that for a living, I can't believe they have that job!" I was maybe 24, 25, but I still didn't think, never occurred to me that all you have to do, you get into a clown school, if you want to pursue it so much, but I remember that feeling of knowing that, like, "Ohhhhhhh!" Because before it was just, you know, clown at the circus.
[16:00] And I grew up doing theatre, doing normal theatre, and in my early 20s I looooved improv, but I did it for actors. And I remember one time my improv teacher, he took me out for a drink after and he said, "You know, you really ought to think about doing comedy, maybe stand up, improv," and I thought, "Comedy?!" I was in – I was offended. Comedy? Are you saying that I'm goofy? Are you saying I'm not a serious actor? [general laughter over what she is saying] Like I got all funny about it, I just… I didn't see myself the way he saw me. Because I would always end up leaning toward the comedic thing, even though it was not… Later I got to New York and I started doing improv, and then I found out that, in New York City, when they do improv, it is funny. And you're supposed to be funny. [laughter] You know, in Texas it was, like, for actors. The guy I studied with, he was one of the original members of The Fantastiks, he was a like regular actor. So anyway, I did improv for many years, and I liked it, and then, I remember… I always had in the back of my head, like, awww, it'd be fun to be a clown – of the Mump and Smoot type. And then I – somehow, I think it was… a woman… I forget her name… She forwarded an email to me [about a workshop]. So I went to this workshop, this was 2005, and I remember I just found out I was pregnant, and I remember thinking, "Ooh, I'm two months pregnant, I don't know if I can do all that exercise, I might get hurt or something," I mean, so stupid [general laughter].

Kendall: Was that the time when we did the pregnant clown with the punching bag? Was that… Or was that later?
Julie: Later we did – That was maybe the first week we [can't understand this part]… And then, uhh, [Kendall] did these pageants and we did things, so I've known Kendall since 2005 and I've been working with her since then. So I guess at the beginning of the troupe because that's when the troupe sort of began, with the workshops… It's so much more… I always felt a little bit fake doing funny improv and I always liked not worrying about being funny. I always wanted scenes to be real when I did improv and I'd always say, like, well who cares, if it ends up being funny, then it will be funny. I didn't want to jump on the game or force a game, and in improv people try to, like – oh, he's a silly character [in a funny 'character' voice], and so it's strange, it's this weird balance with the clowning, it's so difficult because it's even more like you feel naked if you're not acting funny; and yet, if you act funny and you're not open to some other thing, like you're not – you're putting on a mask and you're separating something from you and the audience, and, somehow, the fact that I had trouble with it, draws me to it, and that it's not easy, makes want to do it more. It's like an exciting thing. Like, "Oh, I finally found the [?something?] clown," [in a whisper]. And maybe someday I'll do that again! [laughter] That's what I felt… So, anyway, that's all.
Me: Cool, yeah, I lived here for a couple of years a while ago and I moved here with the express purpose of – I was going to become the next cast member of SNL, [laughter], but I needed improv training first. And I also tried my hand at a little stand-up comedy but that was too scary for me. But there was something… Uh, relief, in the little, little bit of clown that I got to do… And you're talking about the difference between, there's that pressure that all these people are at an improv comedy show and they want to see jokes and bits and they want punchline, and that is, uhm, not present. In fact, that can become a roadblock to connection. I think that is an interesting point. That, going after the laugh completely shuts everyone off from all the other emotions that you can experience. [Looking at Kathy, who came in later]. Oh, hello!
Kathy: Hello!
Me: I have to put you on my chart [laughter]. Let's see, right here… [drawing on chart]. What's you're name?
Kathy: Kathy.
Me: Kathy. Hi, I'm Kim.
Kathy: Hi. Nice to meet you.
Me: Nice to meet you, too. Thank you for coming. Uhm, the question that I just asked everyone is, when were you first exposed to clown work, or introduced to it, what kind of got you going, and then how did you find your way into Clowns Ex Machina?
Kathy: Uhm…[long pause]… My answer to that question is… 1989, because that's when I was living in Washington and taking classes at the Shoestring Theatre and going to auditions and one of the auditions that I went to that was listed in the free weekly was for Barnum and Bailey's Clown College. So I went because I wasn't working during those hours and, you know, just trying to get to as many auditions as possible, and I did the audition, and didn't really think anything of it and then about

a week later I was at a party and somebody said, "Oh yeah! I went to Clown College and I was at that audition and you were favorable, you really should fill out your application." I was like, "What?" [laughter]. So then I ended up going to Barnum and Bailey Clown College without every having seen a Barnum and Bailey Circus because I grew up in Missoula, Montana and trained as a goat[?] there. So that… That was strange [laughter]. But then I realized that, I grew up in the 70's so there was… You know, "Godspell" was done a lot and our drama teachers taught us Mime, and Desi and Lucy Arnez were on TV and I went to an Acting Camp and we did…uhm, they were a smaller crowd and so we did "Stop The World, I Wanna Get Off", which is a children's musical. [Talking so quietly here I cannot understand what she is saying, but something about first being introduced to Musical Theatre there].
Me: And then, how did you find your way into this group?
Kathy: After Clown College I went back to DC and then I went to Seattle and then to Japan, and then Alaska and then back to Seattle and then we moved to DC, and then we moved here [NYC], and I had done theatre, and I had my kid and I didn't do anything until she started all day kindergarten, and I was looking around and I found Kendall's workshop listed in…something, and it was still a big deal for me to take the train into Manhattan by myself. So I was, like, really intimidated by, like, everything. Like, "Oh my god, you know how to rent a studio? That's amazing," [laughter], "Wow!" You know, stuff like that. Because… I didn't intend to move to New York. I was in a theatre company in Seattle and the artistic director and a bunch of people came to New York and a bunch of people went to L.A. and a bunch of people went to Grad school and a bunch of people got married and had kids – that's the group that I was in – and then my husband got transferred here, so…
Me: Okay…Yeah. Wow. You've done a lot of things [laughter]. And can you comment on what is attractive to you about clown work?
Kathy: Uhm… I like the… the way that… uhm… One person told me that it's just yourself with the volume turned up, which I really like. Another person said that it's a lot like jazz improv where everybody is playing their own instrument and you get together and see what's gonna happen. And that really resonated with me. And there's different aspects of the creativity and the variety of things that you can do [gets too quiet to hear] and you can do it when you're not cast in a show. You can do it on your own. It's just a different world. When I was in Japan, I had come from theatre and then I was a clown I had this gig, and it came to my mind that the variety of entertainment… You can do a magic trick or you can't do a magic trick. You can juggle 5 balls or you can't juggle 5 balls. There was no… "Oh, I haven't gotten into character yet," or "What's my motivation?" you know, the craft aspect of it, it's … it's…
Me: Cut and dried.
Kathy: [nodding] That resonated.
Me: **[26:28]** Good, thanks. Does anyone have anything to add in terms of what personally appeals to you about the work that you do in this group? Maybe even some specific examples from shows or work that you've done with this group?
Kathy: Working [in clown] with women is… is very interesting. Because, it does go to different places then it does when I work with men. It just goes where they don't want to go [laughing].

Me: Sure, or where they can't go. Yeah. Thank you guys –
Diana: I –
Me: Oh, yes –
Diana: I like the fact, I'd just like to add, that the clown's world is limitless. You can use anything. And it just really plays on your imagination. Anything is possible, and that's what I enjoy about it.
Kendall: There are some people here who do other kinds of performance… That might be… something to talk about, what –
Me: Sure, we can go there –
Kendall: How the whole clowning experience is different than other…
Me: Yeah –
Kendall : Or, we can move on to other –
[general laughter – I think at Kendall's directing of the situation]
Me: No, no, that's good, that's a good direction, I want to ask you guys about that [lots of laughter, hard to hear distinct voices]. Well, these are kind of the same – I'm curious what, uhm, I'm calling them "permissions" are possible in the work that you do, in the clown work that you do in this troupe, that you don't feel are options in other modes of performance. Improv, or "straight" theatre, or even, uh, music [indicating Carla and Diana, they are in a band together]. Or any other kinds of performance that you do. And I think what I would like to do now is just open it up for you guys to jump in when you have a thought. Or, I have a chart and I will call on people. [general laughter] What are those freedoms that you have in clown that you don't feel in other types of performance?
Julie: The one thing… Like, in theatre, you're sort of… you're with the audience and you do sense them, you can feel it, but because of the 4th wall, you know, you're really more in your character, you're more in the moment, like you're supposed to be whatever it is that you're supposed to be. And in an improv, you may be with audience, it's all just, top of my head, I'm just gonna say and do what comes – but it's this weird middle line in clown because you kind of have to re-capture the feeling of improv but it's usually rehearsed, and so it's different. Because even in theatre you're not capturing the feel of improv you're capturing, I'm in this real situation where it's "We're sitting around a table" or whatever it is, so that's what's very strange about, like you're… and it is sort of… 'cause we do, often some part of it is improv.
[30:00] But this moment where, it's not about I'm connecting with this person or I'm in this character, you have to be much more open, but you've rehearsed it but you have to act like you haven't. So that the audience feels that it's real time, so that the audience feels like this is not something that we rehearsed. So it's kinda weird, but that's where I find… I mean I like that … The only real frightening thing is that, is not even performance but the play part where, like what she said, where –
Kendall: … the development process…
Julie: Yeah, where you can try anything, whereas in regular theatre you can't. Even in improv, you're sort of, there's a little bit more of a right and wrong, but in clown work – you just say, I'm gonna just stand on my head and then I'll try this bit. It still sort of needs to end up…being funny or not, but you can try anything, in that moment, it's this feeling… It's like endless possibility.

Kendall: I'm also, I'm thinking about this moment in development, whenever it was we were doing the show, and Lucia started to cry, because she couldn't do…she was so terrified of doing the exercise and she just was like, I can't even remember what she said, it was like, "I've never been funny!" or –
Diana: "I have to change my job"
[general laughter]
Diana: [laughing] I have to change my profession!
Kendall: It was a crisis about… what she was doing, but the crisis itself became a clown routine. It's like…So, what is the work, and what's not the work, can morph a lot of times. Sometimes that's not it at all, sometimes it's we need to stop 'cause that didn't work, and we start again. Sometimes the ways you can expand into directions of reality, or something, that become comic is so interesting…
Me: And I think, too, and what I heard you say in that example is that you were able to bring something personal, something that is you to the table, and I don't know that I see that as an option in other kinds of performance…
[32:30]Lucia: Well, I think that, also, there's a very fine line between therapy and clown work. [general laughter]. But I mean, I love that about this form, is that you can explore portions of yourself and your emotional realm that, yeah, that may or may not be appropriate or accepted in other processes. Of course, depending still on the group, always having a sense of how far you're going into one's personal process.
Kendall: And there would be a point, like in this moment that we're talking about when Lucia says, "I need to get another job" –
Lucia: Artistic crisis of faith.
Kendall: Artistic crisis – but she kept working, you know, she didn't sort of quit, she didn't quit and not play anymore, she was able to keep it in the air and juggle. If, on the other hand, if it had become some sort of real crisis that nobody, that we were like, "Oh, man, what is this," then it would no longer be clown, it would just be… because it was no longer in play, you know, no longer…
Lucia: Well, it's like the nose, it's like a tiny little mask where it's just enough removed from yourself that you can play it. And it's not like playing "you".
Me: You're not putting your dirty laundry on the stage, necessarily…
Kendall: Right 'cause then everybody goes, "Hmmm…what?"
[general laughter/chatter]
Me: Any other thoughts from the table?
Diana: I've never taken improv before but isn't it, kind of, it's that, if you're with one person or with four people your kind of just playing with them and if the audience thinks it's funny they think it's funny… Well, no, I worded that wrong. In clowning you're just a lot more connected to the audience, you're, like, talking to the audience more, and not in improv…? Right? I mean –
Julie: It just depends, there's short form, long form. Short form is gamey and you talk to the audience, like, "Give us a word!"… You play with them but it's a game, a joke, you don't show… Here's the thing. You're not supposed to be that sensitive as an improviser, you're supposed to be on. In fact, what they say is if you don't know who the person is, make something up. I remember once I got Eminem, and I sang a

song about M&Ms because I didn't know who Eminem the singer was, but, you know, you fake it. You're just like, "Okay, I'll just act like I know this."
[35:30]Carla: Well, and it's like, improv is like constantly being a smart-ass, whereas clown is, like, constantly taking all that away. And the vulnerability is so intense. Nothing about clowning is comfortable…[general agreement from table], it's not fun, it's not comfortable, it's terrifying…
Lucia: But it's addictive!
Julie: You're showing the audience the face of [demonstrates -- failure, uncertainty], you know what I mean? It's suddenly being, like, making a mistake and being wrong in front of them.
Lucia: Which is what you're not supposed to do in improv, you can't be wrong… even if you're wrong you're still like, "Ah haha," [smarmy].
Julie: And I always hated that aspect of it, I liked long form, which is more like regular theatre but, I did short form or full-length musicals but I hated that aspect of it where it's like, "Okay! [I'm on! I'm in charge!]"
Lucia: Yeah, that's something I can't stand, where it's like a battle of wit, you know? Like, fast wit, and of course I'm terrible at that… like, vocal improv to rap or something would be my absolute nightmare.
Julie: The audience… When the clown makes a mistake, or feels upset, that's a good moment, because that's what the audience… I mean, that's when you feel the most connected to the audience, when you're allowing them to see… But it's hard to feel that in front of them. Especially when you're creating it, because you're looking at the other clowns and you're thinking, "I am not – This is not funny." And you can cover it up and keep trying, just like "How about this?!?" like the improviser, or you can sit there and stare at them knowing that, I just made a poopy on the stage [laughter] and now you guys are looking at it, or whatever. It's just… you have to be able to be embarrassed in front of them, or kind of make mistakes. And it's not so easy, you'd think even when you know people because… Like, I recently worked with newer people because we kind of had… sort of an influx for the first time, after many years of us all being the same women, but even with the same women, I found… As much as you know about them and trust them and know each other's things, it's still hard, because you still want to be funny, you still want to do a good job. And it's hard to get up there and be open to, "Well, it might not work out."
Carla: I go home every single time feeling like a frickin' failure [laughter] and not funny, and what am I even doing here? What am I doing? Because nothing is funny. But then you sleep on it, and you're like, "Oh my god, I just realized eight new things about myself," or just realize… you know, about this life, it's really… It's a funny business, this clown thing [laughter].
Lucia: One of the first workshops I had to do, it was a different teacher than I ended up working with, and I did something, and, you know, I chose… We had to do individual clown stuff, basically go into a corner and make up something and come back in front of the class and show it. And I remember doing that, and I chose something, and nobody laughed, you know – I wasn't funny [laughing], but you know I was working in a complete vacuum, I wasn't working with anybody, just an idea, just coming from an idea. And I remember one of my classmates coming up to me and saying, "Why would you even think that was funny?!" [laughter]. The whole

first experience with clown, with a teacher I didn't really gel with, was basically a lot of not being funny. You know? It was basically like you try tons of different things, and most things aren't funny.
[39:34]Ginny: I think a lot of what we're doing with clowning is you play with situations, and when you're doing clown, any theatre I think, you play with the situation. But I think clowning allows you to see… you have a chance to create from you a little bit, in the situation. Like, for example, Lucille Ball, all she played was the – she didn't play to be funny, I don't think, she just played the situation. What was so funny about her was just, she committed so much to the – to what was going on in the moment, you know? So, for me what's happened is that the clown work actually has me – I'm a better actor with other material because the clown work makes me more somehow in the moment, present, to what would happen. I'm totally sharpened. My skills are sharpened as an actor. As a person. You see, I breathe the air in different somehow. But it does help your other acting.
Carla: I mean, not even with acting, but with performing. I feel completely different being in front of the audience and playing with the audience and looking at the audience. As an actor, the light are your savior, you don't have to see anybody, you're doing it… But it's completely different looking at someone and really connecting, or, you know… It really helped.
Me: Good. I kind of want to – 'cause it's been brought up a couple of times and my paper is on gender, and comedy, so, uhm, I wanna talk – or, hear you guys talk a little about, if you've had experience working with male clowns, or… Well, yeah, we'll start there. And if you can articulate for me what the difference is between that experience and the experience of working with all women, and then we can move from there into some more kind of follow-uppy questions, but I'd just like hear some of your specific experiences that you guys have had. With that. If any.
Julie: Well, I have something. I was very shocked when… I remember when I first took Kendall's workshop and she said, "Women can be more free and when their not around men," and… I kind of didn't get it. I mean I did feel like what we did had a feminist slant, because it was just coming from our issues and our things, but we recently, this last year, we did a jam, twice with a guy, a clown, a male clown, with some of us. And I was amazed at how different it felt with the man in the room. He's sort of not a masculine clown, [laughter] at all, almost animalistic clown, I know that sounds funny but its true. Wasn't he a little like an animal? [general agreement from group] He's sort of –
Kendall: That's why he said, "Oh please let me come, I'm more like an animal …"
Kathy: He was more like a lab puppy.
Julie: But the difference I felt – Because everything turned about … It became almost instantly either the sexual or power thing, or… And, it wasn't him, it was just the strange dynamic in the room. And we did different things, scenes, groups of us with him, but it always had this completely different element than I've ever felt with female clowns. And I remember thinking, "Oh wow, Kendall was right, it's different." [laughing, Kendall is smiling] I just had never experienced… I did improv with men, of course, but, because I'd only ever clowned with women I didn't realize how dramatically different it is.
Me: Yeah.

Julie: And I didn't not enjoy the jams, I enjoyed what we did and I liked it, but it made me appreciate sort of what Kendall does. A little more. Because I think it's more special. Now.
Me: And in that experience… I think it… I think… No, I'm not going to say anything, I want to hear from you guys first.
[silence, then laughing]
Kendall: Look at Michaela, I think she has something to say.
Michaela: No, but I've been training with a male clown, that's how I know Kathy, and I've been training in and out with him for probably [three? Four?] years –
Kendall: On and off, it's on and off, not –
Michaela: On and off –
Kendall: On and off, not in and out –
[laughter from the group]
Me: I knew what you meant.
Michaela: Anyway, uhm, and I have to say that working with only women, and with a female leader, has really helped me tremendously as a performer. And in the way of just trusting myself more, and just letting myself mirror my own problems and deal with them outside the rehearsal studio and then, like [claps hand together] ready to work! Instead of sitting, agitated – like, being nervous of getting up and showing something, or… Because I also trained in a Russian theatre school, from Moscow, and they're all men, you know? Smoking cigars and basically, telling the women what not to do and what to do. So –
Kendall: And didn't they say something about women clowns –
[45:30] Michaela: Yeah, when I went to St. Petersburg theatre school, they said, "Women clowns, they're like vaginas with teeth" –
[general disgust from the group, some laughter]
Michaela: A vagina with teeth.
Kathy: Vagina denta.
Diana: I never heard of that.
Kendall: It's like a psychological concept.
Julie: Women can't have the power to be funny.
Michaela: Yeah, so I remember when [???] with Kendall I wasn't sure… [she gets too quiet for me to hear] I think it's extremely important. This troupe is extremely important. Just as… as an idea, even.
[silence, then they burst into laughter]
Kendall: If only it were that easy.
Michaela: I don't know what to say, anything else…
Me: No, that's great!
Michaela: I'm getting nervous now so I'm dropping off.
Diana: It was the in and out thing.
Kathy: No – I think you're on to something there with the "in and out" thing… [laughter] Because, the traditional gag structure is 1-2-3 blow-off, which is a male experience, and the women clown can just like, "Well, I think I'll move and then see what it's like, and then see what it's like, and see if it's fun," you know? It's like, you're not getting anywhere, what are you doing, it doesn't look like anything. It

doesn't seem like you're going anywhere, which is kind of the male-female experience, in, uhm, other venues.
Lucia? Michaela?: But I agree with Julie, I done a lot of sketches with specific male [?], but it always ends up in some sort of sexual joke or very animalistic-y licking each others' arms or, just really strange.
Me: I wonder if that – I'm fascinated by that and I've heard several people talk about that, you know, and I've had that experience too, in improv, with younger men, new to it, and it's just like, that is their safe place to go. I mean that's very interesting, right? To immediately sexualize the situation, in order to -- you know, we [Kendall and I] were talking a little bit yesterday about, and I want to talk with you guys about this too, after we finish with this portion of our conversation, but, that when a man is watching a woman perform or on stage with a woman performing and is having an attraction, it's gotta be friendship or sexual, right? Like, there are these very sort of limited ways of approaching it. And that men have to figure out where to –
Diana: Doesn't that go both ways? I mean, I don't know…
Kendall: Yeah, I think it goes both ways, because – two things. One is we've done work, or sometimes we've done stuff with the troupe where one of the women will play a man, and, you know, then some interesting stuff comes up. But also, Chris Bayes, who is the person that gave you my name, he has said to me at one point, he said – you know, because he teaches workshops all the time, and he said, he's like, "I would really like to see a workshop where men and women are on stage, a clown workshop, where it doesn't end up being a couple," you know? A romantic thing. And, you know, my thought is that all the men would have to do this kind of work that we do together, and all the women would do this kind of work together, and then they could get together – you know, to get beyond what the easy story is, and really find something else out, or… Like when we worked with Patrick, he came in, and, you know, we started to try to work beyond some of that, you know… But it definitely, you know, power structure, and there's just a lot of pieces that get involved and you have to stop and slow down and say, "Let's look more deeply at that."
Julie: Sometimes it's the women that – not just the men… It's interesting that it wasn't just he was injecting his need to put a sexual element, we sometimes as the female clowns, there were group exercises, like, at one point we put a leash on him –
Kendall: Yeah I remember that. That was the one where I was like, "Okay, stop," [talking all at once]
Kendall: It was like he was a puppy or something. But, I don't know, it was some strange thought. It was like the group at that point said, "Oh he's cute" – I don't know, it was like a power thing. And then the times when people were models and he was the designer and –
Julie: He was trying to cover our faces.
Kendall: Right. And it was about – the question was who can have the higher status, the models or the designer? And what he ended up having to do, because he's a small guy, and they were all the tall ones, you know, it was like, put stuff [over their faces], you know, so they couldn't be seen. That was ultimately how he would win. Win the situation. So the sort of power that they had as women because of their

female-ness and beauty, like, how do you – and that was the specific question of how can, who can have higher status. What can be the game of higher status? But, you know, that was specifically what we were working on, and then… But what happens when you throw two people on stage and they've got to figure something out? Same thing, I guess, that happens when one person gets onstage, they're like, "What do we do?"
Julie: It seems like, though, the options that we have as women, the weird stuff that comes up, like I can say – stuff in the shows, that comes from us as women, seems like it could never have arrived where it was if there had been a man.
[51:45]
It would have had to be some… It just would've been different. Because sometimes it is, I'm think what you said, where even the borders aren't clear, you're not quite sure what's going on, or it's a tableau in church and do I have to be the nun, just strange things you're thinking, if a male had been there, people would've gotten shot, or –
Kathy: Yeah, suddenly the mafia comes in, or –
Julie: --just things I can't imagine, and they do speak of something, they speak of feeling that I have, they speak of feelings that we have, they speak of dreams that we have, all kinds of things that are not about, whatever the man says, oh there's 36 dramatic situations or this is the story or this is the way it's supposed to be. Somehow, I think really a lot of it is coming from Kendall, too. There's us, what we're bringing, but Kendall sees things and has a sensibility that isn't clear and defined instruction in the same way that men structure that [group and Kendall start laughing].
[general chatter from the group, comment about lack of structure, I think]
But it's true, it's true! I think people see the show and they're like, I'm not sure I understood this exactly or they don't…they don't get somehow.
Kendall: But they do get it, they do get it. They laugh, the audience laughs, but then… and then they say, could we put that in a box, please? I'd like to get it in a box.
Lucia: I just wanna, I want to mirror something that she was saying, or actually, there's a strong trend in the healing world, basically, right now, of like, men's groups and women's groups. This idea of, you know, it's time for the women to do their work with the women and the men to do their work with the men, you know what I mean? And it's kind of like you, uh… There's certain things that you could only do in gender segregated groups. You know certain… whatever, like there's certain issues that are men's issues and certain issues that are women's issues. And I think that that's really real. Like just in our world and in the way that the, uh, therapeutic community is addressing things now. It's interesting that we're sort of paralleling that. That trend.
Me: So that, to me, uhm, that sort of begs the question… When you do this work as a group, as an all-female group, and then you put it in front of a mixed gendered audience… That's kind of where I want to go next but I don't want to short, stop anyone from, if you have any other thoughts…
Lucia: I think we're heading the same direction.
Me: Yeah, so, and if you think of anything that we talked about earlier please, you know, we don't… we can go all over the place. So I wanna find out from you guys

what kinds of responses you get from your audiences, both men and women. And I know watching your work I had I was having reactions to things that were happening and I thought, "The only reason I'm having this reaction" – or, a very strong possible reason that I'm having this reaction is because I'm a woman. And I'm watching women do this thing. And it would be totally different if I were watching men do this thing. So, any audience reactions that you want to share?
Carla: Well, for this work in progress [I believe she is talking about Full Tilt here] that we just did a lot of my female friends were really impressed with, uhm, or they were touched by a lot of the things that we're doing but very specific female things that my husband and brother were like, "What was that about? Why were you washing your face?" But my friends, you know, this is an issue for her in her life it was like, it was so profound… It was unbelievable, whereas the guys that watch it were like, why would you wash your face? [general laughter]
Diana: [imitating a guy] "That's stupid."
Julie: Did they say that?
Diana: No, they didn't laugh. They didn't say it was stupid, they just –
Carla; They didn't, it didn't resonate with them in the same, you know…yeah.
Ginny: I do think that they like it, though. I know when my brother comes he's profoundly moved, really truly moved by each show. And he thinks it's great, you know? I'm always amazed also, though, of how women do come up and go, "Wow, it's so profound, and this just brings me back to this issue of women." And we didn't come up with it that way, we just came up with it. I'm always amazed at how women read into it very deep things that I didn't…get when we were rehearsing it, I just, these things just come up, we didn't create it that way. But I do think some men get it. In a different way, but they love it.
Kathy: I think almost every time I've been in one of Kendall's shows, some guy said, "Oh, it was so amazing to see all those different women on stage…" [Pause, smiling] And then what happened? [laughing] It's just like –
Lucia: That's as far as it gets, huh?
[general laughter]
Me: Like they're still trying to comprehend what they just saw…So many women on stage at once!
[laughter]
Kathy: I don't know if they're, they see all these women on stage and they think it's gonna be a Miss America pageant, or something, I don't know. But there's always some guys who's like, Wow! There were all these different women on stage! And then they would just be speechless after that.
Kendall: A number of the shows, Not Just For Shock Value and… other ones; we've started very slowly because it's exactly that: the women coming on stage, the audience sort of like [makes an "awe" face; laughter] Like, Don't move too much because it's so… [the entire troupe is laughing now] It's hysterical. And it's not just because they're women as clowns and they come on with a huge radiance and energy, you know. It takes a long time for people to take it in. I mean, even people who are clowns, who see it all the time, are like… Like Mark G?? came when we did, when we showed, before we did Not Just For Shock Value, I don't remember quite

what it was maybe it was a studio showing? For the first one or for the second one, I don't know. But he came and I remember him saying afterwards he was like, don't let them move too much at the beginning [laughing]! Because it's so over—it's so powerful, you know? Just, slow – make sure they come on slow [in her 'man' voice]. It's gonna blow the audience out of the water, basically. Remember when we went to that Cirque Du Soleil thing, and Michelle started to cry
Julie: That was so much fun.
Me: So, it sounds like when you're working together, and this makes sense to me, that some of the power and status issues that come into play when you're working with men are absent from the work that you do with each other, not to say that status and those things don't come into your work as clown, but that they're maybe absent in terms of you as people coming together to work.
Lucia: I just, I have to throw it out there because it's coming to mind… Just to put out, too, that I've had very positive experiences working with, you know, also with male teachers and with men. It's not like my experience has been all bad. I mean, what we do is lovely, and I think it is different, but...you know…
Me: Yeah, no, and I'm glad that you said that, too, because I actually don't, uhm…. I think that it's import—one of the things I appreciate about this group and the fact that you do the work that you do is that there *is* a difference, and I don't think that it's helpful or useful to ignore that there *is* a difference. But I'm not interested in qualifying, this is a better experience than that. What I'm really after is: there is a difference. You know? And I think that it's worth noting and talking about. Because I think sometimes – and I've only heard this from men – uhm, there isn't a difference. Or, it's not an issue. And that… isn't true to me. And so I think that having this kind of conversation is important because it just honors the fact that there is a difference, and gives us a chance to even have a dialogue about it. And explore it. But no, yeah, I'm not hatin' on men [laughing]. I love 'em!

[1:02:19] the recorder is paused, Diana leaves, we take a short break and have some snacks.

Lucia: I think there is something that relaxes for me, I was just thinking about it, when I'm with all women. I was just telling my boyfriend last night, I miss my women's group! That feeling is so…. relaxing. Like I mean, there's just something that relaxes in my heart and in my [can't understand what she says because she's chewing food]
Me: Yeah, I agree. And I feel that way here, with you guys. It feels really comfortable and I feel… And I don't think I would feel that way if I were in a group of all men and I was the only woman. I'd like to think that I would be able to feel as comfortable, but I think what that would require of me is a sort of putting on of some sort of persona that I think could stave off, or could rise up to that power thing. Whether it's real or just something that I perceive.
Kendall: Right, it's the Horner affect.
Me: Is that what it's called? Is that real thing? I'm gonna write that down.
Lucia: Well it also like, I feel like that ancient, you know, for all of ever. Women have gotten together and been creative together, you know, whether it was working

with their hands or quilting or doing something creative together. You know, and that sticks around because there's something important about it.
Julie: Someone told me that they found monkey that were, they were evolving in a way that their [tittering/giggling from the group, Julie pauses.]
Carla: They found monkeys?
Julie: No, this it true, this is true.
Kendall: Oh, a monkey story.
Me: This is good because it sounds scientific.
Julie: Well, the idea is that they were – [gets distracted by someone she sees out the window that she thinks she knows] The thing about the monkey. I forget now what they created, they started using, they learned some new thing. How to use, how to make a tool. What was interesting is that is was the women who were passing it down. You know, I thought, that makes sense because – that women would be the one's passing down the information because they're the one's with the babies [she's running out the door now to go say hi to the person she saw out the window]
Carla: Don't worry, I'll finish the monkey story!
[laughter]
Me: Well, I want to ask you guys… [1:05:03] In the…hmmmm. Maybe that's… I'm trying to think of how to best use the rest of this… Actually, in the conversation you covered a lot of the process questions that I have for you…
Kendall: Well I think there is something, also, about the process of, what Julie started to say about how we're working sort of from an empty space situation, which I think, I mean, probably it would be good for people to hear how that's different, working from ourselves, in that way, as opposed to other situations. You know? The way we work with, like, really open-ended, nowhere to end up exercises or stuff like that.
Lucia: There's a lot of space for the un—for not knowing. And then seeing what naturally arises from that, is different…
Me: Right, right, yeah. And, you know, something that I think has already come up a little bit is this idea of, and for me too, because I obviously have a specific sort of thing that I'm trying to keep in mind as I go through this, that, you know – are you even thinking about the fact that you are a woman on stage, does your gender even enter into your mind while you are performing? Or is it kind of beyond that in the performance? Does that make sense?
Julie: Hmmm.
Lucia: I don't think I think about it.
Ginny: Well, sometimes it comes into it. If you're playing a character, like I played Cinderella, and I had to go find somebody, you know, a man, and not a woman, and it was this sexual, I don't know, there's something a little bit about having a man put the shoe on. Then there's other times when I don't think … or we're playing enough, you know, show girls, I mean… Then there's time when it's just a situation. I don't know.
Me: Well so, as far as process goes, can you guys tell me a little bit about the sort of strategies you have, even just as individuals, who are sort of over-coming that self-consciousness, I think, that other female performers do carry, with them. I know I do. You know, that – well I think that's the best way to put it. That un-self-

consciousness, that, you know, non-concern with… neither trying to sort of down-play it or ignore it, it's just a…And what you guys do, if there are things in rehearsal or things personally as a performer to sort of set that aside. OR, you can talk about that that is actually a really valuable tool that you bring into your performance.
[pause]
Ginny: Well I'm not sure I can answer all of that…
[laughter]
Me: Any one of those…
[1:08:53]
Ginny: No, but I will say that putting the nose on, putting on the red nose, does tend to free you up. I mean I think that that was mentioned earlier. There's something about that process that allows some part of your inhibition to go away. And then you can come forward in a much stronger way. I think ultimately the nose isn't as important as it is in the beginning. I think it becomes, in the beginning you use it just to feel safe.
Kendall: But there's probably, maybe there's something that you say in the tapes that is specific about and un-self-consciousness. Is there a thing that you saw that you wonder how we got there? Or…?
Me: Oh well, I mean, I can think of a few – there's uh, there's – and I suppose too I'm thinking specifically of your female-ness in terms of body and even sexuality on stage. And how you can get to a place where, that vulnerable place where you bring that with you. The thing that is popping into my head because it was so, it was kind of a shocking image, is, uh…actually, I'm not sure, because the nose does make a difference in terms of recognizing people –
Kendall: Just say what it was that you saw and we'll tell you –
Me: There's a woman, uhm – "Bosom!"
Kendall: That's Lucia.
Me: Oh, okay. And then there's someone else, the other, and she's grabbing on, you know, "Boobies!" and, I mean, I thought that was hilarious and I thought, oh my gosh, how to you get *there*? [1:10:47] How do you get there and not that it's necessarily that it's a totally comfortable thing but it's like, you develop something like that in a group of all women, but then you have to be prepared to bring it to an audience that has men in the audience.
Lucia: That… I didn't even think about that. Like, honestly, I didn't even think about how men were gonna perceive that.
Julie: I feel the same, like, because it's created in the space where I feel safe to do it, the performing part, I forget that, oh maybe this is something that a man or a woman, like, I don't even think about, you know, the gender aspect. I think, I feel like in the beginning I used to go to a more sexual place because it was the norm, like in improv, you have your tools. You can turn on this, turn on that, and, I can even remember Kendall, like, "It's not sexy!" [Laughing] Because it's not. When you're in a room with women, it's not – I mean, there's a different kind of sexy. But I feel more – I don't have a clown in the way of a character, some people do, but I do feel like when I work with Kendall, a more softer side comes out that's a part of me that I may not want to show to men. Because I feel like, I don't want them to know that I'm this actual human woman… They find out soon enough [laughing] but I … so

I… but in improv it's not like that. I would always be more, I would be, oh, I'll be the seducer, seductress, or this or that. So that changes a bit.
Me: Well, and paradoxically, when you feel like there's a limited number of roles that we can play that make us feel powerful. And what I see in the perf – you know, in the tapes that I watched, the work that you do is that that kind of goes out the window. And that you are powerful presences in your own right. Without having to put on a stereotypical "powerful female" – not that those don't, I mean those come up still, but the range just opens way up. And that's really, really cool to see.
Julie: I was just gonna say, now when I feel like I'm putting on something, it's just kind of playing with it. It's like I'm the clown playing with it. I'm not actually really "it" the way I would be in a regular theatre or in improv. It's not like, "Oh look, I'm sexy…"
Me: That's a great segue actually into my next question… There's a quote that I really like and I think it's, uh, Zigerfeld is the guy's name and he says that "humor can be defined as playing with the institutionalized, traditional, and differentiated values and norms of a given society." So in other words, comedy and humor and, I believe, clown work allows us to sort of play with those norms, including gender norms, in a way that's palatable and easy to digest, for audience members. So I'm kind of curious if you guys could talk about, what are the kind of norms and values and gender roles that you play with in your work. Or that you're interested in playing with.
Julie: [to Kathy] You played the big mom…
Kathy: Yeah, uhm, being a mom has come into my work and has been the artistic struggle that I've been working with. I guess since we moved to New York. Because, before, from musical comedy and children's theatre and traditional clown and also the clowning in Japanese I was basically Hello Kitty, and then I got married and had a baby and got old and I can't do Hello Kitty anymore. So that, like, there was a period of me being lost, like, not knowing, apparently, in society I'm invisible, so who am I on stage? So that's been, uhm, a bit of a work that I've been, uhm, working with! [laughing] And in another situation have, like, barely touching on what that could be. Like, if I can't work my cute then what can I do? I have no idea what to do, because – am I supposed to be competent, am I supposed to be… that's been my work, as a clown.
Lucia: I think, like, [1:16:39] we have are certain things in clown where, it's true that I don't necessarily explore in everyday life. Things like anger, and sexuality, the parts of myself that don't necessarily, I'm not going to feel as comfortable necessarily to share.
M: Do you think that the reas – I mean, this is sort of loaded question, but, you know, not wanting to share anger and sensuality in your public life is that because you're female?
Lucia: I think, that's –
Kendall: How do you know?
[laughter]
Lucia: I think that it's – I think that it's like, again, I think there's lots of stereotypes around… it's more difficult for women to share anger and it's more difficult for men to share sadness. And I, I think that that's true! I mean, I think there's definitely

truth to that, whether or not they're – yeah, I mean, that's perpetuated by society and society … I don't know, it's hard to say.
Kendall: Well there's also, I think, like, specifically in terms of anger, women expressing anger, if you're gonna do it in a clown way, how does it have a strength to it, you know? How does it have an honor to it, or how does it have some way that it becomes comedic, or, you know, not just sort of reduced to stereotype or something like that. I think there are – I mean, I was thinking for me one of the things that, for me, I feel I sometimes work on in my solo stuff is pride, having real pride as the clown. The clown – I'm doing something, having self pride, and self-importance. Then being able to allow people to laugh at that. That means I gotta have a lot of pride! I gotta have some real self-pride to do that, to play with that. And so, the same with any of those things. I mean, like anger or romantic, like your romantic hopes and dreams. You gotta go there in a serious way before you can play with it as a clown. On stage. So, uhm, [1:19:18]I mean it's an interesting question whether it's norms like roles? Or whether it's norms like, what we allow ourselves to show, feeling wise? Or whether it, you know—
M: Well, and I think that there's, I have an on-going sort of debate with a friend of mine, and we just around and around in circles but, the question is as artists, as performers, how responsible are we for what our audience brings to the table? Meaning, how responsible am I for what I think are the social norms that my audience is bringing to the table. Uhm, how much do I need to know about those things when I create art. Even more, how much control do I even have? A couple of things have come up where you've gotten a totally surprising response and it's like, well that's not even what we were thinking of when we did this but that's how it was received.
Carla: I think truth and honesty transcend all that. Because when an audience, with their social norms or whatever it is, once I think they see real truth and honesty on stage I think they get it. That's the norm now, because it connects in some way.
Lucia: I think that transcends gender, for sure. Mainly because of the situ – because of the creative situation that we might be in and the process that we have, we're able to get to that place of truth, in a way – you know, maybe faster or, in a different way. [1:21:23] Then it might if there were also men involved.
Julie: I never thought it – I agree with what you're saying about it transcending, I also never thought well, we're so responsible for this idea of the audience except there was one show we did when we were very interactive, we would go out and beg to audience, and I remember most of the audiences were pretty nice and pretty cool, but there were this one night when I remember just trying to connect. I would look at a person and I'd be coming up begging, and they weren't reacting, sometimes they would look -- one night, they would, like they would just look away, like, I'm not gonna participate. I've decided that you cannot be in my space. I do not feel comfortable. And I realized like, they just felt so uncomfortable, they didn't want to be part of the show, they didn't want me to put the spotlight on them or make them have to do anything and it was hard, because I notice like a lot of these people, and I remember feeling really bad, like, it must have been me! I must have done some horrible thing that they had to not connect with me! And they were just uncomfortable, but it really made me notice, like, when you're just presenting it the

way we did our show, I think then you can say, well, we are not responsible, but it is different when you're doing interactive stuff with the audience, sometimes they're not prepared, and then it's awkward. You still have to be 100% yourself –
Carla: But that's what it is, truth and honesty –
Julie: But –
Carla: If you come and you keep being truthful and honest –
Julie: But if I'm not gonna look at you – you know what I mean? They, they will look away –
Carla: Yeah, but that's not your responsibility, your responsibility is to consistently bring truth.
Julie: Yeah.
Carla: Everything else, that's their problem. You wanna turn your head, I don't care, I'm still gonna enjoy what I'm doing, because I'm being truthful. Which is super friggin' hard, it's so hard.
Kathy: Yeah, it's hard to move on, too – if you give a friendly gesture to someone on the subway and they're like, I don't want to talk to you, you don't keep trying. Or they'll, you know – it's the same –
Carla: But it's not your responsibility to –
Kathy: And then – right -- It's not your responsibility that saying something didn't make somebody smile. They're like, somewhere else.
Julie: I agree. It's not our responsibility, I just notice that when it becomes more interactive, it becomes an issue and that I notice that not everyone feel as comfortable… they come there for you to be on stage, they're willing to accept you on the stage but they don't want you to interact with them. And it is, if they don't know somehow, it makes them, because it can be – it is so honest, it makes some people very uncomfortable. They're crying and now they're here next to me and they want something funny and it's like, this isn't what they wanted, it's not…
Me: That's actually a good example of, it doesn't have to do with gender, it's just something that I think we are socialized to not be open and honest all the time, and so when confronted with that kind of openness and honesty it can really be frightening, you know? For a person to, to now know where to put it and you know – oh, hahaha, I wanna play, but everyone's looking at me, you know? And there's this real thing happening and in public, of all places. So that, I think, is interesting. That when a performer is truthful and honest on stage it starts to expose these things. About, you know, the people observing. And my hope is that they walk away having conversations about it. I just, I want to kind of give you guys a chance to add anything that you've thought of…?
Ginny: I think part of the reason this troupe has been so successful is really because of Kendall. Because she has an eye for taking us – we could be truthful, we can be honest, but it's her that is the tipping point. She knows the timing of when to push you into where you need to be, and you're suddenly playing in something you never thought you'd play in, and you're just playing and it's working. So I don't know that we'd be so funny if it wasn't for her. She has an unbelievable, unbelievable eyes for what's funny. And you don't, you never know [troupe laughs], half the time, suddenly we're in a situation that's funny. I'm curious, remember the one with the stilts, with the pregnant ladies? [To Kendall]

Kendall: Mm-hm, mm-hm.
Ginny: Because I still have a couple of friends who keep talking about that. About how deep you got into what a pregnant woman feel like, and things you built with that, because of that – I knew there was something juicy about that subject --
Kendall: Well I'm trying to remember, it's hard to remember the step by step process. I think I had the image, somehow –
Ginny: Of the ladies on, pregnant on stilts? [1:27:03]
Kendall: Yeah… And then we began to work on it somehow, not on the stilts, and I knew I came in and I said, "Pirate language," because I knew it was something – I knew, I don't know where in my dream world I had pulled this, whatever – but I, so we were doing and improv where, I don't remember what it was – you had to speak pirate language and you had to be a mother, or something like that. You know, a mother and you have to speak pirate language, I think that was the thing. And I remember Mindy, who's not here, she was sitting next to me watching, some people were on stage, a bunch of people or whatever, and something, people were hitting just the right note, sort of like, in that zone, like, oh my god, there's something so true about this, and I remember Mindy was like, oh my god, and everyone was like, shh, you don't want to say anything because you don't want to stop what's happening because it's so strong, and… Yeah, but looking for that, what are those… That's what I do – what is this archetype? What is this image? How to get to something that I have some idea or some sense about? [1:28:34]
Ginny: Yeah, so for me I feel like, I don't come because I want to work on a specific mother romance or whatever, I just think I come to go … to be as open as possible so that Kendall might see where I can go that's funny and grow and be funny. And sometimes you're fearless, as a clown, I don't know … But I don't necessarily come in with an agenda. I just more come in as a vessel that want to work and when I know it funny – I mean, I know it's funny, when – we all know, we're suddenly doing it and we're like, oh my god, we're right on. Right on the cliff here, it's great. It's scary and fun.
Julie: That place that I was talking about where you're really uncertain and unsure, the only reason that I can really do it is because, like, I trust Kendall 100%. I know that if it's not funny, she won't have you continue. She'll find something, at some point, in some sense – you know what I mean? I just know, and that it's – I don't know, there's some freeing element in that, it's like, Kendall's just got her eye on it, and if there's anything to pull from anything that we're doing, she'll find it.
Carla: And always being able to trust, as a clown, it's never – it's brilliant, it's a brilliant thing that you do – now that we've all gotten mushy mushy, Kendall I think you're fantastic! [troupe laughs] But really, the power of being in a group, and then being addressed as a clown, and everything is possible in this world, and then constantly these things that you [Kendall] are able to – whoa, look at what's behind you or, you know, she'll mention something that you would never even think of, and then it sparks a new thing, and a new thing, and a new thing. It never is stagnant, it's never, uhm, there's always like, you're always building on top of something and I think that's a real gift, because sometimes I feel like, what the hell is the point? Nothing is funny, you know, let's go outside and smoke cigarettes because that's

better. But, she's in the world of the clown, everything is possible, everything is full of joy, and wonder, and that's a pretty amazing place to be in. So. But scary and shit.
Kendall: You know the place, that place of sort of constant exploration, like a child would have or whatever, that you're always moving forward and always sort of something else, something else, something else. And I don't know whether it's a gender thing or just a human thing to sort of shut that down. I mean, I think it's a human thing that gets shut down, or whatever. But is it more difficult for women to open that up? In a way, you know, are we socialized off in a direction that's not about our own development? You know? Our own inquisitive mind, our own exploratory minds and developing… you know, so that's more challenging to be, to just sort of make that space for ourselves? I don't know.
Ginny: Well, you know, you mentioned Patrick earlier, and working with him, that's something I loved about him; he never, he never stopped looking in the moment and finding what, you know, he's of course been doing it forever, living a true clown is just used to finding the moment, I think.
Kendall: Well there's something about, I mean, for me, personally, I've never considered myself a good improviser. Because I don't have the forward motion, you know, like I'm gonna go, whatever. I'm a little more reflective or a little more like, what is this? They're things, you know, so I need to sort of try something and then stop and try again. And I don't know whether there's something about the process that we have in this group of having a leader who sort of help you, helps people go farther farther farther with it, is that's something that has to do with gender, socialization issues or not. Other people have that same experience of, I would like to have somebody hold the door open for me. And give me permission – you know, maybe it's something about that. That women need a little more permission to go here or there or the other place, you know? A little bit like, oh, I'm allowed to do that, I'm allowed to do that. And so in this environment there is somebody saying, yeah, why don't you go over there? You can go over there, go over there! Now go over there! And go farther! Go out the window! Why don't you yell out the window as a matter of fact! So that, some of that stuff is –
Ginny: Even though it's not done to be therapy or, it's very cathartic to be able to go to that point. And you suddenly go, oh my god, I'm dealing with things deep inside me that I just have repressed forever or I have an issue around, and now they're out in the open.
Lucia: Well, why not? I mean, I feel that that gets looked down on, like… bringing the parts of ourselves, the shadow parts into the light. Where the – shadow meaning the parts of you that you don't shine the light on, not the "bad" parts, just the parts that don't necessarily get to be spoken from very often.
Me: And I think that – what I'm loving, actually, is that we are starting now to talk about things that aren't gendered, necessarily. I think that the process is definitely different for women than it is for men, but I can imagine, I feel like I know men who also don't want the gritty parts to show, and need someone to give them permission to do that. And so, it's something else I kind of curious about and I feel like now I maybe am sort of able to bring it into my paper, this idea that, of a universal connection that does, in comedy, that does transcend gender. You know, and I feel like what we're talking about starts to enter into that territory. Real connection.

Genuine curiosity. Getting, having genuine curiosity and awe and joy in a thing, is not strictly male or female. But then, how then, we get there, I think is different.
Lucia: It is interesting to me the question of, like, do – or, would a man think what we come up with is funny? I mean, I don't talk to any men after the shows, so I don't know, like, any men in the audience, and vice versa –
Kendall: Wait, there was some friend who just came into town…?
Lucia: Oh that's right. [1:36:15] [Says his name].
Kendall: You just dismiss him.
[general laughter from the group]
Lucia: He loved it. He did love it. Yeah, he did love it.
Kendall: Sorry, that's –
Lucia: No no no, that's good, because, like, yeah – in my head I was like – but yeah, but no, just – I guess what I mean is that I haven't considered that when we put out the material. I really haven't considered, like, oh, are men gonna think this is funny or not. It never occurred to me.
Julie: It never occurred to me in any of the shows that we did if a man would think it, like what would their reaction – that their reaction would be different. But also, again, I mean, like I said, I didn't think there – I knew that there were elements that we would bring in now because we were all women, that probably wouldn't have come to light, but I didn't really believe the difference until I saw it. Then it was very clear – especially because he was not masculine, he wasn't trying, he wasn't in any way pushing, but it just, somehow, maybe it was me, but – well, it wasn't! It just seemed even the group, no matte what, I mean, I felt different. The room felt different. Very strange. [1:37:38]
Lucia: It's charged in a different way.
Julie: I think we wanna impress men in a different way. I think when there's a man in the room, we want to – even though, I didn't want to impress him, I was not attracted to him in any way, or anything, but yet there was still this feeling of, oh, I have to be different, not myself. Like, it just -- and, I don't know. Something changed.
Carla: [mumbles through some stuff I can't understand] I find myself in this situation, of all of the sudden you're doing the, [cute] "Hi," and I'm like, what is wrong with me? I'm like, it just doesn't make sense. But it does help that we don't have to worry about that in the group. I really fell like, when we work together it's like this real sisterhood. And you do feel comfortable. Like, not even worrying about, oh, my stomach is hanging out oh my – like, embrace it and enjoy it, and there was no –
Kendall: Make fun of it!
Carla: -- judgment or, worry, you know, like… Yeah. So, I don't know. That changed it. I think I would have been a lot more, uhm, stiff in a group of men. I would've had to hold in my stomach a little bit more or, or make sure [sniffs her armpits]… But I really, I just didn't feel that way, I felt like everything we do… Sorry ladies, you've got to see it all!
Julie: I was just thinking of the wedgie thing! You don't do the wedgie thing if there's a guy there!
Carla: Yeah, that wouldn't have happened.

[general laughter, remember other examples, can't really hear any one person clearly]
Me: Well, thank you sooo much. This was really a lot of fun for me. I hope it was fun for you, too.
Carla: Thank you – thanks for dinner, I'm so glad that machine can't see how much I ate! I thought there was gonna be cameras.
Me: I almost brought it but then I realized that you have beautiful pictures on your bios and it's really for me about what's being said, and that's why I wanted everyone to speak individually at first so I could pick out people on the tape. I mean, what would be the best way to – wait, I'll shut this off.

Interview with Kendall Cornell

Me: Okay… So, you know I'm recording…
Kendall: [pointedly into the microphone]. It's Kendall. It's Kendall, we're recording.
Me: [laughing]
Kendall: On Saturday I'm gonna write up a little letter for you, just to say exactly what you said, that it's just for your thesis –
Me: My research, yeah – and I wanted to know, I have a camera with me, is it all right if I take pictures during the jam, or –
Kendall: Still photos?
Me: Yeah.
Kendall: Yeah, that's fine.
Me: Okay. Okay. I don't want to introduce anything into the room that will put people off.
Kendall: No, they're pretty… They're pretty good about it.
M: Okay. All right, so, you know, just the basics, when did you start this troupe? I know that it was called something different before it was Clowns Ex Machina
K: So, yeah, I started – first I was teaching workshops for women and then I started doing some sort of, the clown pageants which are really like recitals, a little bit, like working with people and we'd get a little act for them, and then we would, onstage there would be sort of like a group of them coming out on stage, and I was still interacting with them. So this is before ensemble work, which is sort of performance work for them. Then I decided to put the ensemble together, whenever that was, 200---6? 2006, 2007 we did a project, Work in Progress, uhm… Well, first we did some workshops, I guess we did some ensemble workshops to sort of figure out what that was about, for me to figure out, what is ensemble? What would that mean? And then started creating a thing we put together, some material for a first showing and then we did a full production which you watched the video of, and that was Spring of 2007. So yeah, at that point it was called Kendall Cornell's Soon To Be World-Famous Women's Clown Troupe, which was just, uh, a name, that soon became too unwieldy and needed to change, and…yeah, so, it was just sort of an experiment, a –
Waiter: Hi ladies, would you like something to drink? We sell –
[At this point I turn the recorder off while he reads us the menu, and takes our order. I had to turn the recorder on an off several times in this part whenever the waiter interrupted.]
Kendall: So, that was how I started working with… Creating an ensemble. Before that, I was doing my solo work, which was pretty much focused on the same sort of ideas. I mean, one of them was sort of an outgrowth of that teaching, or whatever, but also before that, just was, for a number of years, sort of playing around, working with a bunch of other women clowns. We'd get together every week and go in the studio and jam around, so that was a big sort of laboratory…
M: Are any of those women part of [Clowns Ex Machina]…?
K: No, they were… Three of them were, you know, sort of off – not off anymore, but you know, sometimes they'd work together, they'd do stuff, but not performing so

much anymore, or one of them is performing but they weren't part of the founding of this one.
M: You kind of started to get into some of your training when we met before, can you talk a little bit more about that, about the people that you worked with or worked under, or trained with?
[4:00] K: Yeah, I worked – well, my introduction to clowning was, I saw, well, I observed a workshop that David Shiner was teaching, and he was, at that point, on Broadway with Bill Irwin doing [can't understand what she says here], and it just blew my mind, and I was like, "I have to, I have to do—", I mean after one day, after two hours I was like, "I have to do this, what is this,", just completely changed my life. And I started looking around for people here, I worked with a woman who was a Lecoq person, she was teaching a clown workshop and somebody in that class said, "Well you have to go work with Philippe Gualier, he's the person." So I went to Europe to workshop with Philippe, I eventually brought Philippe over here to teach… And David Shiner came back to New York a few years later and I asked him if I could be his assistant. So I worked with him, and then helping him, you know, he was directing his own project, this and that through performance stuff that he had done. That was sort of a real apprenticeship, being around that. And those guys have a… they sort of are at different ends of the spectrum. Well, I wouldn't say different ends of the spectrum, but they each have a different point of view about it, but they're both really great clowns.
M: I'm not sure what that means, different…?
K: Well, they just come at it from different directions. And, you know, Philippe is a teacher, and David, even though he's teaching, he's a performer. So they just have a little bit, uhm… Philippe has a sort of pedagogy, or way he teaches it, thoughts about it, and David is self-taught and was a street performer and is really in touch with… he's a great improviser. I mean a phenomenal improviser. He works a lot with the audience. His sense is really… I mean, just the things I learned from him, from David – I learned some things from him and I learned some things from Philippe. And then I've studied with other people here and there, who've come to town to do workshops and this and that, and then, like I said, going into the studio with these other women to jam, that was a really big time for me, throwing out everything I'd been taught, all the rules, you know? And saying, "How does this really work for me?" You know? They say "this", but how does this really work for me. The principles, I understood what they said, but how can I really make that work for me. And really going back to the basics. For me, it was really going back to the basics of what is clown, why does a clown exist, what's the function of the clown, and how can I make it work for me as a woman?
[Interrupted again several times by the waiter, have to turn the recorder off a few times]
[7:30] M: So, as you were talking about your training, I wanted to ask you this – I wanted to ask you this before, too, and it kind of flew out of my head – [interrupted again by waiter]
M: Uhm, when you were training, did you feel like it was a… a patriarchal –
K: Well –
M: Did that come –

K: Like I said, in Philippe's class, he pretty much levels everybody down to the … everybody down to bottom, so in that sense, you know… he teases everybody, nobody is safe. Nobody is safe. So it's pretty egalitarian in that way. But he's also… I mean, he's a great humanitarian, but he's also, you know, who he is. He's a Frenchman [laughs], so this sort of equalizing everybody was not so much that way. But there did come a point where… And that was a little bit the nature of him as a master teacher, [says something I can't understand], there came a point when I was like, "I'm not learning anymore, just because what I… I'm not getting the, sort of, whatever it is I need, next in clown to move myself forward." And that was a sad day, actually, when I was like, "Awww." And there was a guy in class, he said to me, "You know, I just want to tell you" – because I had had good success in class, which is not easy in a class like his – and this guy said, "I just want to tell you that you did that yourself. I noticed that you did all that yourself." And it was sort of how I was feeling, like, I'm not getting the step forward, or… that I need. And it's not that I – it's not that Philippe couldn't do it, I don't know what he would have offered me because we got to that point, but maybe it was because that was all – or it was the nature of the class, it's a master class, there are a lot of people, that all, and you gotta take what you can get out of it.
M: And how long did you work with him?
K: I'd say, like… A couple workshops one year in the summer, and the next year I went to London and I did a couple workshops there, and then I went to Denmark, I did some workshops there, and then I brought him here… one, two, maybe three time, I can't remember, you know… And then I think somebody else was organizing this workshop when I had this experience of like, I'm not, I'm just not – it's not what I need right now, or I learned as much as I could learn from him, and… what was the question? Oh, and in David's class I was totally, it was just… [sighs] this thing of baggy pants, and was like, this doesn't work for me. And what you're saying is that clown is supposed to come from ourselves, so where am I? What do I do? Improvisations where I kept feeling like I came up against this, like, everybody had a big question mark over their head, like, what are we gonna do with you? And, uhm, moments like we would do some exercises, you know, we'd warm up in a circle and everybody would get in the center of the circle and dance, and have eye contact with [11:26] people, and times in that class – like, I would get in the center of the circle and some ding-dong yells, "Take it off!" And he's just a ding-dong, you know? But it's just like, "So, I can't explore the way I want to be able to explore because you all got all excited." Whether it's male or female or just mostly males, you're all getting excited in a certain way, and that's not freeing me, in a way. And David basically – he would get frustrated because he was like, [shrugs shoulders], you know? He was like, I don't know, I don't know what to tell you. Because, how could he? He doesn't know. And so, there were just a number of instances like that where I really, it was like, I can see this exact thing where I'm trying to explore myself and, whatever, and there is a strong message from the guys in the room of… You know, they just sort of get, like, all revved up, or excited, and I'm like… this is not – I need a little bit calm, I need a little calm and I need a little space, and my space is being invaded.
M: Yeah.
K: Yeah, they were invading my space.

M: That space that you create for your troupe.
K: And I remember that there was another time where, that same thing, in a circle, and some guy just sort of hooted in a way, like, he just sort of got excited and he hooted, and I remember David looking at him like, "What are you doing?" Because it was really invasive to my space, and they had a certain lack of sensitivity, a lack of reverence for my space and my… what I was opening up, my vulnerability and stuff like that. And also, I mean David's a little bit like, you know, he's a street performer and this and that, so he was like, "You gotta be more rough and tumble," and I'm like, I'm just, I'm not, you know? It's a little bit like what Julie was talking about with the improvisers, you gotta be "on", you know? Nothing hurts, nothing hurts, you know? And that doesn't really help me because I don't work that way. It's just not the way I work. It's not the best way for me to work.
M: I want to continue to talk about that, but I do wanna find out just some sort of, basic, I don't know, business. Uhm, where do you guys usually rehearse? Do you have a space?
K: We don't have a space, we rent studios. Sometimes, like this space that we were in [yesterday], Ginny works there sometimes, so sometimes she can get us in there for free which is really great, but we rent studio space. If we work at La Mama they often donate studio space for part of it.
M: And then, where have you performed?
[This is bio info and is on their website]
[15:19] K: Because it's a lot of people, we need a big theatre. For productions.
M: Okay, so… It sounds like you just got a bunch of new, newer folks back in March.
K: Right.
M: So, kind of a two part question: what's the process that you use to select members, when – a three part question, I guess – and what do you look for in new members for the troupe?
K: Well almost everybody, I think, except Lucia, I worked with in workshops first.
M: And you have workshops fairly frequently?
K: Yeah, it depends – when I feel like it [laughs]. So, basically I need to know them. I need to know them, a little bit. [Need to] have worked with them. Or know them. Just this last time was the first time I had auditions, so even people I'd worked with before came to the auditions. So I just had a day… to do, basically had a workshop, but tried to tailor it to see what their skills are, physical skills, improvisational skills, **[16:40]** how open they are, this and that. So, I might have taken some other people just from that audition but it didn't work out, it didn't work out – the either I didn't, well, I guess it's informative; what did I not take – I didn't take people who weren't that developed, you know, because I'd been going for a while, I wanted people who were sort of solid performers. Have skills developed in terms of performance and physical skills. And then – can you tell whether it's registering?
M: Oh, I'm just – I think we're good. When your food comes I'll move it.
K: Okay. All right. Uhm, and then a sort of openness ability to work with me. Like, one person who came along and wanted to work with the troupe, and she was a seasoned performer but I was like, I can't, I cannot have this person around me. You know? I just, she would drive me crazy.
M: Because…she wasn't willing to take direction, or…?

K: Yeah, a little bit that, a lit bit manipulative person. You know what I mean? And I just, because I had been through working with this group of people I'm also conscious of what are – I need to have no more drama with the people, you know? So I'm thinking about that. That's not really very interesting I'm sure [laughing] off topic but group dynamics, I'm thinking about group dynamics –
M: yeah, yeah –
K: I'm thinking about who's gonna… Who's gonna be able to work well with others. Who's not gonna, you know, that person does not work well with others. You know, they may want to be in the group because they want to grow in that direction, but, you know, I don't wanna teach them that right now. And then you know sometimes I take people who are really natural clowns and they don't have as many skills but they got something that's so deeply organically clown, and then I'm like all right, we'll sort of suit them up, so they can manage. And then there are some people who are really clever, in a lot of ways but they are maybe a little too clever, and I have to work to keep them in the realm of clown and not, and not let them be doing their easy stuff. In the original group, there was a very very, you know, some people dancers, some people very verbal, a lot of different – [waiter comes] Thank you.
M: Should we pause for eating? I want you to –
[tape is paused]
K: So, people were very varied in their skills and there was a lot of training in terms of, like, giving people –
M: Like bringing everyone on the same page—
K: Yeah. And one thing is for me to create pieces that highlight people what their strengths are and at the same time sort of be pushing people to do a bit more. And you know that was great because everybody is different. But there comes a point, there came a point when I was like, I'm pushing some rocks up hills, you know? [21:00] With people. And so there's sort of a natural progression. Really this year, a lot of people left early or like, one woman moved away, and then I got somebody in to replace her, when I took a woman who had come to workshop who, they had a similar energy, not exactly but a similar quality, so I knew she could play at least one of the roles that this other woman had played. So, and she'd bring something else to it, but I sort of re-cast this one clown for some specific stuff that she had, some other roles. Then, some other people have been sort of in and out for various reasons, you know – just a little bit, being flexible in the troupe. And then this – we were trying to grow the troupe, so last year I had done a whole lot of work with a business consultant about sort of upping the, upping what we were doing, and that just turned out to be really hard for a lot of people. And so basically I forced people to have to make some choices, and at that point I said, let me get in – we need fresh blood, because it was a lot of people saying, yeah, yeah, I wanna do it, and then not showing up. So it started being a group dynamic problem. So
M: And that was a result of it having had been a little more casual and … Is that what you're saying? People had trouble adjusting to this –
K: Well, they were saying -- you know, shall we go forward, let's do more, let's work harder. And then as soon as we started to do that people were like, Oh, I guess, I'm sort of busy, or I guess I'm
M: Oh you meant that when you said –

K: Yeah, right. They didn't really want to – no, I don't know why. [23:15] Everybody had different, you know, a couple of people went off because they wanted to do their own material and they started working together, so they were like we wanna do our own stuff, so we're not gonna be around. And it's interesting – I mean, this is not probably relevant, but Kathy, who came late yesterday?
M: Mm-hm.
K: And she was talking about her work and this and that and where she'd come from and projects that she's working on and other things, and I said, that's the sign that she's gonna leave soon, you know – when she, like her making sure that she was talking about other things that she's doing, not as a part of troupe. I mean, that's just a weird group dynamic thing.
M: Let's see. We're eating. I want to give you a chance to eat your food. Uhm. How about. Well I'm just, I'm so interested in hearing more about, I mean – it's obvious, just hearing during the round table yesterday, it's obvious that you provide a space that they feel really safe in, but that that safe space extends beyond the rehearsal process. You know, it clearly is the safe space is the group space and they carry that with them wherever they are whether it's in rehearsal or in performance. Because when I asked them about the, you know – does it enter into your mind even that you're performing for men and women or those types of things, and almost invariably they said no. It just doesn't even, it's not even a question. And I think that that is a difficult mind frame to achieve. And I don't know if – I'm curious what you do with them and for them to create that kind of space.
K: I meditate a lot. Well I guess it's a combination of being a very strong leader but not putting my personality so much into it. I mean, that's probably not true, but keeping like a… teacher neutrality. You know, uhm…
M: Holding the space.
K: Holding space, exactly. So, uhm, I'm good at that. And I'm also a performer, I'm an actor, and there's definitely been times – what I was gonna say is it's not like I'm put off too easily by what comes out of somebody when we're working. So I'm able to hold space for people. And then I'm also – Oh, I know what I was going to say. There was a point when – when was that, maybe it was before I started the ensemble, when I knew, I had done some work and I know this is gonna step up and I don't think *I'm* ready, to deal with the group stuff. I have to get stronger in myself before I can deal with the dynamics that come up and the aggression and all sort of stuff like that. So I was like, I definitely need to work on this before we go anywhere. And there have been times definitely like even in the process of something, we get somewhere and I go, ooh, we're not going to go any farther until I figure out how to be able to work with whatever is coming off, or… or manage it in a way because it's getting… I don't wanna say, no, don't do that, I have to figure out how to make it work. But, there's also trust, openness, things are out in the open, I don't tolerate back-stabbing whatever-y sort of stuff. I'm trying to think –
M: Well, and one thing I was curious about too is this idea that they all seem to share that when they are working on a piece, as part of their process, there aren't – it's limitless, I think is the word, where anything is possible.
K: Right.

M: And I wondered if that's something that you specifically say to them or if that's just something that they learn because you facilitate a process that's sort of … that lets them know by experience that that's okay, or if it's something that you verbally…
K: Well… I mean, when we start, with new show, new material, it's empty space. Or actually, the very first show was exactly that. It was nothing. It was, what are two women clowns on stage? What are three women clowns on stage? What are four women clowns on stage? What are five women clowns on stage? That was it. What is a group of women clowns on stage? The show… then other shows, you know, sometimes I would have *an* idea of an era of pictures, before we start, pictures of some costume looks, and then they would start creating, oh I'll bring in this, I'll bring in this, and then we all … creating together. You know, maybe not, or that or this works, you know, comes together, for no reason. Just like, this is what we're after. And they also feel that this works, I like this costume, I did good work in this costume, you know, that I'm gonna do again. This makes me happy. They can see other people going through the process. Like Julie says sometimes, that she … when she's up there doing stuff she's like, what, what is this, what is Kendall telling me to do. But then she remembers, I've seen other people up there, and when Kendall says to do this, it always works. So I'm just gonna trust that this is gonna work or go somewhere. So I think, yeah, having been through the experience and sort of arriving somewhere. But of course the people who are all new were sort of like, what do we … you know, what are we doing?[31:26] But there are many little successes in a development period, you know – this sense of getting laughs, hitting the nail on the head, and so in terms of the limitlessness, I think they're all really, I mean that's maybe why either they're attracted to my work or why I choose to work with them is that they're not saying, what it this, what is this – I mean, sometimes that's what they do, what is this, where is this – you know, you just have to say, we're just making something. We're making something that we enjoy as a group and we think works and sometimes there are times that we do something and I'll say to them – like it's the first showing or the work in progress and I'll say, look, this is something – it may not be quite right yet, but we're going to put it on stage because I'm telling you, there's something, there's something here. [32:29] And you know, I think they all feel that, or they trust it, or they… I don't know, maybe they just wanna believe I have no idea.
M: Yeah.
K: And maybe it's that simple thing of saying I'll put it in someone else's hands.
M: So you talk about the process by which you create pieces. Is it typically sort of a blank slate like we're just gonna start to play? And see what comes to the surface? Or … I know you said sometimes you'll have an image or a costume or maybe a time period that you begin with. But is there ever a, like… "Oh! Pregnant women!" Or is that something that comes up in the playing?
K: Well sometimes it's stuff that's come up in my own work and solo stuff or my exploration so I may … like, I was trying to think about the pregnant women and how I came up with that and then I was like, that's right! Years ago – I mean, like trying to re-create what happened – I was thinking… I had worked on myself a pregnant woman clown in a certain way. You know, I had some ideas way deep

down there. And then why it came up for this show on stilts, like – I don't remember. I… this image came up. And so there, there are times when I go, I have this image, let's see if we can sort of see what this is about. Or Ginny doing Cinderella. With the shoe. And that was something that I think we had done… I guess when we came to work on that show and it was gonna be fairy tales and this and that, and that was all, you know, that was the theme. So that's what we started with, it wasn't just blank, you know. I had a specific idea, I said, I have an idea of her doing an audience interaction piece like this. And she had to really trust, and I had to really trust. There were times when we were making that piece that I was like [pulls a worried face]. You know? Like, I don't know if she can do it. But then I'd, like, I'd go home and I'd say, Kendall, you have this image, you gotta trust your instincts. You wanted to make this piece; make the damn piece, and put it up on stage. So, but I'm always very nervous when I come in and I say – because it's really vague, it's like, [makes another face], it's very delicate, you know. It's not like I come in and say this is what we're doing. I have my, you know, I'm so prepared for rehearsals, I have my pieces of paper, this is what I wanna work on, you know, I wanna try something… Well like, the woman with the candle, with the cape?
M: Yeah!
K: I don't remember, I must have had the image, I think I had the image.
M: And she's a recurring figure in the show.
K: Right. So I think, like, I can't remember, I'd have to ask one of the other guys, I imagine that I came in and said, "Hey! Hey! I see something, like, with a candle and a cape!" [laughing] You know, that's … Because as I recall, Kathy was, Kathy who did that role was away, and she was coming back at the end, and I was like, let's make her do this role that way she won't have to learn anything. And that was a show where I had many more of these sorts of images. Like the show we just did, the pieces of –
M: That's, uh –
K: Clowns Full-Tilt. That was, the idea was women in 2-D.
M: huh. Oh! Which is why the art pieces…
K: Mm-hm. TV commercials and sort of stock characters, and film whatever. SO it was a really broad place to explore. And I think we had started, I think we had just done, when we were doing jams, when we weren't even working on a show, I had sort of said, oh, what shall we work on, or exercise, what are we… wanna work on. And I thought, well maybe I should just bring in some paintings and we can just play around with that. So that was one of the places that that idea sprang from. Later I was, you know, [can't understand what she says here]. But I often, uhm… Like, I collect a lot of music, to bring in, so there's, like, setting the tone. The music that we're gonna listen to. While we're working. I give them really open-ended exercises. Like, you know, with music or something. Listen to this music. It's not, you know, it's complicated music. Like, you know, something very unique, or whatever. That has a very particular sound. And have, you know, okay, two people, listen and – play this music and you listen and then you come on stage and you be in the mood of this music. And then something will evolve from that. And then in the improvisation I sort of work with them to move whatever impulses are happening or some ideas or some images that come up.

M: Can you, um… I'm curious if you can talk about instances where you've started to move through something and you're running up against a wall, against walls, and you made the decision to either step away from it or scrap it. I don't know if that's something that happens in your process at all. Or if you literally use everything that comes up in some way or another.
K: No. Well, I mean, we do huge amounts of generating this that and the other thing. You know, not all of it becomes an act. But there are times where like, things will come back again in a way because the sort of process of, you know, for them to maybe step into… okay, there's music that's very unfamiliar to me and I have to move in a different way. You know, it comes up for them, and then maybe that comes back again later, and then maybe it comes back again a third time and we go, oh, now it's in a place where we can… I say, now it's in a place where we can use it. And then there are times where like, the piece that's the, uhm, the reluctant stripper? With the Russian woman and, coming out and the stripper… that was, like, the last week before the show opened, I came in one day and I said, "You – here, I brought this fur stole for you. You get up there and you do that thing where you were like doing the other day, where you were the Russian mafia. You – you do that things you did the other day when you were doing your dance piece and you were wearing a big coat." And then I call the third person – and you, you just get on stage when the… so, with all these pieces, when I went home, I said, I suddenly see how they can go together.
M: Is there any territory, though, that is kind of off-limits? In terms of how, the kinds of personal things that come in to … in to the pieces? Or do you try hard to keep that as open as possible?
K: Like, what do you mean?
M: uhm, like, I'm trying to think if I can think of any example. –
K: What is personal stuff that comes up –
M: Oh, uhm, you know, something – well, oh, like it came up yesterday that Lucia –
K: Oh, when she started to cry –
M: When she started to cry… Is there ever moments like that when you have to back off of a thing and say, okay, this isn't productive anymore. Because it's too… yeah.
K: Yeah. There another – she wasn't there yesterday, there's somebody else who, she kept having problems and I was just like – I mean, I didn't – this is what I was doing inside – ugh, I can't work with this! I can't work with you, you know? You're not doing anything. You know, you're just wanting my attention, basically. SO, I mean, that's my call as a…as the director I guess. I mean distinguishing the difference between when somebody's still working or when they're just acting out or having problems, you know what I mean? Because there's definitely, there definitely comes a stage in rehearsal where people start to get nervous… First of all, once, when we go through the – there comes a point when people get nervous about, like, going from improvisation to now we're structuring it. Everybody feels like, bleh, we didn't like that and… and then there also comes a point like before we start getting ready to go on stage, when sometimes, some people get really upset, like, as if they've been neglected and haven't gotten enough rehearsal time. When are we gonna rehearse my piece? We did just rehearse your piece. You weren't paying, you know, you were, you decided to forget everything we did yesterday, and now you're

having a like why don't I get enough attention. So all their issues come up. Why am I not getting, I wanna rehearse, you gave her time! So all of those are personal issues. But in terms, but yeah – everybody's using their, they're using themselves in the work. And this one woman who I was saying that I was rolling my eyes, you know, I told her out – you know, she's gotta change. Otherwise I can't work with her. [waiter interrupts] But, uhm, I mean, they've gotta be able to perform it on stage. If it's something that they can't actually handle, to perform, then there's no point in putting it on stage.
M: And from watching the videos, you know, I saw what you were talking about, you know… These sort of situations that are very particularly female, that are particularly women's situations, and so I guess that's what I was curious about, do you ever get into playing through a situation, mother/daughter, bride, pregnant woman… Oh god, I just think it was hilarious, I think it was Ginny and Kathy, and Kathy is listing different recipes for cocktails?
K: The fondling guy.
M: And the guy is just, you know, all over her. And the look on her face it was hilarious, you know? Then I got to thinking, you know, what – how do you handle it if something like that touches a nerve that, you know, that is beyond play? That becomes a recollection of something real. You know, that's painful, or, you know…
K: Well, like, the piece in the, the Funeral for Dead Babies? The Funeral for Dead Babes? You know they had to be really, It's a funeral, they had to say these really serious things [Kendall starts to smile, I laugh] And, I love that piece. I think it is so hilarious. And there are times working on it where I would be yelling at them, "You gotta be serious, you gotta dig—" Julie's very good at it, she's very serious, but Judy she wants to escape a little bit that, uhm… And so I made them be serious. And Judy was crying! But she was still going, you know? And we were laughing our heads off, because, you know… I mean, yes, I think it touched something real in her, but I mean, that's why we go to the theatre!
M: Right. [46:08]
K: I mean if somebody goes – I mean, they don't say, ooh, I can't handle it. What they do is they don't do a good job. They just back away from it somehow. So…
M: So—
K: But there is – I mean, I guess what you're saying is there is, like, the reluctant stripper, it's good when she's in pain a lot, you know, when it's really painful. But it has to be clown level of pain. If she's actually violated, and whatever, but that's… I mean, that's clown work. That's understanding the difference. How to make it work. Timing.
M: Yeah, I think there's, someone I'm reading has some remark about how violence and comedy go together very well, but blood and comedy don't. [laughing] Or something to that affect. There is a line. We as audience members have to always feel in the back of our mind that the person is actually safe. Or it gets uncomfortable. And it is a really, it's a very fine line.
K: Yeah, and something came up in the last workshop I taught, where, somebody started doing whatever, and it was funny, and suddenly, there was, like, this pall fell. And I said something like, op, we've ventured into the land of tragedy, you know? And then we sort of got out of it again. And then of course the next day somebody

asked a question about this and I was like, oh no, I knew they were gonna ask about this. Because it is totally subtle: what happened? And I was like, I was afraid someone was going to ask the question because it's just so hard to articulate the differences. But I think it's a very subtly thing about timing. The way that, she suddenly became involved in her own problems, as opposed to being… continuing this sort of elange of the clown. And she just became – and the timing changed a little bit, and this sense of memory, or something. So I mean, it's very subtly, and… I mean, I've had people come to workshop and it's like, sorry, you gotta stick with tragedy. I mean, you walk on stage and they have a black cloud over their head. That doesn't mean they couldn't work through it and be a great clown, but
M: Sure, but then – I think that is a really, that's a good image, actually, kind of like, folding in on yourself and that's a shutting out of – and it's all about me an my angst.
K: Right, and you could do that as like, a clown playing that.
M: But you're still sharing.
K: You're still sharing.
M: So… oh good. These are questions I have out of curiosity, really. Is there, you know, when you're developing a piece, do you ever find that there's something specific that you're trying to communicate with an audience about women's situations? Or does it ever get to that point?
K: I'm a deep thinker. I'm a deep, deep thinker. So I think my deep deep thoughts months in advance of going into rehearsal, and then I sort of let them go. Because it's not always – I could write it on a page, this is what I'm interested in, la di da di da. It's not always, you know, a tautology. It's very deep sort of concepts, whatever. I don't articulate it to them. I choose music, I choose – you know, I choose stuff that seems to be in that realm. Like the fairy tales and gothic romance one, I'm trying to think, what did I think before I went in there, but… Because things happen in the studio also, that I go, oh look – because it's also putting the material in the hands of a group of women and seeing what comes out. You know, the whole idea of the empty space. It's a collective, and the collective will reveal it's own thinking. You know it's own – so my job is to not let us fall into easy thinking but to really think the deep stuff. And so… it's always a difficult process for me because, like, the Clown Axioms, the fairy tale one, where we started from zero and did 35, 40 minutes of material. [waiter interrupts] We made this piece, that didn't make it into the full length show, that was just so delicate, and so ethereal, and so unlike our first show. You know, different than our first show, just really interior world and magical, and I was just really like, wow. And I don't think they really liked it, or they didn't know.., It was really weird, and I just felt really sad, I was sad, I mean, I said to them, "I don't know, you guys, I really like this show," [starting to cry a little]. They were all like, in another zone or something. … What was the question? Do I come in with certain –
M: Yeah, so you do this thinking and sort of deep meditation on the images or sort of the prompt. And then kind of let it go and instead choose –
K: Right, so then this show that we're making now, and so it was new people, we had done a few pieces… The other folks had done some stuff from the paintings before that we performed. But here I came into the studio with all these new people basically starting to work again, make stuff. And I realized, the topic is too big – I don't know what it's gonna narrow down to because it's just too big, two-

dimensional women, TV, film, advertisements, and whatall. But let's just start working on it. I had some ideas about constraints and authority and this and that – I don't know, I just – if I showed you my notes it would make no sense to you. Those sort of thoughts. And then when we started working on it, this and that came up, and this came up, and I found all this music of prison chain gang stuff. Things started to really bubble for me in terms of constraints and prison and authority, the way they worked me, like I had the microphone, so there was this authority thing happening a little bit. But near the end I was like, wow, I think we made a show about art and beauty. And there are many, sort of, aspects of the… what's imprisoning about the constraints of that? And what's freedom, like an artist creating her own self? You know, or freedom? So that's sort of –
M: Is that something that came up for you when you were preparing for the piece? Or that's something that was generated purely by the, having done the work? [55:35]
K: Well, it's hard to go back. I'd have to look at my, at my notes. What did I think it was gonna be about?
M: Well, I mean, and it doesn't really – it's not – it's kind of a moot point, really --
K: I knew it was a really big topic so I didn't really know what it was gonna be about. I thought there was, something about roles. Roles we play. And I thought there was gonna be something about good and bad, the good one and the bad one, the clean toilet bowl, the dirty toilet bowl. Some sort of tension, that's supposed to be the two things you know? So… it was pretty [is chewing, can't understand what she says]
M: Uhm… Having had – having trained with – well, I'll just ask the question: is there anything about the genre of clown that you are trying to change? And I know [57:13] that's such an obvious question given the work that you do, but I'm interested in hearing you, you know – because, my assumption is, well, yes of course. Because you're an all-female clown troupe. But it occurred to me that maybe that's not an attempt to change the genre, or to open it up, it's just –
K: Well, a friend of mine told me a long time ago, a guy clown, that he had worked with some old guy clown, who, unfortunately, I can't remember his name and when I asked him again he couldn't remember the story… and this old guy clown said, it's the women who are going to move this art form forward. And I do think that's true. Because, the men have sort of gone around in a circle. They're repeating themselves. I meant here are some people who are like, I do this new stuff, I'm like really out with the audience and so on the edge. And I'm.. that's not, actually, that's not a [new approach] . You know , that they're being political, that they're being provocative to the audience or whatever. That's not new. Russian clowning has been political behind the iron curtain forever. It was extremely political. And street performers like David, they were – actually, he was, in the 80s or whatever, he was doing street stuff, he went to… Somebody told me this story, uh, Dominique Gendo, do you know him? He's a big clown historian lives in San Francisco.
M: Oh, really?
K: Yeah.
M: Okay.

K: But he told me that there's a circus, a young, [says something in French I can't understand], circus festival, competition sort of thing. So it's for younger artists who do competition and sort of the circus arts and clowning and whatever. And so, David apparently, the year he was there he won an award, won a bronze or silver medal, so Dominique said he happened to be in the judges room – I don't think he was, like, why, you weren't one of the judges, but whatever – and he said that they practically came to blows about David's material. [1:00:22] You know, some, like, Russian was like, pounding on the table, like, "I'm telling you, I know clown! This is clown!" and other people were like, no, this is street performance, no this is clown, you know? So, but he was, you know, aggressive with the audience, all interactive, so… what is that about… men going around and around in circles… And I think that, like what Kathy was saying, the rhythm, the timing, is very different, and the world is just like, this whole other world, that opens up. And I that, you know, the traditional clowning – you know, people say, clowns have no, they are asexual, or something like that. And I was like, well, how… I have to question that, because… you know, they're asexual like children. Well children are not asexual. And what does that make me, you know? If they have no gender, what does that make me? [1:01:33] And the othe sort of questions about status and stuff like that that are very traditional, the high status clown, the low status clown, the way they interact with each other, and… I think I started to say that when I started to work with some of that stuff with the women, I just was like, this is so boring. This looks like men. It looks like the male idea of how the world works. And I think women's status is so much more complicated, so much more subtle, stuff – and I'm not sure the stories, you know, in a way it's like, the stories that start to … like, conflict, stories that start about that, it's just so, I go, I've seen this before. It suddenly becomes clichéd and… So I feel like what I'm trying to do, anyway, is stay away from people going oh I've seen this, I know what this is. In that sense. Really sort of slow down and open up the moments. Like in the Clown Axioms we did Jack and the Beanstalk's mother?
M: Mm-hm.
K: You know, and the one moment –
M: [laughing] when he comes back with the beans? Yes!
K: You know, so she's… She only figures in the story, you know – how much does she figure in the story? But this one moment is just filled, like, every single woman has something to say about this anger, you know? And this disappointment, and this thing, you know? It's just, it's so…
M: I love that so much [we both start laughing]. I was dying.
K: The… yeah.
M: I love the [woman who is so upset she can't even get any words out]. Yeah.
K: So I feel like, but not – like, we know the story already, so it's just, let's really, let's focus in on something.
M: So, is it fair to say it's a female perspective? It's a woman's perspective? It's a different sort of lens through which to look at things. Or is that still too [constricting]?
K: Well, I mean, it's a funny way to ask – I noticed this yesterday also, when you were saying, like, can we say it's a woman's perspective, I'm like, I only am a woman.

I say it's my perspective. I don't know what somebody else's perspective or a "man's" perspective is.
M: That is just generalizing "woman's perspective" as somehow being the same across the board.
K: Well I guess it's sort of like, uhm, it brings the idea that there might be another perspective, and I sort of want to just – this is the perspective from which I see the world. And to say, is that a woman's perspective? It's *my* perspective. You want to say, please look at another perspective and I'm saying, like, I'm trying to say, here's my perspective. So in a sense, asking me to contemplate somebody else's perspective is saying there's already something not valid about my perspective. I mean, that's not really what it is, but it's like… I mean, it would be interesting to ask a man, look at that, do you think that's a woman's perspective? You know what I mean? Or, whatever. Or, how would they … Do you think that perspective is a man's perspective? I don't know, because I only know my own perspective. I can't look at it from another angle. But I know this is just knit-picky… but, so the question of—was it… I mean, my, my desires are to free up expression, in myself and in other women. And put that on stage. And I think that has an effect on everybody who sees it. [1:06:28]

Interview With Kendall, Jan 27th, 3:00 pm
Met at Bouvet

M: So, I have to start with an informed consent sort of thing, before… So this is for my thesis, I'm interviewing you for my thesis project, and you are aware of the scope and nature of my paper?
[Kendall makes a face, I laugh]
M: And you're fairly clear on why I am interviewing you for this paper?
K: Oh yeah, of course, I mean…
M: Okay, so I thought with the first one would be a good place to start, I was curious what your, how you, what you think the role of the clown is?
K: Okay, I'm just looking at my notes. So I guess… I mean, going back to thing about what the principles are, the basic, basic principles, I am of the basic opinion that the role of the clown is to break up tension in the community, and doing that by showing the community themselves in the mirror or their problems or things like that. So the clown stands up in the center of the group and sort of acts out life or whatever in order to break up tensions of life and death or sort of ominous clouds that are coming. Like, you can see it certainly in a circus when there's a very intense high wire act and then afterwards the clown comes out to break up the tension and make people laugh because they've just been in this other state of tragedy, or, fear, or whatever. So there's this sense of bringing things back to a certain human level. Or times in the church when they talk about the day, the Feast of the Donkeys or whatever its called when the freaks go in and turn everything on its head, the time for irreverence, or the time for… you know, it's too much to handle, all the other stuff, and so we need this entity that shows us ourselves in our imperfections and all that other stuff. And also I've heard talked about and I believe that, because of that, the clown sort of connects us earthly creatures with a more cosmic or heavenly or bigger force [3:39]. So the clown walks in a different set of dimensions in a way, on stage, both relating to the audience and to the heavens. And so, what else do I have to say about that…I'm sorry, this is like… I scribble my stuff… Take it down from the great life and death drama…And also, then, I think another aspect which, I've sort of said about that, part of that is seeing oneself, like that the audience sees their own experience on stage and the things that they wanna hide about experience. SO they see smaller pieces of the life. The difficulties of opening a door or the difficulties of oh, I'm suddenly, the spotlights on me and I don't know what to do, all of these very… it gets magnified, the clown magnifies these moments. They're tense in our individual lives, you know, they're not the "great drama" but they're an internal drama, and sort of magnifies that. I mean, its still the same role, in a way, but its just another layer of time slowing down, small things magnified [5:22].
M: There's a quote out of Essential Crazy Wisdom it says, "The clown falls over for us, and stands up for us too."
K: Oh yeah, that's nice.
M: I love that. Okay, was there anything [else]…?
K: Oh yeah, I guess along with that maybe I talked about this before, for me personally, one of the moments that crystallizes the story, a lot of the stuff about the clown, is when I was working with this dance company. Did I tell you that story?

Anyway, I work with this dance company, I dance with them, I take class with them, I used to teach there, I'm not IN the company but for years I've been around, and a number of years ago they were doing their season over in the Joyce Theatre and so they were in the theatre doing class and they were having a lot of problems like, someone was getting injured and there was just so much tension, they were really suffering. SO here we are in the theatre taking dance class on the stage, so all the bars are set up on the stage, and I started in the middle of class, "Oh, here's so and so doing his part, here's so and so doing this moment," and I started imitating bits of their program, and whatever, and they were laughing during class, and by the end of class, they were all sitting on the edge of the stage or down in the house, which was empty, and I was onstage by myself doing imitation of all of these different moments, and they were just laughing so hard. And I remember my friend Maria was standing there and she was like [pulls a face of someone laughing really hard, almost crying], tears running down her face, laughing so hard at this imitation of them. And there was something about, I mean, first of all, we were in this theatre but it was totally empty and it was them, they were the audience, but the rest of it was empty, and doing them for themselves, and they were going, "Do more, do more!" And they were just heaving up all of their…it had been so stressful and so tense and they were able to go, "Somebody saw me and saw a little thing I did," you know what I mean? Like, they felt like they had been struggling to, like, "We gotta get this right we gotta duh duh duh duh duh," and the choreographer – she wasn't there, actually, she wasn't there for any of this, but, they had just become like pieces of meat for her because she's like, get it done, get it done, and here comes someone who says, "Oh, I saw that funny thing you did, and this is the way you did it, and I saw that you're worried about your zipper because you start with you back to the stage so…" I'm doing this imitation of this guy Marcus and one piece he started with his back to the stage and his pants had this zipper up the back, so I pretended to check my zipper, and he was like, "How did you know? How did you know? I didn't think anyone saw that!" You know? So, the sense of being seen somehow, being mirrored and seen, which I suppose is a very psychological thing.

M: Yeah, which is…you know, on the other end of that, an example of your exquisite attention to them, too. That being able to do that kind of work requires, well, at least in that situation, required of you attention, like REAL attention to details of other people, and probably details that most of us never see. Because they don't "matter".

K: Right. Exactly. They're the thing that.. the hidden things. And I've had experience also with one of my pieces, one of my older pieces, I met somebody afterwards and she said, "Oh, I saw your piece with my sister and we loved it, duh duh duh duh duh, and my sister said…" I think it was that her sister was newly single and it was about a woman… This piece was called The Maneater and it was about a woman out on the prowl, and she said that her sister had said, "Oh my god, it feels just like that, its just like that, it feels just like that." And I don't know what exactly she meant, but she had the experience that someone had captured some of this stuff that I try to keep totally hidden and I didn't know anybody could open it up or whatever the heck it is. But its something that is not articulated or is hard to express…

M: That a clown can do.
K: Yeah.
M: I love that.
K: And I certainly… I mean, I'm trying to think of things that I've seen or, I mean it's a little bit like, I'm thinking of Julietta Messina and the Knights of Tiberia… Have you seen her? She's fantastic. But, these very complicated emotions, you know? That somehow you're like, "Oh, it all makes sense, that is that complicated emotion that's getting put together somehow." You know, she's very proud, but she's also looking ridiculous, but she's so proud, and so there's something in the dual nature or the openness, I feel like it somehow touches on things that other things don't quite get to [11:37]
M: Part of I'm getting and what Nisker talks about in his book is, it sort of makes being imperfect okay. Making human imperfection… or human…[food arrives]. Making human failing okay, or making it enjoyable. Because it's not even just that you do these impressions and you go, "Oh, that makes me feel a little bit better." It's that you do this impression, and it gives me delight.
K: Well I think that's part of the magical-ness of what clowning does, the way…I don't know. Now I'll have to think about this. The way that things arrive and make us laugh. It does that thing of making it okay or making our system, you know, the tension break up in our system. That also the way a laugh or a joke is created. There's a tension and a release. So, the content of what that is, then, can touch on –
M: The personal.
K: Yeah. Or else it's just a cheap laugh and it doesn't touch you anywhere. But we still laugh anyway because…
M: Yeah…[13:55]
K: Also, there are cultures where the clowns or the shamans are the healers…Does he talk about that? Nisker? No… He doesn't talk about Shamanism, does he…? He talks about the Holy Fools….[…] But that's the sort of sacred aspect of that work, the clown work, in certain cultures.
M: Yeah. Okay, good. Out of curiosity, do you think that that role, or what you just described, sort of sets up, okay, here's the function of the clown, do you think that changes depending on the gender of the clown? The performer?
K: Uhm, I don't think the function changes. I think the manner of carrying out the function has to be specific to that, I guess…[15:55]
M: Yeah. I feel like this is an odd question but I wanted to get it from you –
K: Yeah, I feel like there's more to say… I mean, and I guess I can choose, am I gonna make clowning just for women and for an audience of women that maybe I would do something different than if I were making it for an audience of both – I was gonna say co-ed but nobody says co-ed anymore. I keep wondering, is that okay to say that anymore? (laughing) Co-ed. But, I mean, and I think one of the things that we're doing, that I'm trying to do is, you know, we're making work in a women's environment and then putting it on stage and so we're saying here's work that's, you know, that we made amongst ourselves in terms of what interests us, or me, or whatever. And you all get to look at that, what is it, this fable, when it's made with just women. As opposed to a room of mixed men and women that make something else. And I think there is a special, you know, there's a value in that. It's just got that

– whatever, it's just sorta got that flavor or it's got that whatever, and we don't get to see that that often somehow. But the other thing I was gonna say about the function, does it change, you know… And I do think there's probably some men… some men in the audience who might say, "This doesn't apply to me," you know? Like, "You can't speak to me," essentially. You know what I mean? Like, this will not speak to me, this can't speak to me, this won't speak to me. I can imagine there would be some person who would be closed off to that. But in a sort of ideal situation, not ideal situation…theoretical situation, the way that I would clown to that person would be different than the way that I would clown to somebody else. Because that person would be resistant to what I had to say, essentially. And so, I mean, I certainly try to include, especially for my solo work, I do, I mean I think there are two things going on. Like with the troupe I'm working with, this is what this all-female group has to say, and then with my solo stuff I'm often sort of touching on that, use a guy from the audience, you know? So there's a very specific relationship to that gender sexual question. This last show that we did, my piece, which went through… had three parts. So there was the group stuff, and then my solo had three parts. So there was me sort of flirting with a guy from the audience, and then I go off stage, and I come back later and I'm looking for him and I'm pregnant. You know? (I am laughing very hard) So I mean, it's just amazing how the audience laughs. This guys has gotten caught, this drama, but of course it's totally made up by the clown. She's completely like, "Where have you been? I've been waiting for you?" And then suddenly, "Who is that next to you? Who is that? Who is that with you?" Because he's sitting with some woman in the audience. So there's something very fun for the audience to have that kind of relationship be played with also.
M: That makes sense. We've talked about that quite a bit –
K: Just remind me because I don't remember –
M: Oh –
K: Just tell me "Oh, you told me that" if I'm –
M: Oh, no – I just mean… I was thinking, "Do I really need to ask that question?" because I had a sense for what I thought you might say, but then I said, well, I'll get *your* words and not make assumptions. Okay. So, I was thinking about this – well, I'll just ask it first. Why do *you* think Clowns Ex Machina is important?
(A pause. Kendall starts to smile, I laugh) [21:19] And, I picked that word specifically, because --
K: -- I think I put a question mark next to that one [laughing]. It's like.
M: Or, maybe it's not "why do you think", maybe it's "how you think". because I do think it's important. From where I sit. That's me.
K: Well I think it's important…I think it's important because…Because I think I'm important [both of us are laughing]. No, because I think the way, what I'm interested in, and what I'm interested in doing with them, with this group, of creating a world that is filled with possibilities and riches and all coming from female experience, you know? All female possibilities. And then bringing that, inviting people to see that, and be part of that, I think it's valuable. To sort of show the glory of what is possible with women and their imagination, and their freedom and their everything. Even their – the show that we just did there was a, it was on the theme of aesthetics, so

we did this fantastic numbers with these body suits, these nude body suits with nipples on them. Did you see the pictures? [I shake my head] Oh you didn't see the pictures? So they had these nude body suits with nipples, they were fantastic looking nipples, they were really expensive, and we had so much trouble getting them on, but they looked fantastic. I mean, nudey costumes, they looked like nudey body suits. And we used them just a couple of times during the show, and – why was I bringing this up? The… women… Oh, I mean, there they are in all their glory, except they're not in all their glory, you know what I mean? You know, this sort of feeling, it was heightened in a certain way, and then, because they're not actually naked, the audience is sort of be free from some fear, or whatever, and instead be able to be with that feeling of them. So they came out once to them, and then later the whole group came out, to the audience, and was touching them a little bit. And it was really funny because, I was backstage so I could never see it, I could only hear the audience, and I would ask them how did it go, and they would say, "Oh, it went okay, it went okay," but I didn't trust that they actually knew what was happening. But, so, they go out to the audience and they're sort of touching them, and then they drift away slowly, one by one, sort of to the music, and every time always the audience would laugh when they were leaving.
[25:00] M: Laughed when they were leaving?
K: Laughed when they were leaving. You know, because, they're like, [sound of relief], or – I don't know, but they always laughed when they were leaving.
M: Release of tension, maybe?
K: I think so. I think so. And then, one of them, she had not wanted to be in it, she was like, "Oh, do I have to?" And then, just for the piece before and after, I was like, maybe you won't be in it because we're changing clothes or whatever, but then I had the idea that she comes out after in her nude-y costume, but she's shy [laughing] about it, like maybe, "Oops, I missed the number, thank god", and then she sort of got in the spotlight and went "Ahhh!" and opened up her arms and closed her eyes. So it was really really funny. And there were a couple of other things – there was someone coming by with a towel, on her way to shower. And I thought these are the many ways of women being naked, except their not. But it seems like a huge… uncomfortable. And so, it was really really interesting to me to … I don't know, I remember there is just so much room to play. There's another show happening right now by this playwright Jung Jean Lee, it's getting a lot of press right now, and her show is called Untitled Feminist Show. And there are eight dancers/performers, and they're all nude the entire show.
M: Actual nude.
K: Yeah, actual nude, the entire show. I'm like, oh that's really interesting, and they talk about how, once their all nude, and you can da-da-da-da-da, and you don't see this and that. But I sort of feel like, I don't know – that's interesting, it's sort of the same, similar idea, but I don't think they could ever reach part of what we reached, which was this very romanticized sense of beauty, you know what I mean? Like, beyond actually being naked? And so, it was very interesting.
M: That anatomically correct nude-y costumes are more comfortable and even funny. But actual nudity is, "Oh my gosh, they're naked onstage."

K: Yeah, and you have to sort of work, like, they have to make the whole show that, to get through it. And I'm sure they had to refer to it the whole time and they have to – I mean, the whole show is not about that.
M: Yeah.
[28:22] K: I mean, nudity onstage is really interesting.
M: It takes the spotlight. Nothing else is happening except the nudity.
K: Right. But I was gonna say something else about – what was the question you were asking?
M: I was asking why you think CEM is important, but this –
K: --Oh right, and there was another aspect to that.. Oh, so, at the same time in the same show, there was this moment, we called it "Done Wrong". There's a microphone and their passing it along and they're all saying these bad things that they've done, or supposedly have done [laughing], and it was so funny. I mean, I was on stage, and I had trouble keeping a straight, it was so funny. So they're talking about really bad, nasty things like, I … I stole money from my father while he was undergoing cancer treatment, stuff like that. And all in their own way, in their own, you know, I was a candy striper at the hospital and on my lunch breaks I would go to the nursery and switch the blue and pink blankets, you know? So, for us, it took a long time, getting the right tone and making up creative stuff, but on stage, here they are, showing the capacity for just sheer badness. Like, inventive, creative badness, with no moral [laughing] boundaries. And I'm like, that's also part of being a human being and I'm really glad that we can make that fun, too. That people, I mean, sometimes they're like, "Whoa, that's horrible". But I mean – how often do you hear women get the chance to just, with fun, be inventive about how bad they could be?
[30:32]M: Yeah.
K: Yeah, push their little brother down a hill, you know, or whatever it is. That's part of our human experience, we recognize it right away. But we don't do it, you know. What did somebody say? She said… [laughing]…somebody said, "I try on bathing suits without my underwear on," and the Russian woman, she's got a really deep voice, and she's so strange, and she goes, "I told my dad that my mom was talking to another guy, and… he got mad and killed her." [both of us are laughing really hard] You know? And the audience was like, laughing. But it's a great capacity.
M: That's a great word "capacity" – a capacity for what is possible. I remember that came up in the first set of interviews, with the troupe, that that's what they love about clown. That in the clown genre, anything feels possible. And I think that is an incredibly valuable experience for a woman to have. And I think it's an invaluable experience for any human being to have, but we're talking about gender and I'm focusing on women, so, I find it to be… I don't know, I think it's great. Uncommon. Maybe I'm not looking hard enough. But at this point, I think of it as an uncommon space to find for women.
K: Yeah.
M: The only other space I can think of are other groups where women meet, like support groups. I have a women's group that I meet with and we talk about things that we don't talk about in mixed groups. Why would we? They don't understand.
K: I remember a friend of mine, like, a bunch of girlfriends, we'd get together and go out on a weekend or something like that, and then, the husbands just started to say,

"What do you guys do? What do you guys talk about?" Oh, yeah, we talk about tampons the whole time, like…? What do you…? And that made sense to them –
M: -- that you talk about tampons?
K: Yeah, that we talk about tampons, or "you", is that what you think? We talk about you? Like, they had such a hard time…
M: What could women possibly have to talk about without a man around?
K: Yeah. [laughing]
M: [laughing] That's awful.
K: We learn that in school. We learn that in school, like, that's what people think. What happens when… I think the French feminists talk about that, you know? Like, it doesn't exist.
M: We just sit and stare at each other, actually. We don't talk.
K: Yeah, it's inconceivable. What is that…thing that happens if there's just women in the room, is there anyone to hear it? I don't think there's any reason… It's just ignorance, that "I can't conceive of that", sheer narcissistic ignorance. So, it's really, like… Open your mind a little bit.
M: Yeah, and I see this group as being … As fulfilling that role. Of opening people's minds…
K: To the possibilities, yeah. Or reminding them.
M: Yeah. So … Oh! How did you settle on that name?
K: It's a good thing you didn't ask how did I come up with it because I honestly can't remember…
M: I'm less interested in that and more interested in why that ended up being the name you landed on…
K: I… Well, I remember sort of discussing it with myself, and with some people, but I don't remember … I mean, I think it felt to me like, for me, it encompassed the aspect of theatre, and it encompassed also the aspect of the ancient rights of, you know, what moves things, the Deus Ex Machina, that grand sense of a theatre, or ritual, and then I sort of thought the idea of this other entity, sort of rushing on stage solving the problems, but in their own clown ways. Like, what would happen? Everything would open up in a really exciting way. And so… yeah, it's like, what if, here we have this situation on stage, or whatever, and these clowns rush in – what do we get? It seemed like it was about possibilities and new, turning over stuff.
M: And maybe not quite solving it [laughing].
K: Right. Not working it out in the same way, but sort of exploring it, or, I guess the way we talked about earlier – taking it apart in new ways, as opposed to tying it up in a predictable way.
M: That's what the clown out of the machine is.
K: Mmm-hmmm. [36:58]
M: I really like the name, I can't believe I didn't ask this sooner. Uhm, okay. So, I'm curious, what are your wildest dreams for this troupe, if you could… yeah, well, or goals. We can start with that. Goals.
K: Looking at my notes, here… Well some of this we talked about just in terms of, that hope, like influences, what that performance stuff is… but, I mean I guess back and forth between my most, like, next step goals, like: if we could just be self-sustaining, if we could just be…that. But then, my wildest dreams, that's a whole

other dimension. I think I would like the troupe to be, me and the troupe performing – like, sort of three things going: one is creating, one is performing stuff that we've been performing and touring, and one is training and creating. So sort of these different facets of the company, and just to be able to make that cycle work in a self-sustaining way. And not be just this organization but I think I see us sort of continuing to create new things and go back to the old things, and sort of keep our repertory going. Hopefully. And get more and more audience and more and more ability to show our stuff. And make it possible for the people in the company to deepen their skills, so it would just be sort of evolving in that way. And then, the other part is, sort of – sometimes I just feel like, I just want the company to just go and have a show, a long running show, so that I can go and do other things [laughs]. That's sort of the other thing, like if they would just take care of themselves then I could go off and do new stuff. But for myself as a performer I do have a lot of other goals that I have to, in other various ways…
M: Such as?
K: Well, I think I'd like to do – maybe not a "solo show", but "solo clown", and some other collaboration like musicians, and have work that is not the whole troupe, that is not always the whole troupe, and be able to perform in that way. [40:23] And, so that's a sort of –
M: Do you still train? Do you still go and do…?
K: I do, I go to acting class all the time, and I go to dance class. And I'm now taking a flamenco cante class. But I don't do – I haven't done clown training for a while because the last time I went to a workshop, which was a fine workshop, in the middle of the workshop a little voice in my head said to me, "Whatever you're looking for, Kendall, it's not here." And I said, Ohhhhhh…
M: Did you leave? [laughing]
K: No, no, I stayed [laughing] I stayed for the rest of the workshop, but I realized, like, whatever – I mean there's some, you know, I'm waiting for the teacher to tell me or push me farther or give me and I'm always disappointed because I'm always looking for – I don't even know what, I'm looking for a director, I'm looking for, to finally fell like I'm graduated? You know? I'm looking for something. And I think that's also, for me, a female problem. A female problem of somebody else please tell me that I've graduated. Somebody else please tell me that I – Oh, actually, I was going to bring it for you but I forgot – did we ever talk about this book, "Necessary Dreams"? [41:55]
M: Mmmmm… No…?
K: Oh, I've forgotten her name. It's called "Necessary Dreams: Women and Ambition"… something like that.
M: Google it.
K: Yeah. Anyway, I gave it to a bunch of people to read after it first came out, and they all came back after chapter one and were like this, "Oh my god, it's so appallingly true." Just the way a women has to work for herself, to achieve for herself, is just not acceptable. It's okay, you can be a teacher, you can work for children, you can be an assistant, you can do things for good for other people, but to just achieve is just, completely –
M: And for myself, too.

K: Well I mean, like, what are men doing it for? They're doing it for themselves! But we have to explain. We have to explain.
M: That sucks. That's true, actually.
K: She talks about it in a really clear, clear way, and that's what I mean, everybody read the first chapter and went, "Oh god…" But why did I bring that up, about…?
M: Oh, we were talking about goals.
K: Goals, yeah, and the main…
M: And I was asking if do still –
K: Oh, if I train. And I think it's a little bit related to that. Like, you know, me being my own authority, essentially, about what I need, or going out to get the help I need. In another way, and not like, [in a sugary sweet voice] "Hi, I'm here to learn from you, what do you have to show me because I'm an empty vessel", instead of another way of being a professional, getting new skills, or people helping me… I don't even know what to… You know what I mean?
M: Yup, I do know what you mean. I'm actually struggling with that right now.
K: Oh, really?
M: Thinking about graduating, you know, and I wanna… I wanna have a group and I wanna do improv and comedy and physical comedy, and… I keep thinking, "Well, I need more training." [laughing a little] I need more training because that will legitimize my status and it will make people want to come and train with me. If I train with – you know what I mean? Like, I need to train with someone who's name people know, because then I won't just be this little nobody who's just self-proclaimed… The thing is, I've taught workshops, at school, and people love them, I get good feedback, and then I go home and I think, "Ah, if only I could do that."
K: Why wait?
M: What am I waiting for?
K: Absolutely. And I remember, I was, same sort of discussion, about this, and I was saying to David Shiner, actually, "Oh, one of the women, she wants me to start a school, she wants me to start a school," and he says, "Well, if you're gonna start a school, you need a name," like a name person, and I was like, "What's wrong with my name?" [I laugh at this] I'm like, that's the bigger point – what's wrong with my name? [she starts laughing]
M: What did he say?
K: Oh he was just like, yeah, you're right. [45:51] Well I mean, it's like, it was exactly what I was saying.
M: Oh boy… These things. These things that are sort of, just, burned in there.
K: They're in there, yeah. That's when I'm like, let's turn these over, let's turn these out. So goals, yeah…
M: I had a question about what you hope the women in your troupe are learning, we talked about that a little bit…
K: Are you gonna skip question 5 or do you want to come back to it?
M: OH! Oh…. Are you more –
K: We don't have to go in order, but…
M: Yeah, no – process versus product, that is a point of curiosity for me because people talk about it's for the audience, it's all for them.

K: Well, I think I'm pretty balanced in that sense, because I don't want to just be in the studio all the time, but if you don't spend the time in the process then what you're putting on stage is not a living, breathing thing. But also, when we get onstage, everything shifts and I'm always tinkering and fixing and learning. Especially if I'm doing something with the audience like, this last show I used an audience member and I was like, "I have no idea if this is gonna work. I have no idea." So I learned every day, oh, I gotta do that or oh, that was a big mistake, I'd better not do that again. [47:34] So you know, it's always in process in performance as well. But I definitely feel like it comes – there's a stage when we can't be in the studio any longer. We need to have a set, we need to have lights, we need to have audience feedback. We need to not just be going around our circuit. We need to open the circuit up and it's gonna change some.
M: What made me think of that question, actually, was listening to the first interview, with you –
K: Yeah.
M: And you mention finding that right moment to, okay, this is it. We've played with this and we've opened it up as much as we can, so this is what we have. I'm gonna call it, you know? And move on. Where is that moment, and how do you tell? If you don't want to cut off the creative process to early? But then, you can't stay I in the studio forever…?
K: Yeah, there's definitely like, I mean, for me… Especially because the audience definitely adds a factor. The audience and, especially this last show that we did, the lights – like, there were problems where we went into the theatre and I was like, "I don't know what to do here, I don't know what to do here…"
M: With the technical…?
K: No, just, I was like, I don't know how I'm going to solve this problem. [49:02] You know, I don't know how to – or like, in my piece, I don't know how to get off stage, I don't know how to do this. And then, the lights suddenly – oh, she's gonna do this thing and then she's gonna put a light on the door, and so suddenly there is more happening and there's more input, and so the technical stuff solved… And there was a whole other piece, I was like, I don't even know what I'm going to do about this third time that I come on stage, I, something, maybe I'll come over the thing and I don't know when are we gonna rehearse this. I mean, really like I don't know what the hell I'm gonna do. And I get into the space and the set designer has made the set and he said, "Oh, and I made so that somebody could come through and poke their head out this thing," and I was like, "Me! That's me! That's me!" [laughing] Solves my problem, you know? And that's beautiful, creative collaboration, when things are coming together and like, oh my god, solves themselves, it's not all me having to figure out. There are other elements at work. Thank god. But really it was that he goes "Somebody could come through" and I thought that would be me! That would be me! I didn't know what I was gonna do. That's my door! So, it's also part of the process, that part. And then all the learning and performance and all the discoveries and the energy shifts so much with people… God, that wine. That wine is really fragrant.
M: Can I get that water? Oh thanks.

K: I'll take some too. Thanks. [pause] Wow, what is that wine? It's like… Oooh, look at that… What are those?.... Can I get some more tea? Thank you.
M: Oh, that looks good.
K: I don't know if it's a little bit of quail or… but it looks like a little castolette… Where's the menu? God, that is like, knock-out wine. It must be, like, fortified… [we are both laughing]
M: It's making my eyes water.
K: I know! It's like, I'm getting drunk over here just from the smell…
[both laughing very hard now]
M: We're gonna smell like that now.
K: I've never smelled a wine like that. I mean, it smells nice but… It's almost like it's heated up or something. Enough of that. Product versus process.
[52:31]
M: In my mind that leads into the next into the next question which is: do you have things… what are some things that you are hoping the women in your troupe take away from their experience? Or discover? Is there anything specific, I mean –
K: [laughing] I'm just hoping they'll get on stage and be funny. And don't mess it up. [laughing]. That they show up.
M: [laughing] We talked about that a little bit, that learning what it feels like to be in a stage where there is endless possibility.
K: Yeah, I mean, for me it's extremely rewarding to work so closely with [these women] and watch that mental… every day, step farther and farther. What they want, they want to open up and how to help them do that. And how to help them step through their own stuff and step into their best creative freest selves. You know? And it's a challenging role for me to be in, to balance that. I think I used to be like, "I know you can do it!" and "It's just the right challenge for you!" And then I think I got tired and I was like [I laugh here at the look on her face], I was disappointed sometimes, you know? And frustrated, and then going, "Please, just do what you can." [laughing] Or, if that's all you can do, try not … just try to at least hit the marks.
M: Kind of lower… lower the –
K: -- Well, I mean, I was tired and frustrated, and discouraged, I guess. And it's also a challenge for me because not everybody's me, not everybody wants what they think they want. They may say they want, and they don't, or they have their own blocks or whatever, and there comes a point when I'm like, "Is it my job to deal with everybody's blocks?" Is it my job… How much can I take?
M: And that's a good question, like: how much are you even capable of [taking on]?
K: Yeah, that – terrific, thank you – you know, the teacher role as opposed – I mean, they're similar, teacher role, director role. But I mean, teacher, you know, teaching, you gotta be very open-minded. And then being a director I have to be like, "I'm sorry, I can't be… you know, get it done. Get it done." You know? We can't wait for you. Or, I'm gonna take the part away from you, or whatever the heck it is. But that's the practicalities and me and my boundaries [laughs]. But I do a lot of work, I mean I have to do a lot of work on that stuff. And figuring out how to negotiate that and how not be pulled into stuff that I don't want to get pulled into… But anyway, but really what I hope for people is, yeah, that they are growing and learning and … I

was actually really proud, we had some, a couple of talk backs after this last show, and I was so tired. I was really like, had worked so hard, so I said to them, "You know, what I would really like is if I could just be the moderator and you guys talk." And they were so fantastic. I mean, they were so articulate and so – you know, talked about the experience and talked about the process and in a very clear way to the audience. And I was like, aw, this is great. Everybody's together. They got it together. We're on the same page. So that feels really really nice, that whole group aspect. The group really working together, the group really supporting one another. And I know, I mean, I think there is – I'm just saying backstage during the show – there's something really nice about that – 'cuz we had a lot of costume changes, it was crazy back there – and the sense of, like, working together, and the backstage choreography and everything… That's just a really nice feeling, I really like this. We're laughing – you know, people are laughing about what's happening on stage. You know? We can't even hear it, but when so-and-so says that we laugh, it's just funny. And happy for each other. Stuff like that. So, that supportiveness feels really good. Yeah, I don't know… I sort of thought, do I think people are gonna go off and teach clown, or they're gonna go an create/direct. Some people are doing their own stuff, some people who have been in the troupe before. Actually… I probably shouldn't say this, but… Some of them are doing their own stuff, and I went to see their show, and I was a little disappointed…
M: You – Ohhhhhh. Oh.
K: And not that I didn't – and for this reason. They're good performers, they're interesting writers, but like, I felt like they were less than – you know what I mean?
M: They compromised –
K: Like, yeah, they were a little more cute – it was smaller. And I was like, okay. Well, okay. Maybe they're not interested in what I'm interested in. Being that, you're full sacred self on stage. Maybe they're just not interested in that. But I was a little disappointed. Because I was like –
M: Or, it – maybe that is also part of you're influence. You know – to, well, not "require" it but –
K: Yeah, insist on it.
M: To insist on it, yeah.
K: Yeah, this is the size of what we're gonna do.
M: Like you were saying, don't be small, no more small. Be big. And then when there's not that voice there saying, "Don't be small, don't' be small", it maybe is easy to revert back to oh, this is what's comfortable, this what I know,
K: It's clever, it's funny, it's –
M: -- not risky…yeah. [1:00:14]
K: Or, you know, there are other risks, or whatever. But it sort of made me think, oh, are they not interested in what I'm doing? Or, did I not impart that? Or, they're going a different direction or whatever. You know, but it was just me personally in terms of what I want to give people, it made me think about it. I think I would… I don't know.
M: Yeah. Yeah, who knows?
K: You know? I mean maybe that was – maybe I was struggling with them the whole to be that because they didn't want to, you know? Or … It's hard. Actually

there's somebody [currently in the troupe]… same thing. I mean I'm like, does it not make sense to people? Like it makes sense to me and it doesn't make sense to them? Or if they can't re-capture it.
M: I wonder if it's that, it's either a matter, a question of having the courage – the permission. Right? Because you give them permission. You're there, you are the presence reminding them to be their full, sacred selves and then when you're not there…
K: They just forget it.
M: That's sort of sad.
K: It is! It is sort of sad, but I was just talking about this with somebody today, about – do you know, I don't know if it's come out there yet but Ben Linder's 3-D film "Pina"? About Pina Bausch?
M: Mmmmmm, [no].
K: You know who she is?
M: Mm-hmm.
K: Have you seen her stuff?
M: I believe I saw a clip [laughing], a YouTube clip.
K: Anyway, her work is fantastic, amazing, mind-blowing stuff. And the film is fantastic, it's in 3-D… But, and it's really nice to see dance on film in 3-D… [1:02:37] The dancers, I mean, and I remember when I saw them in performance last time, I just really notice when they walk on stage, they are their … you know, their sense of time, it's timeless, sacred space in that sense. When they walk into space, they're coming from – you know what I mean? And so, you know, it's a way a company trains, it takes a lot of expectation to say that's the way you wanna be on stage and that's the way that I train to be on stage. Actually my friend – I don't know, maybe this doesn't make sense if you haven't seen her work but my friend Michael who's a fantastic dancer, and works at the company where I was talking about before, and we train pretty deeply. Really sort of meditatively, it's high energy but we really, you've really got to investigate your own body so there's a lot of individual deep work really to know what you're doing organically and everything like that, real mastery. And so Michael, who's a fantastic dancer, he'd gone – he auditioned for "Pina" and he was living in New York at the time and then he went to the company, he went to take class because he was in town at the time, and they said oh, yeah, come take class with us or whatever, and he said – they're taking regular ballet class or whatever, and he's doing his thing, and he's like, "I know how to" – you know – "I know what it is to [work the bar]", and he said to me, "Kendall, I don't know what they were doing." [laughing] You know, they would be like, do a tendu and then, you know, something – [laughing] and whatever, and he was like, "I felt like such a fool", he was just la-da-da-da-da, I don't know what they were working on, I don't know what they were working on. Way beyond what [laughing]. It was really interesting. I know, the way he told the story it was really funny, he was like [imitates him being confused at the bar in the class]. So, yeah, about what would people would take away. And you know, I mean, that's just a… I'm sort of at this place where I'm like, I don't know what to…
M: Well that's a good place to be, too.
K: Yeah.

M: I was, uhm… You know, it occurred to me when I was thinking of this question, I thought, well you know maybe she doesn't… It's not that you don't care but maybe it doesn't really matter –
K: Well, I sort of have to say that I can't care. You know what I mean? I have to come to be this way, of just like, folks gotta be on board, they gotta be on board with me for the time that they are with me, and then they'll take away what they take away. I mean I don't have any need to be creating a school of thought, or –
M: --Yeah, and I don't get that sense from you.
K: Or pedagogy. Or my way of doing things is a better way, a better new way. Actually I was reading somebody was teaching clown and his – he's got some new special way that he teaches that is the 'best' way –
M: Oh really? [laughing] Do you remember his name?
K: I think it was [can't understand the name], I don't know, I can look it up. I can look, send me an email –
M: Okay – [1:06:37] I'd be very curious to find out what he think is…
K: I don't know, maybe some technical… or technique or something… I don't know. Every good teacher I've seen, is a good teacher. I mean, they are a good teacher, they know their stuff, and they know how to teach. And if it's a good school its because their teachers had to be good teachers, pick good teachers, and people who are using all of their knowledge and all fo their intuition and all of their, you know…
M: Yeah, and that's… Yes, and not all good performers make good teachers [laughing]. I'm surprised by how often the assumption that a person who is skilled and talented at performing can then turn around and translate that to teaching.
K: Oh yeah, I would never assume that a good performer would be a good teacher.
M: And I mean, it's possible…
K: Absolutely. I've known teachers who weren't great performers, too, and I've known, one of my dance teachers was a phenomenal, out of this world performer…
M: Okay, we already talked about… I wrote down this question, why do you think it is that people find such joy in being reminded of their vulnerability?
K: Oh, I used to have this quote on my bathroom wall about Vincent van Gough, something about why do we, why are we so filled… whatever the heck it was, you know, why are we so filled with fear knowing when we see a painting of his that is so full of the vulnerability of life, you know? But, uhm, I mean I guess it's one of those paradox things, you know, why are we so filled with joy? I think it's because you know, we're not alone, and I mean, we don't laugh when we see vulnerability that's presented as tragedy, we're filled with feeling and compassion and, yeah – empathy [1:10:02] and something like that. So, but the resilience of the clown that they can be so vulnerable and bounce back, I think that's very life affirming and profound in a lot of way.
M: That's a good – life affirming. I like that, that's a good was of putting it.
K: And thinking about, you know, the vulnerability of Charlie Chaplin, The Kid, the film, where he's got that kid, and it's so sentimental, and so just [laughing] horribly sentimental but you can't, like, it's really affecting. And heart opening and all that. I mean, I think that's a good feeling, when the heart opens and things are shared in that way. And I think the clown has a potential way of relating to the audience that you're… you know, that you share and have a real empathy and a relationship in a

very direct way. You know, they're very open with you in the way that a child is open, it's easy to feel what they're feeling and it's very easy to know what they're feeling, so its really…the chord is really direct, of relating. And, I mean it's an interesting question, because I think about that sometimes like, you know, what affects… I guess I think about it more like, I go to therapy or I go to cranio-sacral, which is another kind of physical therapy, body therapy, and so these people know about my life, it detail. But there are moments when I say something really in anguish, or, you know what I mean? I mean, I say something that I don't even know what it is and I can see that they're actually personally affected. And it's not like I'm having some dramatic moment but there's some it touches them in some way, or my vulnerability touches them in some way. And there's a part of me that goes, oh, this person hears all this stuff and yet there's something about the energy right now between us that is making our eyes fill up with tears or something like that. And so, what is that? What is that? SO I guess it is like the clown is connected… they have that ability or they're on that wavelength that people, it's easy to be in tune with them. They're so honest about, they're so open about everything that's going on with them that you fall, like you understand the sequence in where they are…
M: There's not an agenda going on there either, they don't have a…
K: Yeah, they're not interpreting their experience for you, it seems.
M: It seems.
K: You know, they're just having it. They're just having it.
M: For no other reason than to have that experience with you, too. That idea that the experience is enough, this is what's happening right now, and there doesn't need to be a reason for it.
K: Yeah, we're walking across the room in our too tight skirt and it's troublesome. And we have all the time in the world to take care of the problem or try to fix it in 20 ways and that becomes the whole world. The whole situation. Time slows down. Everything slows down, even though the clown may be moving very fast.
M: I honestly coming over her, I was like, I don't really have any questions formed in relation to this book, but I thought… So, I loved the idea of crazy wisdom. Really, really yummy to me. And he talks a lot about, mentions over and over again this idea of stopping thinking. Getting away from that incessant monkey mind. Stopping thinking, arresting thought, and sort of stepping outside of that driving time driven existence. And I thought, well that is the experience that I have when I participate in clown. And watching a video, it doesn't translate I don't think, in the same way. But I can imagine that that's what it would be like to watch clown. So I guess I wondered, do you think of clowning as a meditative act or as a way of sort of slowing things down even to a screeching halt? Or to stop that compulsive generation of thought that all of us sort of suffer from?
K: Yeah, I mean, I'm trying to figure out how I nowadays think about it. But, yeah, I try to think about everything in life as a meditative act [laughing] the possibility for that. But, and… I certainly feel like the place, I guess I would say creating a play space or a meditative space definitely has a different quality than a thinking space or analytical , you know, a play space that possibilities, you know, they open in different directions. They're not what we already know and what we've already formed. It's creative solutions, creative space, new ideas. And you know, turning off

expectations, turning off sort of the known outcome or what I think it ought to be or how I think this is gonna go or something like that. Like, I mean it's important and of course, any performance, music, dance, whatever – you may have a very rigid structure but once you are performing it, you're hopefully in that space that is still a creative space, you know, you're still in the flow of the moment and you're aware and attentive and changing things according to what's happening in that moment. You know, whether it s the phrasing of a line in a song or, you know, with dance it's always a tightrope walk where you know the thing inside and out but you have to have your balance and your awareness at every single second. [1:19:01] Then of course phrasing changes and all that sort of stuff. SO anyone who's trying to do the same thing over and over again is an idiot [laughs] as far as I'm concerned. Doesn't get what it's about. But, so I think that clowning for me is just more that, of giving the impression – I mean me as a performer, I am giving the impression that this is complete improvisation, and I know exactly what I'm doing. But the feeling that I'm there and it's open and spontaneous is a little bit about how I'm present with the audience in the here and now. SO you know, people will tell me, "You come on stage, Kendall, and it's like anything is gonna happen", you don't know what's gonna happen. And that's – I know exactly what's gonna happen. So, and I'm trying to make sure that it happens, so it's a little bit about just being able to retain that energy of it seems timing of it, sensing the timing, sensing the what's happening, what needs to happen, the music or the…But I think there was something…you asked me about it terms of … what was the question again?

M: I guess I'm sort of chewing on this idea of how meditation and all that relates to clown work.

K: Well there's definitely a kind of a, and I mean we'll talk about it in the workshop, but a kind of a clown psychology. [1:21:01] A way the clown thinks. You know? Is quite different than the way – like, problem-solving for a clown. It's not like the clown is too stupid to figure it out, they actually, you know they actually have lots of solutions but they're just not the solutions we normally use. You know? I'll go under that thing in a squiggly way because that makes sense to me, that seems like the right thing to do, or trying to think of a good… I don't know, I Love Lucy, filling the chocolates in her blouse, like she's solving the problem of what to do with it. That's not the greatest, that's not the greatest…

M: I've actually, there's an example in here [Nisker's book] of a, sort of a hypothetical Zen master and a Jester start arguing, and then a bunch of people start getting involved in the argument, and to solve the problem the clowns begin to introduce them to one another, like that's their way of solving the problem.

K: Oh, you're disagreeing, maybe it's… [laughing]

M: Maybe it's because you haven't met each other yet! That must be what is wrong.

K: yeah yeah, that – there's definitely a different way of thinking, like I mean, I would say to people, oh, you have a clown problem, and you solved it too fast. You know. You're hat fell on the floor and you picked it up. That's not the clown way of solving, dealing with the problem. It's a much bigger problem, you know? Needs a much more creative, creativity to deal with, is it embarrassing? You know, it's, it's ruined the act [I'm laughing], my hat fell on the floor, what are we gonna do? You

can't just ignore it, you know what I mean? You have to deal with it in a whole other clown way than just picking it up or kicking it away.
M: That defies logic.
K: yeah, what we say, what we, what we would say, well that's really sort of inconsequential that the hat fell off because what I'm really doing is singing a song. Whereas for the clown, there's the song, and there's the hat, and what are we gonna do? Dilemma! And you're able to stop time. You're able to say, okay [gestures hands up, like "wait a moment] until we can get this figured out, and then, whatever. So time doesn't have to pace along in the same way for a clown, it can follow all kinds of things. And so then, making a clown show is not a straight line, it's starts over here, and then it might end up some place and not be about the song in the end at all. So that's a lot of artistic choices to make. How to take that path.
M: [laughing] That's good. [1:24:24]
K: And there's also – I mean, I have to say, once we get in that play state, people are amazingly inventive and sometimes things come out of people that we're all like, where'd that come from? They're even like, where did that come from? Just there's a great wealth of stuff that can come up when you …
M: yeah, and that's what I got from reading this, and also there's that idea of the empty space, making room for creativity. There seems to be – oh, I'm not gonna say adversarial relationship between creativity and, obviously they need each other, but …
K: They have their own time and place, like, now's the time to just put a lot of stuff on the table and later is the time to make some choices about it.
M: And also, being a slave to my thoughts, or being aware of them and therefore able to pick and choose. I can't count the number of times I make up a story in my head and then it becomes absolutely true. It's absolutely true, that person didn't call me because they hate me, or something, right? And then I see them later and I'm like, "Hey," [gloomy], because I've been arguing with them in my head all day, and then they say, "Oh hello, I'm sorry, I was in the hospital" or something. It has nothing to do with me, but I just made this thing up in my head, oh, it must be, they must not like me any more, I must have made them mad.
K: Right, I think there's that level of our stories we tell, and then I think once you go beyond that, like a great wise person or who meditates a lot, would be able to know, exactly that that person hates me, they would know that person is angry at me, because they would know. And so then they live their life in a different way when they see that person again. So they don't have the illusion, you know, like the difference between the illusions and the story, but they still are thinking things, they still know things and they still think things, but they have a sense of what is true and what is not [1:27:02].
M: And that's the… yeah.
K: Takes work [smiling]
M: I was curious… You talked about, you described your experience training with Philippe Gualier and David Shiner, and some of things they didn't, you know, when it started to not jive and you realized, okay, I have to try to do something different. But I was wondering if there's anything you find you have in common with their sort of ethic, or –

K: Oh yeah. I definitely took stuff away. I mean, I learned a lot from both of them, and they were sort of at different ends of the… I mean, I sort of put them in two different places, which was good, to, their approaches came out in different ways, so I sort of take that [?]. Certainly, I mean I take a lot of Philippe's exercises, actually, which I then teach my way, but as a basic, as a basic sort of teaching tool or whatever, they're good stuff. But, uhm… I mean, first of all, Philippe also talks about *Bouffant*, and stuff like that – did we talk about *bouffant*? So he talks about that, which I think it's a Lecoq idea, that a woman is the first *bouffant*, and so some of those ideas I found really interesting, for my work, but in terms of other stuff, from Philippe a lot of ideas about complicity, and…. I mean, actually I learned a lot about physical theatre from him because that was my first encounter with sort of the dynamics of the stage, you know, sort of seeing it in a whole different way than American acting sort of stuff, so I learned a lot of sort of stuff, a LOT from him. But in terms of clowning he also talks a lot about the, uhm, the feeling of the "bad student". You know, coming on stage with a certain vulnerability and that sense of am I gonna get thrown off stage or, you know, that sensitivity. I learned a lot from him about the role of the authority figure, whether it was the teacher or the audience. So that was stuff I then had to sort of figure out for myself, but I got a really clear sense of that piece of it. That relationship to the audience. And then also he talks about, you know, everybody – he flattens everybody, basically, he flattens you all down to nothing, so I really learned a lot about everybody's individual ways of being stupid/funny, their all their charms, there was no one particular way to do it. You know, somebody might be funny when they're super boring, somebody might be funny when they're aggressive, somebody might be funny when they're very active, somebody might be funny when they're very still. You know, so, that sense that there are as many ways to be a clown and as many charms of being a clown as there are people, you know. You have to find what that is. And seeing the possibility of how stupid people can be [laughing], because he was such a strong teacher! You know there are tons of people, they are so lost on stage, perfectly intelligent people are up there like [dopey face and voice], and they're not acting, they're –

M: Genuinely just –

K: -- completely lost. [Both laughing hard]. And don't get it and ready to cry, and we're all laughing our heads off. [1:31:26] So, you know, that, he's strong, strong teacher. And you know, just wrestled that off people in a fantastic way. I might have told you this before. A few years ago, I hadn't studied with him, I hadn't been in his class for a number of years but then he was here and so I went to visit and went to just sit in on class one day, and it was really interesting for me to see that, people – they were doing an exercise where they had to come on stage and do whatever the heck they had to do, and they would come on stage and just walk, BANG, right into their own wall. Their own wall. And they would walk, BANG. And then they would start doing something, and he would say, "What are you doing?" And they would get all upset, and like, "I'm just trying to do this, that or the other thing," and I realized, wow, it's really just, you know, people walk into their own shit, they walk into their own shit and they think, they think –

M: They think he made them do it?

K: They think he made them do it! And I was just like, wow, it's… he's a powerful reveler of the wall. He's like, "What are you doing?" and they're like, "What? Well, I'm trying to do the exercise", and I'm like, no you're not. You're jumping around like, you totally… But, so that's a lot of what I learned from him. And also the humor – whatever, these are like teaching things, but constant ability to have humor about I mean, big subjects, horrible things, his view of the world, his vision of beauty, you know, to create something really powerful on stage. I mean, I do it now to, he'd scream at someone, "You destroyed it!" And to see, like, oh yeah, you have to be that still sometimes, and to insist, don't destroy that, even if people, they don't get it, they're just doing what he said, but we're in the audience going, [makes heavenly choir singing noise], you know. Sort of like, even if you don't get it onstage please don't move, because, something great is happening.
M: Right: you don't have to have a moment. We have to have a moment.
K: Exactly. So, let's see… what else I learned from him. Well that's a good amount. And then from David I learned, or I took away a lot of the more shamanic stuff, sort of about being in the middle of the group and the clown mirroring people. And the sense of, how do I say, the sense of my having to be, you know there's something about Philippe's work that you get very lost, I'm stupid and I don't know who I don't know what I'm supposed to be. But David's work was very much about like, getting really powerful in one's self and knowing, what do I have to say, who am I on stage in a certain way, and how can I be in front of the audience. He's a street performer, you know? So he, that sense of feeling an ownership and a power on stage as opposed to the authority figure situation it was more like, I'm here on the stage –
M: Where the performer becomes the authority figure?
K: Well, you don't, in a sense, as the clown, but you need to have a sense of, because the you have to put the authority somewhere, for clowning, but the sense of self, like that I have to express something about me, what is it that I want to express about me? [1:36:20] On stage, what do I have to say, who am I, that that's what I need to bring to my clowning, that I need to create my character that I have to … Like he would always talk about, what do you have to say? What are you trying to say? That sense of voice, in a way. But he also actually, I was thinking about it before, because it was something we were saying, I mean, when I first took class with him and I showed a piece that I was working on, and I remember, he was sort of like, he sort of came and took some prop and threw it down and stripped something off like, get rid of this and get rid of this, and he was like, it's to small, he was like, it was too small, he was like, you have to, like, the whole world – I think I was doing Shakespeare a thing with Romeo and Juliet, and he said you need to do Shakespeare, and I was like, Oh, you know, suddenly I could bring my actor self into it, and I do have that power as an actor, and I suddenly understood about the size of it. You know, it's not small, it's not a stage like this big, oh you mean its not like this and was like, oh, oh, and I realized I'm not, my – I think that's what I was saying about the self, you know, my size as a female being, my biggest dreams, my biggest aspirations, to put those on stage and have people laugh. Because then, you know, then you're talking clown. Then you're talking clown. And so that I really liked a lot from him, about not… just, bigger, bigger, more personal, uhm, you know, plus a lot of, you know, I got a lot of

stuff about timing and rhythm and [can't understand what she says, crowd noise is too loud]. No, he's a great improviser, I mean he's like a master, in –
M: He was a street performer, right?
K: He was a street performer, yes, but I mean, he's like, the rhythm and timing stuff, in terms of improvising, like he is like a jazz musician, he just knows how to create out of whatever. I have to rehearse, to be able to compose something, to be able to put it on stage. But he really can I mean he has to rehearse also to create stuff, but that sense of it, he's really able to put it together in that way. And so what else…there was something else I was going to say about what I … yeah, a lot, I mean, also a lot about heart opening and being really open, you know, in another way, and bold, and a certain vitality, you know what I mean? I mean, Philippe also brought a lot of play and a lot of energy and a lot of vitality, but David I learned something, I learned sort of in another way about, about that, what that was, I guess. But then, what else about clown… I did learn a lot from him, because I was also working with him and directing and stuff like that, so I just learned a lot of composition, about making and building a clown. What's important, I saw a lot of, you know, I mean, the difference between that and that.
M: Yeah, I can imagine, having had two different experiences, I mean not wholly different, but just different stylistically.
K: Yes, different stylistically, and very much I mean from both of them it was, I was absorbing a lot. Like a sponge. Major sponginess. Spongeness. Major sponginess. And years later going, you know, I saw that thing, and now I get what that thing was about. But I also, you know, working with David, I realized how much my intuitiveness, I mean I realized my talents as a clown, basically, I was like, Oh, I get this, you know? I really get this. So to open up to that intuitive part in me that knows that and not that, and so, and trusting that. Are…are you okay?
M: My contact is really dry, so I think I'm trying not to spaz out.
K: Do you need to put a drop in or something?
M: No, I don't have any with me. That actually is –
K: Oh, I wrote, "My best shot". That's what David would tell me. Give it your best shot. Best shot.
M: Yeah. So, that's what I've got.
K: Was there more about the book or we talked about –
M: Uhm, that, I – come to realize that the book, the book will help take some of the theory that I'm reading and make it more, I feel like this is a nice kind of glue between, this is comedic, this is comic theory, or this is theory about clown, and then there's you and your group which is practical application, and then this is kind of a good connective tissue between the two. I find there's a gap generally between theory and how it's actually used. But really, I love hearing you talk about clown… I don't know, it just clicks, it just makes sense, so I don't have that much [crowd noise] that you suggested. I feel like it's kind of been this missing link that I didn't have before, like, how am I gonna… like, it has to be a thesis, like I can't just write a paper about Clowns Ex Machina, like there has to be a research question [crowd noise] can talk about why I think, this is why I think this group is specifically important [crowd noise] Not just because it's a group of all women, but because [crowd noise] [1:44:33]

K: Yeah definitely, definitely interesting stuff.
M: yeah.
K: Definitely, I was just thinking about the trickster, I don't think he talks that much about the trickster –
M: A little bit, he talks about the clown and the jester and the trickster and the fool, Coyote –
K: But I was talking to somebody about the trickster and shamanism and this and that, and the, you know, the element of topsy turvey-ness that the trickster brings and new solutions and unexpectedness, and in that way that's a little bit demonic almost. That I think is also an interesting piece of the puzzle. Like, clowns are not always happy, birthday party, there's a piece of devilry, there can be a piece of devilry in there too. To touch on that.
M: It's not all benign, yeah. I think he talks about that with the jester, too, the skewering –
K: yeah, the jester, always looking for –
M: And has a really close relationship to government and power and religion, yeah. That's his food, or her material.
K: I mean, it's so important, its important… I mean, it's interesting. There's just so much of that, we have such great jesters now, John Stuart, I don't watch Steven Colbert that much, but –
M: It's pretty much the same, I mean it's not… the same exact thing, but the same idea. His is very sarcastic. Just that sort of, not sarcasm, just dry, parody.
K: Yeah, parody. I mean there's some funny, on John Stuart's show, I don't like Samantha B so much – do you watch the show? She's okay, whatever. She's a little too – I don't know, she doesn't do it for me. But sometimes there's this woman on, she's really sort of stupid, you know?
M: Does she have brown hair?
K: Yeah and she's got big goggly eyes. And it's an old classic Gracie Allen, kind of really dumb, really don't know but they say these funny things, and I'm like, she's funny, she says funny things, she goes really far. With her sort of expert that's not an expert. You know? [1:47:59] And she goes very far. Let's see, we were talking about… who's been in the newest, we were talking about some woman comedian in the news, does she go too far?
M: Oh, I don't know! A comedian.
K: I'm trying to think…
M: Was it Sarah Silverman?
K: Well it wasn't Sarah Silverman, it was somebody … it's all new or whatever. But I think it was somebody… Oh I don't know. Because I don't watch that many movies. Or maybe she's got a tv show now, or something. I don't know. But I'd like to see more super-parody stuff [1:49:23]

Phone Interview – 5/15/2012
12:00pm – 12:45pm

Interview with Kendall – part 3

K: Hello?
M: Hi Kendall!
K: Hi, how are you?
M: I'm good, how are you?
K: I'm pretty good. I'm just getting over a cold, so I might cough.
M: Oh, oh… I don't know… I don't know if I can handle that.
K: Well it's pretty, it's that stage where it's a deep cough thing.
M: Yeah, the real throat-y.
K: Yeah.
M: Yeah. I actually am just now kind of coming out of something. I'm not sure though if it's an illness or allergies 'cuz, man, something happened here and all the trees exploded and I started waking up really congested and headache-y.
K: Oh yeah.
M: So, I feel your pain. SO I have to tell you I have you on speaker, and I am recording this, so can you give me your verbal consent that you're okay with that.
K: Yes, I'm okay for you to record this phone conversation for the purposes of your research on your thesis and that it will not be disseminated in any other public way. [I start laughing]. That maybe after my death, for some archival interest.
M: Good, perfect [laughing]. Well, so, I did get, I got on your website and looked… But I don't know… I see a few pictures, it looks like they're kind of spread throughout the site, of Full Tilt, and they're beautiful pictures, by the way –
K: -- Thank you –
M: -- and I do see the one with the nudey suits, that's nice. Are there any, I mean, is that, I'm in the right
K: Oh yeah, just sort of spread out, I just wanted to point you to some of those images and also to the reviews and the stuff about the most recent show because I thought it would maybe just give you a little bit of an impression of it, I guess. And I couldn't remember what we had talked about before, so I just was like, I don't remember where we were with it, so just go head and –
M: Yeah, so you mentioned, the last time we talked, you mentioned that this particular show – I think the question started out with me asking you how do you think of prompts for the generation of material and you used this as kind of an example saying that at first you had it in mind to explore notions of beauty in 2-dimention, and then as you worked the troupe sort of started – well, the work sort of started to reveal connections between beauty and constraint.
K: Yeah, I think the original idea, it wasn't even beauty, it was just representation of women in 2-D. And then the issues about beauty came up very quickly. And you know [3:59] it was art, you know, we were looking at two-dimensional artistic representations, fine art representations, and then we were also looking at commercials, and weren't just looking at beauty commercials at first but it sort of honed in on that in a lot of ways, for certain aspects. Okay, and then I said… subject

of constraint… Oh yeah, so, I think that was also one of my original ideas was what happens when you try to make something two-dimensional that's not, you know, you flatten it out, an image of a woman or a sort of for a commercial is sort of very ready-stereotypes and things like that. And so we could feel very quickly that sense of being stuck in something, you know what I mean? Stuck in some constrained area and which could be very good for an artist and also generated… I guess it was sort of that sense of… I wish I could remember more specifically, maybe I should think a little more [I laugh] about that. It was some sort of amorphous feeling of having to be a certain way, as opposed to the clown just coming out and being on stage, this sense of I have to try, to be like this art object, or I have to fit in something, then of course the flip side it's the breaking out, freedom, and prison stuff. So these are just the things that were floating around in the air that we played with, and I brought in a lot of prison music and chain gang stuff. So it was really just in all of the stuff that we were creating. The pieces that came up. I think we were also… We worked with some video for some children's games, and I think this one another one of these, my inspiration times, you know? I was like, oh, let's focus on children's games or something.

M: Like X-box video games, or…?

K: No no no, like old fashioned children's games, you know skipping games. So we were… I think maybe… what was I trying to get at? I don't know what was in my mind, I don't know what we discussed either [I laugh]. You know, [6:58] something about sort of like kid's games and they have these rules, but also this sense of before you have any of those impressions about art or commercials, or a very free playground sense, you know? But we were looking at videos of some old British kids playing and they were these really weird videos where it was sort of post-World War II and it was humbling Playgrounds and fences with shadows, and the kids are crawling through the fences. You know, so I was like, that's right, the school yard, it's like a prison [laughter], like when you go to school that prison aspect SO somehow all of this made sense in terms of, like, a civilizing aspect of going to school and the institution of these buildings with th big fences and games. So it was just this sort of this piece of the metaphorical work. Maybe you could see it a little bit in the pictures, the set constructed had that and we had some very dark lighting with the shadows and the fences.

M: And that's a real, that's really interesting actually that image of children playing in a post-war, sort of the wreckage, like playing in the wreckage, being playful amidst the constraints.

K: Yeah, exactly, the life that springs up and the sort of destroyed civilization place or what appears to be destroyed civilization. So that was sort of what we were going for and I think we did pretty well with, actually, in the set and also in some of the scenes and transitions. And then also, I probably talked about this, the "Done Wrong"?

M: [laughing] Yeah!

K: The bad women, and that came out of the prison music. To me, I think we had a quote – I'm just talking now, Kim, because it's really hard to remember the process –

M: No, this is great, this is great.

K: There was I found at the end after we had made it I found a quote that said something like… What was it… Something about "Out of…crime?" Something? No… Let's see if I can find it…. I'll have to find it, it was in our program actually, maybe I could find it there. Oh, I'll have to look for it but it was something about crime and art… or something…But, to me, I felt like, you know, there's a lot – especially when the clowns started working with something like that it was just a lot of creativity in their bad ideas, their ideas of what are bad things to do and I thought, yeah, it's really repressed. There's a real repressed aspect about that. I'll have to look around for that quote. And it wasn't the inspiration is was just sort of something that matched what was going on [11:00]. But yes, somehow for me that chain gang idea, and socializing and civilizing, and turning into art, and turning into a form. All those things seemed to be a piece of turning into something that we think is beautiful. Wait… goodness? We equate art and goodness? You know, when they're not really…
M: This is great actually, because I've been –
K: Oh, it's beauty and goodness.
M: Beauty, yeah. That idea that beautiful is good and ugly is bad, and how that's been…
K: Yeah, exactly, so I think that is how that stuff was coming up. Because all the beautiful, you know, all the light skipping beautiful la-de-da, and then this other fear, like when we did some of the beauty commercials there was this sort of fear of not being that. The ugly aspect. So, yeah, the whole process is a little intuitive and amorphous. Happening in some place in my brain that I don't know whether my idea came first or a thing came first. It just happened. Kismet, it comes together, and seems like somehow it strikes the right chord.
M: Yeah. So this chapter I'm working on right now focuses on the body and what that means for the clown, basically. And how the body is this really rich sight for failure because we continue – because of exactly what you've been talking about, because we continue to try civilize and socialize it and it just cannot ever – you know, we fart and we excrete and procreate and we fornicate and our bodies do all these things that we try to pretty up or ignore or push to the side and I was curious if you could remember any specific vignettes or examples from the show if those tings came up. Like the beauty commercials or if you can think of…
K: Yeah, for sure. First of all, the piece that I did, the character that I did was… she was called the "Poor Sophisticate". And she was, you know, really wanted to be sophisticated and cultured and she loved art, but she had terrible accent and a lot of malapropos, and, you know, just really not what she wanted to be. And then she totally got excited by this guys in the audience and some music came and so she was dancing… I mean, even before that she got all excited about the art and was really orgasmic about it. So like, her body was really like, "Oh oh oh", like making these orgasm sounds as she was trying to be….
M: Sophisticated…
K: Yeah and so for me it was real mix of somebody who is very body and crotch/hip oriented and yet, you know, she's wanting to be… reaching for this very beautiful aesthetic. And then when she sees a guy in the audience and she just becomes all a flutter. She's not even a flutter, you know, her crotch is a flutter. [15:29] She's a

little like, you know… And the music comes on and it was like a mambo or something so her hips are going, wiggling. And then later she comes back looking for him again and now she's pregnant?
M: Oh that's right, yeah, you talked about that [laughing]
K: Yeah so then she farts and she has to pee and all of that stuff. So to me that was… I tried to make in that piece this character that wa that contradiction. You know, her body, and even her getting pregnant, this sort of functioning of the body was so strong and it was vulgar compared to what she wanted it to be and so detestable that the guy had to kill her, you know what I mean? [I laugh]. And that was also a play on "An American Tragedy" and "The Plays in the Sun". You know those…?
M: Oh. No.
K: "Plays in the Sun" was I think a film version of a short story by Theodor Drieser, so it was big in the 50's and so older people recognized it right away. And the main character, he wants to, aspires to move up in the world and meets the daughter of his company boss and falls for her but meanwhile he's got sort of this low-class girlfriend that he's gotten pregnant, and so he's stuck between here is his aspirations to be taken into this other society and he's got this woman following him around who's dragging him down. And he ends up going out on a boat with her and most likely drowning her.
M: Ugh. Oh my god.
K: Yeah, so, I made this into a funny piece [we both laugh]. You know, it's about…In that original thing it's about class, but the way I was working with it was really like this body, this person who is so body oriented and, you know, just as hungry, I need you now "stage", you know, [in a desperate voice] "I need you, let's go for a walk". You know? [18:17] Like, that that seems unappealing in this world where we're, even though people are laughing, the world of aesthetics and beautiful, that was a little bit what that story was based on. But then…did other people fart? Where there was a whole, they did the number when they all came out nudey and very ethereal and dancing and what all, and then they sort of fluttered away and there was one last person who came out covering herself, cause she was sort of late and obviously had not really wanted to come out naked, but then she just sort of quickly flashes the audience and tries to get off stage. So that was another idea about the body, a different relationship to it. And right after that there were some other nude, sort of, just tableaus, and somebody's on her way to the shower with a towel [over the nudey suit] and she's very normal. Asking other people to get out of the – you know, they're standing around smoking a cigarette nude and she's asking them to get out of the way. The Russian woman was doing that. So I tried ot have all these different levels of body fun about the body, the naked body. You know, they're not really naked.
M: Yeah, I'm looking at my…About nudity, and how shame is used a predominant social tool to control how people use their bodies or in this case specifically how woman use their bodies. Shame around nakedness is a really big strong tool that's leveraged to get women to be, to cover themselves to be modest. Which then is connected to all kinds of other moral and political stuff. I wanted to ask you more about the naked body suits and we talked about it a little bit last time to the

difference between actual nudity and these body suits. SO it's like a parody of nakedness.
K: Yeah, and I felt like… And then we could use it in all kinds of different ways. Some was very artistically ethereal, balletic in a way, and they went out in the audience like that. So people in the audience… I mean, it's very funny because there are these fake nipples and it's as if they're nude but they're not. And they weren't being sexual at all in any of those, either. So they never used their bodies in that way.
M: DO you think that, because I was thinking about this, why it is that – wow, [22:18], that was a door slamming, I don't know if you heard that. If people seeing this sort of parody of nudity and seeing them behave in a playful way or even just in a normal way like standing around smoking cigarettes naked, that's funny. If the difference is that is sort of alleviates the shame around the naked female body?
K: For the performer? Or for the—
M: Well… Not necessarily for the performer, but for the audience. I mean that's sort of guesswork, I suppose.
K: No, I mean, I really think that skin – we have a really strong response as an audience to seeing like actual nuditiy and skin. I mean certainly it can be done on stage many many ways and I've seen it done on stage many many ways. But I think, what I've seen of say burlesque… I think… there's a seriousness, you know what I mean? There's a danger aspect and a confrontation aspect… There's a show which I didn't see last spring [talks about Yun Jung Lee's untitled feminist show again] and what I read about it was people said, having them nude throughout the whole show and having them do these different skits and different kinds of styles of stuff, eventually, as an audience member you start looking beyond their nudity. And so I'm like, yeah, and you have to have a whole show before they start looking beyond the nudity [laughing]. So that's an experience for the audience, yes, and whatever, but I don't think you could… I don't know, I just imagine there's a sort of, there's always just an issue about nudity [25:06], when I see burlesque people or this is always so palpable, the performer's own relationship to their nudity and to you, and I think that somehow we've managed to take that piece out of the equation and so there was something else that we could talk about a little bit.
M: What I appreciate about it, and I've only seen the pictures of it, but I think that it… This sort of… god, what's the word – deification of the female form, putting it up on a pedestal and making it this other-worldly thing, and not allowing women to be carnal. And even in terms of your Sophisticate, the sexual appetite in women that is kind of ignored, that it makes naked female form just a body, it's a body and it does these things, it's capable of these things, it's not shameful, it's not divine. Any more divine than any other form. I don't know if that was an intentional thing, or if that was my own reaction to it. I don't know, there's not really a question in there, I just appreciated it [laughing]
K: No, I think it is, because like, for me – like, the way the nudity, nudies first came on stage, there was a piece with three women three clowns were listening to this – they came out, and was this very sort of religious music and it was sort of growing glorious thing, and they were having this ecstatic thing the three of them, and they were just turning, slowing turning with their arms upraised, and started slowly take their hat off and throw it, and scarf. They were starting to disrobe in this sort of

religious ecstasy, and they, you know, when they get down to their underwear – you know, like when we were in rehearsal and they were getting like way down to their underwear, and we're all laughing our heads off, but when you put it in the theatre, it becomes, like, the stopping point has to be a little earlier. Otherwise, then the audience starts to have a whole other experience, you know what I mean? Anyway, it's an interesting line, but suddenly the music stops and they all kind fo wake up out of their ecstasy and realize they are half-disrobed and are stunned, and then two of the nudies bust through the back doors leaping, nude, completely free [I'm laughing], and joyful {28:27]. And then these other women the other clowns are sort of, oh, they're picking up their clothes and walking off. So, for me, I mean, first of all it was all very funny, but then this sense of, I was like, wow, this, you know I see the clowns, you know they're trying to reach this ecstatic, you know, no need for clothes, this openness, and taking off their clothes, but when these nudey suits come out, they're in another realm, you know what I mean? They're in some other realm. And to be that open in their fake nudity. So there really is, there really are some very different levels of aesthetic, a certain lightness, angelic pride. Actually they did do … they leaped around a bit and then there was a point when two of them just walked forward towards the audience, like straight forward, very proud. And they turned their backs and walked back and so you saw their butts. So, it was interesting exploration, I guess that's all I can say.

M: Yeah, no, that's great. I wanna ask you too if there are any instances in this show that … I think there is a connection between beauty and violence as well? Although it sounds like it wasn't exactly beauty that you were exploring specifically but just representations of women, but that if there was any kind of piece that used, oh, I don't know what else to call it, like slapstick, bodily violence but in a clown kind of way?

K: yeah, well first I wanna say—we started out exploring just representations of women in 2-D, and after a while, after we worked on it, in our first big work-shopping time, creation time, I started to see that is was about aesthetics and beauty in a certain way, so then we worked more directly on that. And, I mean, not that we talked about it so much, because I don't like to talk about it so much. I was working on it. [laughing] but this violence…

M: Or like, devouring the body, or …

K: Well, the one thing, there was one piece that was called the battle of the blondes –

M: Oh, I think I saw a clip of that!

K: What?

M: I think I saw a clip of that, it was one of the works in progress, where they were kind of flinging their hair around?

K: Yeah, they were like, "C'mon, c'mon", they're just flipping their hair around, and like, "Better, blonder, bouncier, bouncier!" And they're bouncing around. So they were sort of violent with themselves.

M: Yeah, that's what I'm – I'm having a hard time articulating it – they way the body is punished for beauty, like wearing high heels or doing these things to our faces and bodies to make them beautiful?

K: Yeah, well, I'll tell you the ones that were really directly that way. First the Battle of the Blondes where they jumped around and it was this competition, and they were really vigorous, like super vigorous [laughing], and then there was one, we edited it down a lot, we called it the Face Washing Firing Squad, I don't know what it, people laughed (32:52] I don't know what it was so weird [I laugh], but they suddenly… they were walking from the upstage down, and shadowing light, and very the music was sort of fighting music in a way, but they were walking to the firing squad, and the firing squad was washing their face… I think originally like each person had washed their face and maybe it would kill them. And one person actually did die… But when we got to the final product, one person tested the water and washed her face, and then it was safe and then everybody could wash their face. But you know, the dread of, if.. Whatever, I don't even know what… the audience laughed so I guess they get it. They get it, the washing your face, if you use the wrong product.
M: Oh, yes, definitely [laughing]
K: But there wasn't high heels, or… There wasn't anything that direct. I certainly in the past have done, I think I've talked about my piece, my solo she's called "Glamour Puss", and she comes on, she's really excited to be on stage, you know, "Hello, hello" and she takes off her coat but she's forgotten her bottom half of her costume, her clothes, and she's very feminine, and she like, she's find them all oh, this in her coat pocket and she left her girdle in her bag. And she tries to be on stage in just her undies for a little while but it doesn't work too well. And then she has to get into her girdle, and it's vey tight, obviously, but she really enjoys – she puts on her girdle and you know the little pieces that dangle down that clip onto the stockings? So then she like dingles those, it's sort of weirdly sexual but she's just delighted that she can shake 'em and make 'em dingle. You know, she's just super innocent and delighted to be there. Like she has to cinch her belt way too tight and then she can't breath. And what else happened to her… Oh , she's old. But, she's constrained by her clothes for sure, she has to get into them, and it's transforming. But your original question, painful, destruction of the body… No, we didn't do anything that obvious. Because it's so obvious. People have done that before. You know what I mean?
M: Yeah, gotcha.
K: I'm all constrained by my clothes, 'cuz I'm a woman. Did we have anything…? No I guess all of that was like put in all the prison stuff. And the… it was a whole, the "I'm Dry" scene which I think you saw with the classroom answering questions happily, and then somebody said something about anti-perspirant and then they all start saying something about body image stuff.
M: Oh yeah…
K: And that shame. And then "Egoist" commercial where they talk about the perfume product. So it's all, that stuff was in there but it's not, but … I guess in this sort of other form, like, they see all these beauty things but in a very, like in the Egoist commercial, in a very elegant way. French accent. But you realize it's all – I mean, what is it all? It's all just stuff to make you feel better about yourself. [37:37]
M: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I guess, I think what's… The difference that I see, and I've realized that I can't, like going down the road of, Oh the oppressive – representations of beauty as oppressive things is a different paper, because I'm

actually more interested in how a clown can take those things, and it's not necessarily about oppression, it more about the failure, the failure of these things to successfully achieve what they're trying to achieve. Like, the failure of a perfume to actually give you self-esteem. Or, or –
K: Well I think what happens is, you know, like in this perfume ad piece, they're so convinced – like, they're saying the most ridiculous things but with total conviction that they are beautiful and elegant and sophisticated. And models, you know? Except they're saying really ridiculous things, you know? More and more ridiculous, gosh I can't remember what they said – oh, one of them said, "Rouge, for the eyes, and the pube." [I begin laughing]. You know, she says it over and over, like, "Mascara, for the eyes, and the pube." And it's just, it's a preposterous idea. And somebody else is like, "Exfoliante, for the décolletage", you know. So they're playing with the image, the perfume ad image, but the content is ridiculous. You know what I mean? So they're not directly trying to oh, if I put on this perfume, it will… I believe it's gonna make me attractive but oh, it turns out, it attracts bees. It's nothing is direct as – which, could be a perfectly good clown skit, you know, but it's I think we come at it the other way, of they already believe, you know what I mean? They already believe [they are beautiful] and so we get to see the failure, we get to see the gap between what they believe and –
M: The reality.
K: -- how silly, yeah, how silly they really are. As opposed to them being, "Oh, I wish I were more beautiful," they come on stage and they act like they are beautiful, and we laugh at them.
M: Right, right. Yeah.
K: Because we see, we can the gap, you know?
M: I love that, too, the idea that saying something with a French accent also kind of makes it that –
K: Sophisticated.
M: Yeah! If I just say it with this accent it makes it automatically sophisticated but what I'm saying is absurd. That's a nice gap as well, between the imagination and the reality.
K: Yeah I remember one time we were working on it and one woman, she was not so good with her French accent and she always wants to make it, like she thinks she'll be funnier if she sort of makes it more American-y, like she'll be the one who is sort of not got the good accent. And I said, okay, you can sort of do that, but you have to say "crème", instead of "cream". You know? So she'll try to do the accent and she'll say, "Anti-aging, uhm…", and I said, you have to say it slow, like in that perfume ad way, "Anti-aging, wrinkle-defying crème", you know? So we have to see her struggling to sort of get there somehow.
M: That's good [laughing]. Well, I actually have to go grab some food before my next class…[41:45]

APPENDIX B

NOTES

Notes from Workshop with Kendall Cornell, January 28th-29th, 2012

DAY 1

- The clown allows you to laugh at her; at her vulnerability. It's not like when you're mom said to you, "They're not laughing at you, they're laughing with you." No, they're laughing at you.
- PRESENCE: there's a fine line between being yourself and clown
- Find out how you are funny
    - Sophia: "Traveling through you to find the funny part."
- The clown's dilemma: not necessarily a dilemma; like the horse/lion. There was no "problem" there, to speak of, but it was funny because the clown who was supposed to be a lion, really wanted to be a horse… Or the horse really wanted to be a lion…
- The nose: the smallest mask there is.
    - Treat it with respect. Do not chew on it or put in weird places.
    - Nose on: in play. Nose off: audience.
    - Negotiation with the tradition of it?
        - Meaning… I have heard it said that the nose is something a clown must earn. When I said this to Kendall she laughed a little and sort of waved that idea to the side. The nose, for her, is a necessary part of the distance required to clown. It cannot be strictly ME out there. There has to be SOME kind of line, or else it would break my heart. (Like what Lucia was saying about the nose!)
    - As a costume piece, the nose can allow a simpler form of dressing; more "normal" clothing. Regular outfit, regular person, but then add the nose.
- Checking in with the audience: how long can I go before I need to include them? Careful not to get too caught up in what I am doing – "fall in love" with what I am doing. My success or failure is measured by the audience, so I have to keep asking them, "Is this it?"
    - The flop/the drop. This is the moment that gets a laugh.

QUESTION: How much do I have to actually internalize the pain of failure? Does the audience need to know that you're still okay on some level? How complete is that flop?

- It has to do with play: there is always finally an attitude of "life goes on". There is no real threat with the clown.
    - In other words, the emotional and physical safety of the clown is never in question. There's a quote from one of Jack's comedy readings

that says “Violence and comedy go very well together. Blood and comedy do not.”

- Steven Tippet – NPR

DAY 2

- “Clown” state of being. Different worldview.
    - Slowing down, magnification
    - No status play; there’s no negotiating, craftiness
    - Private history, private psychology
- Poignancy vs. Comedy – they are incredibly closely related, clown uses both.

AUTHORITY VOICE:

- Clown is always below the audience
    - This is a complex dynamic for women
    - Have to have our own authority first (what we know and don’t know about that)
- Facilitate exploration and help define that paradoxical line (Kendall role)
- Kendall: There came a point when I wanted to be really private about my exploration
    - Undercutting provided by “authority figure” in workshops has to become built-in to the clown psychology in performance
- Me in a clown state can play many different roles, these are not necessarily different clowns.
- Conviction – you don’t have to know why it’s funny!

FOLLOW UP WITH KENDALL (on the phone, February 5, 2012)

- Authority/Status
    - Mentioned something about how this was a complex thing for women.
        - In order to play lower status, you have to be pretty confident to be able to give that up.
        - For a woman performer, no confidence than how ever feel confident being lower status. Or safe?
        - Not pretty actress, playing a not pretty person. Dif is acknowledging or not.
    - Can be prob for woman to not be in control
    - Not even our story
    - Most stay at "goofy"
    - Permission – male clown might be able to come onstage w/a trumpet n do something aggressive, big energy. If a woman did it, we would have a different reaction. Woman clowns who loose sensitivity, relation to audience; can't just blow past it the way male clowns do
        - Takes more time, slow down, let audience digest
    - Woman – do I even have the right to be on stage?
        - Am I allowed to break the rules? Clown not just innocent, keep pushing the boundaries. Inappropriate. Less acceptable for women to be naughty, socialized to obedient.
    - "Roll with the guys." Not that there's anything wrong with that --- but does it make you blend in? men's perception of whether or not you blend in?
        - Burlesque – that's somebody else's game
        - Joan Rivers – aggressive in the *female* sphere, Evynne Maynehardt stand up about rape
    - Sometimes I don't know what women are doing, for whom? To whom are they speaking? Why? FROM where are they speaking?

Knowing who I am first, and then entering into play from there.

- Cranky clown – not about validation or approval
- Why are you onstage in the first place? All about validation ☺
- FUN – great power source.
- Clown state of being – private history/private psychology
    - Does this mean that it is private in the sense that the audience doesn't need to know about it? It is hidden, it doesn't need explanation?
    - Do things their own way, doesn't have to make sense to anyone else, and no one else has to do it the same way.
    - The audience will go with it – proving that it doesn't have to make sense to them.
    - Clown logic. Fully present, the why doesn't matter as much, watching what happens next. Come out of subconscious, pressure of moment.
        - Elusive. Amorphous.

APPENDIX C

EMAILS

Subject	**Re: Update and another question**
Sender	kendall.star@earthlink.net
Recipient	kbates
Date	2012/05/22 13:37

Dear Kim,

In "I'm dry" they are raising their hands high (like a classroom) and when I call their name they proudly give random factual-sounding answers (geography, literature, science, etc.) and finish by saying "And I'm dry!" referring to their armpits. Then at one point someone answers "Anti-perspirant!" and everyone looks a little upset with her and guilty (she's let the cat out of the bag). Their answers are now some truth-telling about the secret products they use/things they do "tummy tuck tights, colored contacts, water bra, tweezing all over, colon cleanse, bulimia" they are very uncomfortable and on the spot having to admit all this. One of them is just bursting out with things without being called on because she is so overwrought with upset.

Why is this funny? I don't know. Mostly their being on the spot -- and the funny things they say. The sort of different manners they have in their guilt and the contrast to their pride earlier.

Also we had a piece "Egoiste" which was the perfume commercial -- and for part they say all these made up elegant sounding beauty products with French accents and perfume ad voices. "Depilitor for the décolletage!" "Razeur for the legs." Very funny.

Hope this helps!
Ciao!
Kendall

On May 22, 2012, at 1:44 PM, kbates wrote:

Hi Kendall,

I completely forgot to write back to you and let you know that I decided not to include discussion of the voice in my Body chapter. It gets into complicated territory that I simply don't have time to explore at this point.

However, I was going back over the transcript of our last conversation and I do have

one last (maybe) question: you mention the piece called "I'm Dry", and I do remember seeing that on the WIP video, but I do not remember specifics about it and I can't find anything in my notes on it. Can you recall some specific things that they bring up about body image, lines or phrases that they used?

Let me know if this would be easier to discuss over the phone, too!

Thanks,
Kim

Subject	**Re: More questions...**
Sender	kendall.star@earthlink.net
Recipient	kbates
Date	2012/05/08 20:32

Dear Kim,

I was thinking a little bit more about it -- and I remember my work with First Folio technique of Shakespeare was a big new world that I would link to clown. It was an eye opener with regard to being onstage, in the moment, and discovering what was going to happen next (including the lines). That was a good prep for the world of clown. First Folio acting technique subscribes to the methods of Shakespeare's time -- where there were so many plays done in repertory that the actors didn't memorize the lines but were onstage with their scripts and all the clues about behavior and delivery were in the text. And so listening to figure out what was going on was very important. Being onstage with a lot of unknown!

Ciao!
Kendall

On May 8, 2012, at 12:25 PM, kbates wrote:

Hi Kendall,

Yes, I have the story of you attending David's workshop and being profoundly affectedly the experience, but I'm glad I can also include how you found your way to clown in the first place. Some people say, "Oh I've ALWAYS wanted to do comedy" -- I think Carla says this in the troupe interview -- while others stumble upon it or get "bitten" by it and then follow their desire for more. I was bitten -- I accidentally found myself in an improv group my first year at the University of Oregon as an undergrad, and I've been in love with comedy every since. In the last year, I've come to really love and respect clown -- hence the thesis :-).

So thank you for that detail, and for the words about your process! Hope you are

well!

Best,
Kim

Subject	**Re: More questions...**
Sender	kendall.star@earthlink.net
Recipient	kbates
Date	2012/05/07 11:30

Dear Kim,

Sorry it has taken me a few days to get back to you. I was away for a long weekend and without internet.

I am sure I must have told you the story about my introduction to clowning. I went to observe a master class/workshop being taught by David Shiner and was thinking it was a going to be a weird day (the studio had talked about costumes and other strange things) and when I walked into the space there were all these people dressed up and I thought, "Uh-oh!" But then David began to talk about clowning and show some this-and-that and work with the people who had brought in acts -- and I was totally, life-changingly struck. I say it was like a frying pan to my head. The work just seemed to open up a truthfulness and a rhythm that made sense to me. Before that my intention had been to do straight (and serious) theatre. But I was in the workshop because I had recently found myself doing some comedic theatre projects (a live soap opera) and was getting more and more interested in that kind of work (sketch comedy, Shakespeare comedy, etc.) I was also a modern dancer, so I had my movement background that also seemed to get integrated with clowning. At the time David was doing Fool Moon with Bill Irwin and I (post-workshop) went to see that show 5 or 6 times. It was a very exciting moment.

Developing show process -- I think I have just refined the process as I have recognized that there IS a process. The first work I was doing was just very intuitive and the method of inquiry was hit and miss (a lot of hits) and I didn't know what would come out of it. But as I could see what methods were good generators of material I expanded on them. And I keep developing specific exercises and games to try and get at what I want. Lots of times things are fortuitous and using what we have at the moment. And I have learned to trust that the creative impulse is at work there -- and to include all that. I've learned to trust my images and seeds of ideas as important directions to pursue (and not be put off if it doesn't work right away).

Also, at certain times there were clowns who were very good at improvising and

wanted to improvise more -- and so we had pieces that had a lot of openness for that. At this moment people are liking more structure (depending on the piece and where we are with it). Also, at a certain point some of the clowns have felt that my vision was more strongly steering the process and their creativity and the kind of material they generate. That they sort of know what kind of thing I am looking for. For some of them that felt constraining and problematic. I think that it is not that the process changed that much -- I think they felt differently about it when we were all beginning and everything was unknown (including what any of this would look like -- it was all an experiment). For me I still think everything is open-ended and I am looking for the tone that is truthful and resonating -- but I have some vision and experience of how the troupe functions artistically. So I feel that ws a little bit their own resistance/rebellion to the overall process -- or they were reaching their limits with the work -- that is really the issue.

Also, I learned that it's important to have an all-female studio environment (no male stage manager in the creative space). And I definitely learned about the importance of working with the right costumes and that important exploration (some clowns are very lack-a-daisical about that and I have to push them because it makes a big difference). And also understanding the different stages of creation and re-creation (structuring) and rehearsing and performance -- and the different anxieties and moods around each stage. So I don't freak out when everyone gets depressed or snippy or forgetful. Also the very helpful nature of the "food" for the clowns to riff from (images, videos, stories, music). The choices and evocative quality of the "food" can really affect what we get -- and it's important that I make sure that what I bring into the studio is really on target.

Let me know if there is more. I am writing this in a hurry.
Ciao!
Kendall

On May 4, 2012, at 1:56 PM, kbates wrote:

Hi Kendall,

I can't believe I didn't ask you this before -- I asked the troupe members this, but I never asked you: what got you started in clown to begin with? Was it something you sort of always had an eye to, or was there a performance/performer that first sparked your interest?

I was also curious if you see a difference in your process for developing shows now versus when you first began. I imagine it has had an evolution of some kind -- and that it continues to evolve. Can you think of anything that you've changed, that didn't really work before that had to shift to facilitate the creative process?

I'm in the refining phase of my paper, I think I'm closing in on completion. Woo too!!

Thanks,
Kimberly

check us out at
www.ClownsExMachina.com

Subject	**Re: Bio questions**
Sender	kendall.star@earthlink.net
Recipient	kbates
Date	2012/03/18 21:26

Dear Kim,

I'm going to try to knock this email off to you with efficient answers.

The Clown Pageants were shows with a particular structured improv format -- a combination of structured individual prototype-acts and some improvisation. I was the MC/ringleader -- much like I am in class -- so I was conducting the show and interacting with the clowns -- calling them out and calling out directions and asking questions and giving them cues. That way their beginning clown acts and clown performances were sure to be successful. We had just rehearsed a teeny bit to find and structure their act (some of which was material that had maybe come up in workshop or something -- perhaps some of the themes, interests, ideas from Clown Pageant acts came back later in other work. I don't remember anything specific). And they were all individual pieces (though everyone was onstage together). I started working towards a full-length ensemble show with Not Just For Shock Value (work in progress half-evening was in Fall 2006 and the finished full show at the West End Theatre, produced by Six Figures Theater Co. in Spring 2007) We performed excerpts here and there in variety shows and festivals around the same time and thereafter.

I studied with Philippe Gaulier on and off from 1994 (in Europe) through 1999 or 2000? I think I first brought him over to NYC in 1996. David Shiner I met in 1993 and took a workshop in 1995 and then assisted him in 1996-1997 and maybe some odd jobs thereafter.

Hope this helps!
Ciao!
Kendall

On Mar 18, 2012, at 6:19 PM, kbates wrote:

Hi Kendall!

Hope all is well with you! I have a few clarification questions for you about the timeline of the development of the troupe. I can see from the website that you started out by performing in pageants and festivals; when did you debut your first full-length show? It looks like Not Just For Shock Value was performed in excerpt throughout 2006 and 2007, but I'm curious when you performed it as a full-length show -- was it the La Mama performance in 2007?

Also, can you roughly tell me when you studied with Philippe and when you studied with David?

Thanks, down to these gnit-picky little things...

Best,
Kimberly

check us out at
www.ClownsExMachina.com

Subject	**Re: Statement of purpose**
Sender	kendall.star@earthlink.net
Recipient	kbates
Date	2011/07/19 19:29

Thanks, Kimberly!

I'm glad that you had a good clown trip to NYC. Please keep me posted on your progress and developing inquiry. I am looking forward to read your thesis when it's done.

And I'd love to see the pics you took of the jam. It would be great if you could send them or email them (whatever is easiest).
Ciao!
Kendall

On Jul 18, 2011, at 4:30 PM, kbates wrote:

Hi Kendall,

Here is a very official email stating that all material gathered during our recorded interview, the recorded interview with the group, and any pictures taken during the clown jam will only be used for my masters thesis, and will not be shared publicly.

Having said that, I got some really nice pictures during the jam :), I can send them to you if you're interested in having them.

I had a blast meeting with you and the group and watching your process. Thanks again, and I look forward to keeping in touch with all of you!

Take care!

Kimberly Bates
University of Oregon Department of Theatre Arts
Graduate Teaching Fellow

check us out at
www.ClownsExMachina.com

Subject: Re: Masters Thesis – Questions about Clown
Sender: kendall.star@earthlink.net
Recipient: kbates
Date: 2011/05/06 22:03

Dear Kimberly,

Thanks for your email and your interest in Clowns ex Machina. Gender and clown is a great research topic. As you can imagine, my work with this all-women clown troupe has much to do with gender. Comedy and clowning works with social assumptions -- so gender is something that must be acknowledged (at least it ought to be!).

We are right in the middle of creating a new show, so I am immersed in work until after Memorial Day. However, I would be happy to chat with you after that. In the meantime, you can read some of my thoughts about women clowns on our website. http://www.clownsexmachina.com/ClownsExMachina/Press.html On the press page there is an article for Spectacle magazine reprinted there. I will also attach to this email some thoughts already written up which I provided to someone else who was doing research on the topic.

Best,

Kendall Cornell
Artistic Director
Clowns Ex Machina

REFERENCES CITED

Clowns Ex Machina. Personal Interview. 12 Jul. 2011

Cornell, Kendall. “Bio Questions." E-mail to Kimberly Bates. 18 Mar. 2012

Cornell, Kendall. "More Questions." E-mail to Kimberly Bates. 07 May. 2012

Cornell, Kendall. "Update and Another Question." E-mail to Kimberly Bates. 22 Mar. 2012

Cornell, Kendall. Personal Interview. 13 Jul. 2011

Cornell, Kendall. Personal Interview. 27 Jan. 2012

Cornell, Kendall. Personal Interview. 15 May. 2012

Finney, Gail. *Look Who’s Laughing: Gender and Comedy*. Gordon and Breach : 1994. Reprinted in 2004 by Taylor & France, London.

Halpern, Charna, Del Close, and Kim “Howard” Johnson. *Truth In Comedy: The Manual of Improvisation*. Meriwether Publishing LTD: Colorado, 1994.

Horlacher, Stefan, Andreas Böhn, Gaby Pailer, and Ulrich Scheck, Eds. *Gender and Laughter: Comic Affirmation and Subversion in Traditional and Modern Media*. Rodopi: New York, 2009

Lecoq, Jacques. *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*. David Bradby, Ed. English. Routledge: New York, 2006

Martin, Linda and Kerry Seagrave. Women in Comedy. Citadel Press : 1986

Nisker, Wes. *The Essential Crazy Wisdom*. Ten Speed Press : 2001.

Stott, Andrew. *Comedy: The New Critical Idiom*. Routledge, New York : 2005
Wietz, Eric. *The Cambridge Introduction to Comedy*. Cambridge University Press : 2009.

Wright, John. *Why Is That So Funny?: A Practical Exploration of Physical Comedy*. Limelight Editions: New York, 2006.