

CALLING ALL CLOWNS

A CREATIVE PROJECT AND PERSONAL JOURNEY

By

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Professional Paper

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
in Integrated Arts and Education

The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

Summer 2007

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband, Kenneth John Weaverling. Without his unwavering support and encouragement, much of the work on this journey would not have been possible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the support of the members of Clown-Forum.com for their unselfish help to any clown newbie who has the good fortune to stumble upon their Internet forum. I would also like to acknowledge the considerable help of the staff of the Drama-Dance department in the School of Arts, whose assistance in the logistics in the presentation of portions of my Final Creative project was invaluable. I would also like to thank all the faculty of the Ultimate Clown School. It is not often one can experience a creative learning environment that is so purely dedicated to the work, and just the work.

VITA

"I was born, one night, one morn, when the whistles went 'boom-boom'." So starts a clown song. However, Linda Ann Elizabeth Cripps was born in Wilmington, Delaware and was raised there on a little patch of green heaven, graduating from Alexis I DuPont High School, Greenville, in the Vietnam era. Her only ambition at that time in life was to get out of Delaware, which she succeeded in doing by deciding to study architecture which required studying out of state, completing a B.S. in Architecture at the University of Virginia, School of Architecture in the disco era. Misfortune in the form of serious illness and serious injury dictated the circumstances of her life for at least thirteen years after graduation from college. Although ostensibly either practicing or teaching in the architectural field, at every decision point in her life, she chose to pursue furthering herself in the arts, rather than the AEC profession. Linda found opportunities to work with some of the greats in the field of dance, Victor Wesley, formerly of the Boston Ballet, as a costume designer for the Wilmington Ballet, and to study flamenco as a dancer with Maria Benitez, Manolo Rivera, and others. Seeking the graduate study program that would be right for over a decade, she discovered the Creative Pulse Master of Arts program at the University of Montana in Missoula. As a result of her creative project study, she completed the Ultimate Clown School with Dick Monday, Tiffany Riley et. al. in New York City in August 2006, considering this her most significant accomplishment. Trading her hard hat for a clown nose, Linda eagerly looks forward to her practice of "jocular engineering".

PREFACE

"When you are no longer compelled by desire or fear...when you have seen the radiance of eternity in all the form of time...when you follow your bliss...doors will open where you would not have thought there were doors...and the world will step in and help". - Joseph Campbell

This was written in my blog journal on 3 September 2004, shortly after my return from my first term in the Creative Pulse program. It was written at a point when I was seeking with both desperation and passion to find something "more right" for my life. At the beginning of my work with the Creative Pulse, this excerpt was words on a page that expressed a hopeful sentiment. By the conclusion of my Final Creative Project work, it was a description of a process that had been experienced. The Final Creative Project is more aptly described as a journey, than a project with a defined purpose and a distinct beginning and an ending. This paper is an account of that creative journey. In sections it is written in the first person, as this is the only manner that was workable to express the experiences clearly.

In 1981, I was invited to participate in a time capsule experience. The assignment was to write a determination of what I wished to achieve with my life on a 3 x 5 postcard. These postcards were to be collected from thousands of SGI-USA members in a time capsule that was to be opened on May 3, 2001. Writing this little determination was quite a struggle for me, as I had little passion for the work I was currently doing, although I was quite successful. My deepest desire was to be a dancer, although by the age of twenty that path seemed closed forever, due to illness and injury. In 1981, I was approaching thirty, and was adrift in purpose. It took a great leap of internal courage to write what I deeply desired on this card. It was to "invigorate the culture of my country with hope and a passion for life through my art". To speak of "my art" at this time, seemed absurd. I had no idea what my art was, as being a dancer who didn't dance, seemed to obviate me from aspiring to any definition of artist.

In the next twenty years, I did acquire appreciable skill in design and the visual arts which led to work in the theater arts that I had always dreamed of, albeit backstage. However, the truest essence of me was rooted in performance, which had no outlet.

Another significant event in my journey prior to the work of the Creative Pulse program was in September of 2001. The destruction of the World Trade Center in New York City affected my family directly, and initiated a period of questioning about my choices in life. I was struggling with the relevance of being committed to an artistic path. On September 12, 2001, "artist" seemed to me to be a most superfluous occupation. To persevere through that period of suffering required an intense internal personal change. It was as significant a change as the metamorphosis of the mulberry bush in Ovid's tale of Pyramus and Thisbee. Prior to this time the mulberry bush's fruit was pure white. After the lovers die, their blood runs into the ground, and from that point forward, the mulberry's fruit is dyed the deepest red. I had undergone a similar internal metamorphosis which I was struggling to reconcile with an artistic life, and seeking a means to share the benefit of that struggle with others.

It was in this personal context that I entered the Creative Pulse Master of Arts program in 2004. It is not hyperbole to state that the work of the required creative projects transformed my life. This professional paper is an account of the study and artistic work of that process.

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A JOURNEY

The beginning of this journey was the creation of a large (120 inch by 40 inch) mask for the first Educational Foundation Fundraiser with a Mardi Gras theme for Delaware Technical & Community College, Newark, Delaware. The work continued as part of my First Year Creative Project for the Creative Pulse program with the study of the Commedia Dell' Arte and the performance of Commedia characters. The 2nd Masks of Transition convention at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, in the fall of 2005 was a natural segue into the next phase of the project: preparation for professional clown school in the summer of 2006. The prime point of the plan was to study mask by doing, and making, in addition to traditional reading research. It was harmonious coincidence throughout the two years as the opportunities that presented themselves for study led through a similar path as formal Lecoq study. The first year of the Lecoq study begins with work with the neutral mask and expands through multidisciplinary experiences and experiments in basic materials and poetry, to animals to larval masks, which would include masks such as the Basel masks, to study of character, situation and emotion, and music. The second year of Lecoq study includes gestural language, melodrama, commedia dell'arte, bouffons, tragedy, and culminating in clowns (Lecoq, 2001). Without planning it or realizing it, the steps of my personal odyssey of study followed much a similar course, although much abbreviated. It is the journey of a broken-down dancer, who simultaneously discovers a new art and a mission.



Mardi-Gras Mask
created by Linda AE Cripps, 2004
photo by K.J. Weaverling

THE MASK AND PHYSICAL THEATER



Parade Mask
created by Linda AE
Cripps, 2005
photo by K.J.
Weaverling

The Mask

The use of masks transcends time and culture. They are as diverse as Aztec skull masks, Kwakiutl ritual masks, Balinese Barong masks, Yoruba funeral masks, Venetian carnival masks, or the animal mask-puppet creations of Julie Taymor in the Broadway show, The Lion King. The purpose of a mask has been diverse as well: to communicate with ancestral spirits or gods, for physical and spiritual healing, for storytelling, theater and education, or for concealing one's typical identity to find a new freedom.

The exploration of mask work at the outset of the journey, was not specifically chosen to be a metaphor of, or a tool for self discovery. As the series of steps were taken, one at a time, only few steps of the process ahead were clear at any one time. The workshops chosen were selected primarily by the limitations of travel, rather than being part of any master plan. The study of mask in this creative journey included experiences in both the European theater tradition and in the Balinese mask-dancer tradition. Each is representative of the two primary concepts of the mask: mask as a tool and mask as a means of transformation. The first considers the mask as one element of the creation of character, in combination with costume, movement, and dialogue. However the mask is an entity separate from the wearer – a tool. In the second, the mask itself is an embodiment of an idea or spiritual energy. Through union

with the mask, the wearer becomes embodied with this energy and is transformed. This aspect can be difficult for Eurocentric cultures to comprehend; however, in Asian philosophies such as Buddhism, the spiritual and physical realms are not seen as separate entities, but as indivisible parts of a whole. Per Brahe, of Studio 5 in Brooklyn, New York City, designs his own masks and commissions Balinese mask makers to create them. In the creation of such a transformative mask, the quality of the mental and emotional states in the process is considered as important as the quality of the technique in crafting the actual object. In describing the process of the making of one of his unique masks, Per relates that if he is not having a good day in the design phase, he will put the work aside, just as a Balinese mask maker will not work on the construction of a mask if his spiritual energy is negative in any way, lest this negativity become imbued in the mask (Brahe, 2007 and Ensor, 2005).



Balinese Barong Mask
photo by K.J. Weaverling

Working With Masks

All mask work, regardless of its tradition begins with the warm-up of the instrument, the body, with physical movement. And both mask traditions, begin with work with a version of the neutral mask. Working with the neutral mask, in de-emphasizing facial expression, it makes whole body the instrument. Lecoq (2001) describes the essence of neutral mask work:

"...A neutral mask puts the actor in a state of perfect balance and economy of movement. Its moves have a truthfulness, its gestures and actions are economical ... This object, when placed on the face, should enable one to experience *the state of*

neutrality prior to action, a state of receptiveness to everything around with no inner conflict.”

Work then progresses to masks that embody some specific expressive character, such as a Basel “Idiot” mask or a Commedia’s Arlecchino, or a mask with deeper spiritual power. However the detailed structure and experience of mask work study is completely different depending upon the tradition it is grounded in.

In the workshops of Hunt, Brown and Sanguigno, which were grounded in European theater tradition, the exploration of creative movement follows the basic physical warm-up. Then the work with the masks begins with viewing the mask, experimenting with wearing the mask, and then working with the basic character of the mask in scenes. In Brahe’s Balinese mask workshops, the wearer never sees the mask before it is put on, and once the wearer and the mask are united, the energy of the mask itself dictates the work.

The workshops in the theater tradition used both basic masks and character masks. Larry Hunt emphasized basic movement working with larval masks of his own design. These larval masks were not specific replicas of human features, but were masks with features simplified to embody the essence of specific human emotional states. Ross Brown worked with basic Basel masks of Fatty, Charlie, Idiot, and Lizard. These “larval” masks, commonly used in Lecoq work, are ones that evolved from the Basler Fasnacht carnival in Basel, Switzerland. “Larve” is German for “larva” and is the term used by this carnival tradition to refer to their masks. Extensive creative movement work with and without the mask preceded the scripting, rehearsal, and performance of 3-part scenes with the Basel characters.



Basel Masks
photo by K.J. Weaverling

The workshop with Ginevra Sanguigno from Clown One Italia similarly began with exploring the dynamic aspects of creative movement in space, tempo, and emotion. The specific mask work used the two comic masks of Arlecchino and Pulcinella from the Commedia dell' Arte. The performers worked in pairs doing improvised scenes with these two characters.



Commedia dell' Arte Masks
created by Jeff Semmerling, Inside Out Art
Studio
photo by K.J. Weaverling

Per Brahe's workshops follow a planned sequence to achieve a specific goal – release of inner creative power. In a typical workshop, the participant will experience a series of masks moving from a "beginning" mask, to what Brahe terms "moving masks" then "healing masks." The specific mask sets are unique visions created by Brahe. His explanation of the process is that throughout the entire creation of the mask from inception to completion, the mask is imbued with a specific energy and image. In wearing the mask, the mask gives this energy to the participant, which activates the same memory of similar images and movement in the muscles of the body. Work with these masks is conducted in a studio without mirrors, and connecting with the energy of the mask is the goal rather than watching oneself move with the mask.

At Studio 5, workshops with Aole Miller in the basics of Fitzmaurice voice work and the Grotowski method of acting were completed also.



"Charlie" Gives Lessons to Two "Idiots"
Basel Mask Workshop
photo by K.J. Weaverling

Experiencing Masks

The work with the mask technique occurred throughout the two years of this journey of exploration. With all of the workshops, the experience of the work came first. The study and research of their methodologies came last. Each session was approached with very little preconception of what was to be achieved. There was, then, little excess experiential baggage therefore to get in the way of the experience, or to color one's reflection upon it.

My major observation after the conclusion of the first mask workshop at the Masks of Transition Convention, was that the study of mask, without stepping into the role of mask wearer, is like the study and the research of swimming without ever getting into the pool. It validated my strategy of learning, primarily by doing. The experience was a tiny window into the experience of the mask, feeling initiated but mystified. One and a half years later, in working with the Commedia masks, the process had become more fluid and relaxed. The mask of Pulcinella was chosen, as its characterization was the least familiar from personal experience. Taking risks of stuffing oneself to appear obese, and interspersing a flowing stream of babbling gibberish with many varieties of flatulence, seemed an interesting experimentation that flowed along, gifting Arlecchino with a cornucopia of opportunities for reaction. This was in marked contrast to the first mask experience which was characterized by a constant inner monologue wondering what the mask or movement looked like, or what should come next, or whether or not the "right" action was being performed.

Two workshops were taken with Per Brahe, also about a year and a half apart. Although next to no verbal explanation of the process is given preceding the exercises in a Balinese mask workshop, the process did not seem the least bit foreign. In many ways it was more synergistic than the workshops based in larval, Basel, or Commedia masks. In these workshops there was a lot of explanation and discussion, preceding and throughout the work. In a Brahe workshop, you just do. My first session with Brahe, was characterized by an initial hesitancy, primarily evidenced by a reluctance to work with the whole space of the room. This was partly due to the fact that I found it easier to "tune in" to the mask if the eyes were closed, and the overly trained visual analyzer was "turned off." In great contrast, my second workshop had a confidence of working through space, and with various levels of space. The interesting revelations of a Brahe workshop occur when the mask is removed and the wearer gets to visually see it for the first time. I felt overcome during the wearing of a "moving" mask, as if it required too much effort to get off my knees, and I staggered around speaking with the attitude that "shit happens, and then you die." At the conclusion, I found out that the mask on my face was one of the expressive masks described as "the grotesque." During the concluding healing segment, I felt a tremendous surge of energy that seemed to be simultaneously connected to breathing, body, and the rays of the late afternoon sun streaming in the windows. The energy seemed to dictate the work, and the only appropriate position was to hold a yoga position lying on the back in which the abdominal muscles contract to hold both the arms and the legs elevated in a bent position. Ordinarily, this pose is a struggle to hold for an extended period of time. In this mask experience, it seemed effortless and that it was possible to hold it indefinitely. The mask worn was a totally golden face, described by Brahe as one of the angel masks. Brahe states that strong narcissists have great difficulty with this type of mask work, as to be successful one must "let go of false images of the self" (Brahe, 2007).

My attraction to the methodologies of Brahe, Lecoq, Grotowski, and Fitzmaurice are understandable, as all are grounded in the kinesthetic intelligence, the first nature of a dancer. These methodologies emphasize training of body memory which is reactivated in a future moment of interpretation, or in the case of Fitzmaurice voice work, training working with the correct movements without intellectually analyzing them. Regardless of which path one takes in mask work, both are grounded in movement. Although

process can be very different, the end measure of the work in mask can be measured in the degree of the authenticity of the experience. As Jacques Lecoq (2001) speaks of work with the neutral mask:

“When the actor takes off the mask, if he has worn it well, his face is relaxed. ... It is enough to observe his face at the end to know if he wore it truthfully. The mask will have drawn something from him, divesting him of artifice.”

Per Brahe’s mask workshops also strive to divest the actor of artifice, and unleash their inner authentic creativity, although he attributes the process as something the mask has given to the actor, rather than taken from her.

It is a deeper, more significant process, than the average experience of wearing a mask in a masquerade, or for Halloween. This common experience is best illustrated by the example of the masks of the Venetian Carnivale. The wearing of the mask in Venice was a device to gain freedom from the rigid social expectations of family, class, and morality by masking one’s identity, and to therefore gain access to a more personal liberty (Mithra, 2007). In its own way, it is a transformative process, but one without union between the self on the outside and the self on the inside. As soon as the mask is removed, this apparent freedom vanishes with it, just as the superheros, ghosts, princesses, and monsters vanish every Halloween to be become ordinary children once again. In contrast, the work with masks in actors, especially in the methodologies of Lecoq and Brahe, aspires to a permanent effect in enabling the artist’s access to her inner creativity. Wearing a Carnivale or Halloween mask allows one to experiment with other roles by being someone other than oneself, while the goal of transformative mask work in acting is to facilitate a greater discovery of one’s true inner creative self.

With each step in working with masks, I grew curious to know and experience more. While watching other participants work in the first workshop at the Masks of Transformation conference, the moment the mask and the wearer merged into one was always a conspicuous, magical moment which I desired to understand how to replicate. This was the motivation to seek out more mask work, wherever I could. The mask is also integral to the Commedia dell’ Arte which comprised the first major portion of my exploration.

COMMEDIA DELL' ARTE

Personal and Cultural Roots

The choice of the Commedia dell' Arte as a realm of work in the early stages of the journey was a case of selecting familiar cultural roots as a starting point for the exploration of something as yet untried. The influence of the Commedia in European culture is pervasive. Although few performances of authentic Commedia dell' Arte scenarios can be found today, its characters and comedic structures survive in the theater, in the ballet, in film, in painting, and sculptural arts. No ballet dancer or devotee is ignorant of Harlequin and Columbine, as they are among the magic doll characters presented by Drosselmeyer in Act I of The Nutcracker.

A Short History of the Commedia dell' Arte

The Commedia dell' Arte was a phenomenon of theater that thrived in Europe for over 200 years, primarily circa 1550 to 1750 CE. It had unique characteristics that are not typical of today's modern theater. The players of Commedia were simultaneously the actors and the writers, as Commedia performances were completely improvisational in nature. It is from this characteristic that the Commedia dell' Arte derives its name, as the "arte" refers to the dramatic artisans or translated literally, "the comedy of the artisans." Other contemporary sources refer to it as "*commedia improvviso*" and "*commedia all maschera*" (Grantham, 2000). The "commedia dell' arte" is the term that endured, and was used to distinguish this type of theater from the "commedia erudita" which was a completely scripted play as in the common practice today. The Commedia performers originated with traveling street performers who would entertain in towns on market day with their juggling, acrobatics, and other skills. The term applied to these players was *zanni* (fem. *zanne*) from which our English word "zany" derives, for their outlandish antics. At some point in time, the individual street entertainers banded together into dramatic troupes. Although the first record of a professional acting troupe was in Padua in 1545 CE (Richards and Richards, 1990), the dramatic roots of Commedia players can be traced back to ancient Greek and Roman theater (Duchartré, 1966), and it is certain that the Commedia as a collectively understood cultural

phenomena existed prior to this date. (Note that in the study of the Commedia, it is difficult to ascertain specific dates as it is probable that any specific character or set piece had been in performance for decades, prior to any written records being made.) The troupes of Commedia players performed at first in the cities of the Italian peninsula, but spread throughout Western Europe along with the other cultural elements of the Italian Renaissance. In the heyday of the Commedia dell' Arte, it was possible for a family of actors to make a living for many generations as Commedia players, and many professional troupes had standing engagements at theaters in Italy, France and England (Chaffee, 2007 and MacNeil, 2003) .

A typical Commedia performance would be in public on market day in city. The troupe would arrive in its wagons and set up its own stage in the market square. To attract an audience, the players might juggle or perform acrobatic tricks. When the moment was judged to be opportune, the players would perform a *canovaccio*, or a short scene. A Commedia piece did not use scripted dialogue; however, it was not performed completely off-the-cuff on-the-spot as a lot of improv theater is done today. The Commedia repertoire is based on a defined set of characters, each of whom had distinctive characteristics in costume, speech, behavior, and most significantly, in mask. The specific character masks, or *maschere*, of the Commedia were as familiar to their audiences as Mickey, Minnie, Donald and Goofy are to audiences today. The mask immediately identified the character upon entrance to the scene, and with it an immediate understanding by the audience of the backstory of the character and therefore, his or her dramatic implications. Every Commedia player specialized in at most a few characters, and the most famous players, only played one (Smith, 1912). The player developed a repertoire of stock speeches, quips, reactions, and entrance and exit lines, movement, and physical humor referred to as "*lazzi*", which they would apply or modify depending upon the requirements of a particular scenario and the situation of the moment in performance (Gordon, 1983). The troupe would decide collectively which *canovaccio* they would perform, and their leader, the "*capocomico*", would organize the scene, ensuring that the players understood the premise and the set entrances and exits. With their shared understanding of this outline of a scene, they would create the dialogue and action as they went along, integrating both their stock character repertoire and any improvisation inspired by the moment. Over time,

Commedia troupes developed a repertoire of tested "scripts" that they would perform again and again, without resorting to structuring it with written dialogue.

The characteristics of the Commedia dell' Arte theater was a broad theatrical style and the incorporation of many skills, including music, dance, acrobatics, as well as speech into the scenes. The humorous scenarios were irreverent, appealed to all social classes, especially since in a Commedia drama the servants usually ended up besting the masters.

"Commedia characters [and scenes] are funhouse reflections of everyday people, and the audience will see versions of themselves and people they know on stage" (I Sebastiani, 2007).

Most unlike modern theater, a Commedia actor would address the audience directly in planned asides, or spontaneously, and might even stroll out visibly into the audience for a chat or a *lazzi* while other players were continuing the scene waiting for their next entrance. The typical dramatic structure of a *canovaccio* revolves around the characters, and includes some aspect of love interest, at least one strong master character, *vecchi*, at least two servant characters, *zanni*, and one outsider to provide complication (Rudlin, 1994). A example is an untitled scene that is played with The Captain (*Il Capitano*) his servant (one of the many *zanni* characters, perhaps Pulcinella), the two lovers (*inamorati*) Flavio and Isabella, and Diamantina, a servant character whose distinguishing characteristic is nymphomania. The Captain wants to seduce a rich widow into marriage and asks Pulcinella to find out where she lives. Flavio confides mournfully in Pulcinella that he can't seem to find the right girl, and asks him to play matchmaker. Diamantina flirts with Pulcinella, and to get out of her clutches he decides to fix her up with Flavio and an assignation is arranged. Not caring whether or not she is the woman The Captain seeks, Pulcinella decides to fix up Isabella with The Captain and makes a date for these two as well. Neither date works out well, naturally. Diamantina and Isabella gossip to each other the next day and learns about each others date from hell. They decide to switch houses that night in order to meet the other man that seems more attractive to them. Flavio and The Captain arrive that night to serenade the lady at the same house as before. As the "houses" are right next door, (on opposite sides of a theatrical curtain) they can hear each other, but a bit of comic business ensues as Pulcinella assures each that they are only hearing an echo of

themselves. Diamantina exits from Isabella's "house" eager to meet The Captain, but he is terrified of her overt sexuality, and flees, failing with her as well. Isabella exits from Diamantina's "house" and she and Flavio are happily united (Garvin, 2007) .

The Commedia dell' Arte fell from theatrical fashion in the mid-eighteenth century, having a great assist from being banished from France after one of their *canovacci* poked conspicuous fun at the mistress of Louis XIV, after which followed an difficult era in French theater when it was over-regulated by the government. In England, the major characters of the English Pantomime theater were derived from the Commedia with a corresponding Anglicization of their names. Many of the familiar standard *canovacci* evolved into scripted plays, for example, "The Servant of Two Masters" by Carlo Goldoni. It was a decline of the era of player-writers to the era of playwrights and the craft of the actor evolved from working from a *canovacci* to working from a script.

The Commedia *Maschere*

The term *maschere*, or mask, in Italian is used interchangeably to refer to both the object of the half-mask the Commedia player wears on the face and the character itself. The Commedia masks are distinctive in that they are half masks that only cover up the eyes and nose of the face and leave the lower face uncovered. The roots of the Commedia masks and their characters are traced by some back to Roman ritual and theater (Duchartré, 1966) while others postulate that is equally plausible that there are non-Roman antecedents (Rudlin, 1994). The half mask is perhaps representative of the half animal – half human identities of some of their mythological precedents (Sanguigno, 2006). By the time of the first documentary records of Commedia performances in the mid-sixteenth century, a diverse repertoire of characters, *maschere*, had developed. Many of a stock character, *Il Capitano* (the captain) for example, had several distinct interpretations that had been created by a specific Commedia player (Teatro di Nessuno, 2007) .

Overall, the *maschere* are categorized into three major categories: the *vecchi* (masters), the *servi* (servants), and the *inamorati* (the lovers). The status of the roles in the *canovacci* corresponded to the similar status in society – the *vecchi* were high status roles and the *servi* were lower status roles. In the Commedia, the function of the

dramatic foil usually fell to the servants who played in opposition to the master characters. Within the *servi* roles, the major group is the *zanni*, the acrobatic, juggling, tricksters that began the Commedia in the first place, who are usually appear as servants to the *vecchi* characters. The category of the *inamorati* included both male and female players and are always the young lovers, but are not necessarily the only love interests in a Commedia story.

The essence of a *maschere*, or role, in Commedia is not merely a nominal title, a convention of dress, and a mask that is worn on the face. Each role has a unique combination of personality traits that provide the opportunities for drama in a scene. The essence of the *maschere* is the embodiment of some paradox of character (Rudlin, 1994) and the most distinguishing feature of each character is their passion. Larry Hunt (2005) describes it as "every Commedia character has one thing that he loves above all else." Similarly Lecoq (2001) describes Commedia characters as being "permanently seized by a passion for life."

The Traditional Maschere - Male

The major roles in the *vecchi* category for male players are *Il Doctore* (the doctor), *Il Capitano*, and *Pantalone* (a merchant). In the lower status roles, there are the *zanni* and a lesser well known category are the tradesman, sometimes referred to as seconds (Miklashevskii, 1924). The Tradesmen appear only when their services are needed to advance the plot, and their names are reflective of their work, *Il Marinaio* (the Sailor), for example. Most of the male servant roles were *zanni*, who ridiculed their masters much to the delight of the commedia dell'arte audience. These *zanni* were legion in their number – besides Arlecchino, Brighella, Pulcinella, and Pedrolino, the most common male *zanni*, the chroniclers of the Commedia dell'Arte tradition include mention of Trivellino, Truffeldino, Fritellino, Tortellino, Polpettino, Bertolino, Tabarrino, Temolino, Zaccanino, and others (Miklashevskii, 1929). The male *zanne* are grouped into two categories: the First Zanni and the Second Zanni, further representative of the social strata of the time. The Second Zanni is always poorest of the Commedia characters and sometimes is the servants of the servants. The descriptions of Commedia characters by the I Sebastiani Commedia troupe further divide the First Zanni into two categories. The highest status category First Zanni is characterized as mean, dangerous, and clever,

and includes Brighella. The slightly lower status category of First Zanni are described as less assertive but still clever, and includes Pedrolino. Pedrolino, who evolved into the Pierrot of the pantomime theater, possesses the characteristics of honesty, love of truth, and simplicity (Teatro di Nessuno, 2007). In earliest times he wore the standard white costume of *zanni* with a ruffled collar, being distinguishable from other *zanni* as he was played without a mask with the face heavily powdered, which according to Hovey Burgess (2006) evolved from his having fallen into a flour sack. Unlike Arlecchino, he is cast as the reliable servant. His intrinsic nature leads him to experience everything with deep emotions. Although honest, he is also naive which results in that he is the only *zanni* caught or punished for playing tricks.



"Pulcinella" Commedia dell' Arte
Mask
created by Jeff Semmerling, 2006
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with permission

The Second Zanni category has the trait of being a distractible male servant, and includes Arlecchino and Pulcinella. Arlecchino, who became Harlequin in the pantomime theater, is one of the most recognizable Commedia *maschere*, who always is a servant to one of the *vecchi* characters. Duchartré (1966) describes him as the "prince of numbskulls... intermittently relieved by flashes of shrewd wit." His characteristic costume of patchwork may have origins in earlier traditions of itinerant entertainers whose garb was to represent elements of the universe. The black mask of Arlecchino has a few warts, which are the only remainders of his earlier incarnation as a devil figure in Medieval drama (Sanguigno, 2006 and Teatro di Nessuno, 2007). He is usually with his pair of sticks, the slapsticks, a ubiquitous *lazzi* of the *zanni*, from which our term "slapstick comedy" is derived. He is nimble, agile, and frequently ribald, and moves with his knees always bent, as if he could leap up on the spur of the moment.

His enormous constant appetite was to make him most representative of the common person (Fisher, 1992). Pulcinella is recognizable as he has a hump or other physical deformity and his mask has a long black hooked nose, his origins are traced by Duchartre (1966) to Roman times, circa 540 CE. He is witty, but also cruel as "the ... suffering from his physical deformity reacted on his brain at the expense of his heart" (Duchartre, 1966). Pulcinella is also characteristically vulgar and gluttonous.

The Traditional Maschere- Female

Although Grantham (2000) states that every male character had a female counterpart, this might be misleading. Although in any particular scenario, each male character of the piece might have a female counterpart in the piece, the number of male *maschere* far outnumber the female. Miklashevskii (1927) lists over twenty lesser known male zanni in addition to the five most familiar characters, while in all sources combined, the number of named female zanne is less than one third of that number.

In the historical Commedia dell' Arte, there were no female *vecchi*, or master characters. The roles of women in the Commedia came from either the category of the *inamorati*, the lovers, or from the *servi*, servants. It was quite common for female commedia players to play music and sing both within the *canovacci* and as musical *entre'actes*. It is also important to note that for female roles the term "maschere" is used only in reference to the character, as they performed without actual masks.

The *Inamorata* is the female romantic interest. This role has been a staple in drama to the present time. She is always reasonably chaste in her relationships before commitment. The female *inamorata* went by many names, such as Flaminia, or Isabella, so named after one of the most famous female players of this *maschere*, Isabella Canale Andreini (1562-1604 CE) (Teatro di Nessuno, 2007). Another lesser known character that was not a servant, was The Courtesan, Fiorinetta. She was a woman of the upper classes, but did not have the status in the *canovaccio* of her male *vecchi* counterparts. Her role modeled that of the courtesans in Italian Renaissance society, of women who were cultivated and supported by men for social entertainment and sexual favors. Although they had more apparent freedom than a married woman of the same class, this came at the cost of being considered outside the pale of respectable

company (Hickman, 2004). The remaining defined female *maschere* belong to the *servetti*, servant roles for women. Unlike the *servi* roles for men that distinguish two levels of *zanni* and contain numerous colorful distinct characters, there are primarily three *servetti* characters for women. Also, unlike their male counterparts, their role in the scenarios are as likely to be as romantic interests in addition to the *Inamorata*, as to be comic foils, *zanne*. There are Franceschina and Smeraldina, sometimes known by other names. These are the “good girl” and the “bad girl”. Franceschina, is the sadder-but-wiser girl in the tales of romance. She is not chaste like the *Inamorata*, but despite her travails in love and life, usually by the end of the story she is lucky enough to marry. Smeraldina is the female *servetta* whose distinct character trait is nymphomania, in contrast to both the *Inamorata* and Franceschina.

Lastly there is the ubiquitous Columбина. She is one of the *Commedia* characters that has survived through time. She only ever has one love interest, which is Arlecchino. This pair has survived through the rise and decline of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, their incorporation into the English pantomime theater as Harlequin and Columbine, until the modern day where they appear in the opera, ballet, painting and other fine arts as an embodiment of romance.



Harlequin (Arlecchino) and Columbine as Mardi Gras Characters
Lifesize Marionettes created by Linda AE Cripps, 2007
photo by K.J. Weaverling

Columbina’s *maschere* became so versatile that she evolved into one of the most complex characters of the *Commedia dell'Arte*. John Rudlin (1994) has one of the best descriptions of her:

“She is only lucid, rational person in commedia dell’arte, analogous to Maria in Twelfth Night. Autonomous and self-sufficient, she has no negative attributes; ... She sings, dances captivates, but has gone beyond her entremetteuse origins to become a self-educated woman. ... Although capricious and coquettish she is good at her job, careful with money ... Although she is very sexually knowing she is sometimes a virgin, when it suits her.”

Whereas her favorite Arlecchino, is described as the everyman of the commedia, she is his counterpart, however much wiser. Larry Hunt (2005) of the MASQUE theater describes her *maschere* as the only self-aware character of the Commedia.

There are a few other named women maschere extant, but little survives to indicate whether they once had been a distinct *zanne* or they are merely a different name used by a player for the *Inamorata* or one of the *servetti* roles. One exception is the Gossip, known either as La Ruffiana or La Guiassa (Duchartré, 1966), who is always a very old woman and always functions as the “outsider” who complicates the plot.

Creating Commedia Characters

After the playing of the role of Columbine at the Educational Foundation Fundraiser in 2005 as part of the First Year Creative Project, the actor’s curiosity was piqued to find out about other characters that might be explored. It was a surprise to find out that outside of their function in the romantic intrigues of the Commedia scenes, the traditional female *servetti* roles, other than Columbine, possessed identity in terms of distinct character backstory. One wondered about what roles might have evolved during the historical period of the Commedia dell’Arte, if women players had fewer practical and social constraints in their chosen profession. What began as a rather idle curiosity evolved into a five month period of research, exploration and creation, the result of which, was the creation of The Dramatic Protagonistas and several distinct *Zanne* roles. These new female maschere were created in concept first in terms of their place in the *canovacci* structure, and their individual characteristics. They were named last. It was intriguing to find that, upon consulting a name book which gave the meaning of given names, an Italian woman’s name already existed with the appropriate meaning for each of these roles.

The Dramatic Protagonistas are the mistress characters, female counterparts of The Doctor, The Merchant, and The Captain. They are high status *maschere*, and are also the movers and shakers, whose roles that have existed across cultures and throughout history, although their influence may not have been acknowledged or conspicuous in the public sphere of life.

Abrianna, is the matriarch. She is much more than just a woman with children. She is a dramatic powerful figure, the one with the determination to build family and society. She wields considerable influence inside and outside the home. Her motivation usually derives from the desire to protect and create stability, although her need to assert power can lead to her downfall. Faustina, is the schemer. She is similar in dramatic function to Brighella, but not a *zanne*. She usually is seen in circumstances of wealth and influence, and most often is seen as a climber, always seeking personal advancement. Her concern with social propriety is only because she wants to be seen by others as being socially correct. Don't be fooled - she can be completely ruthless and abandon propriety like last year's shoes. Donatella, is the lady. She is yin force that human culture needs to balance the yang influence of men. Without her, society often becomes degraded overall. Her aristocracy is innate, springing from her strong core of decency, integrity and serenity. She is an active peacemaker, and will act to rectify wrongs without hesitation. However, her strengths are also her weakness; she is not a good judge of the motivations of others especially when they arise from avarice or jealousy.

In developing *zanne* roles with unique identities, three distinct women emerged. Every comedy has the best friend, Constantia. Her loyalty is both her strength and her undoing, as she is often short-sighted in the long term consequences of things. She is as active as a go-between in the drama as Columbine. However, she is usually not as favored by the opposite sex, and is characteristically unlucky in love. Elenora, the innocent, is a role most ideally embodied as a female. She is the one whose inner core of purity reveals all other players to themselves, the results not always to their liking. Then there is the *zanne di zanni*, Vivetta, who can only be described as "the funny girl". She embodies that sparkling quintessence of fun unique to girls, which is simultaneously silly, sweet, and sincere. She may not be the sharpest pencil in the box, but unlike other *maschere* who may possess more brains, she never lets convention get in the way

of being able to resolve any dilemma. If she were allowed a monologue, it might go as follows:

"I know you know me, even if you can't seem to figure out my given name - just call me The Funny Girl. Of course I would have been one of the zaniest zanne in the 16th century in Florence, had not women been banned from commedia erudita by the Church and frequently from the bands of dell'arte players by custom. Perhaps I was there flitting by in the blink of an eye as some unnamed female zanne, possibly played by a young male player in training. Yeeech. Too bad circumstance never allowed the Funny Girl to shine in dell'arte's earliest times. If I had been given a chance, my signature costume would have been a hodgepodge of bright colors, attempting to mimic high fashion, but somehow always falling far short of accepted couture of the day. I know I would have been as highly popular as Arlecchino and my cousin, Columbine. No matter. Regardless if my mask is missing from all of the commedia dell'arte known tradition, I am one of the essentials in comedy. Who would Papageno be without Papagena? Just your average fat boy tootling a Magic Flute, that's who." (Voices, 2005)

CHOOSING A NEW ROLE AND A PATH

Playing Commedia was not a significant part of my journey, but initially more from circumstance than by choice. I did not reside in Texas or Massachusetts, where both of the most active Commedia troupes are based. The annual sessions of Commedia U by Hovey Burgess at NYU Tisch School of the Arts were in late August and conflicted with my teaching contract. I considered attending the Accademia dell' Arte in Arezzo, Italy as part of my Final Creative Project for the Creative Pulse. Their summer courses include a six week course in the study of the Commedia dell' Arte.

I had attempted to play Columbine in an improv manner at the Mardi Gras fundraiser as part of my First Year Creative Project. It was a complete comedy of errors from beginning to end, and not always in a good way. The major obstacle was a family crisis which interrupted me numerous times on the cell phone. I did not feel much sense of accomplishment after this attempt, and began exploring other opportunities for work in Commedia and studying the *maschere* for other characters. This led to the work in "finishing" the complement of female Commedia roles previously described. To present this part of the work, I decided I needed to "bring" one of these characters to the Second Year of the Creative Pulse as well as doing a reprise of Columbine as part of my presentation.

Of the numerous characters I defined, I chose Vivetta – "the funny girl". I can offer no clear logic to explain this choice. I had been also sketching the Commedia characters as if they were set in the mid-1960s, and visualizing Vivetta as a Mod Girl inspired a lot of designing and drawing. Perhaps she was the only one I clearly "saw" in a visual sense. Perhaps her essence had deep subconscious resonance. Whatever the reasons, it was a fateful choice. I sewed up her ensemble and acquired her accessories, and Vivetta traveled to Missoula and made a brief debut. My own analysis of my abilities in improv and comic routines after this effort was that I definitely needed more practice and training.

As opportunities for classic Commedia training were scarce, the next step in the journey was arrived at by pure logic. If Commedia training was not feasible, then perhaps I might explore clown training as the fundamentals would be quite similar. Clown classes were definitely more common than Commedia classes. I have never

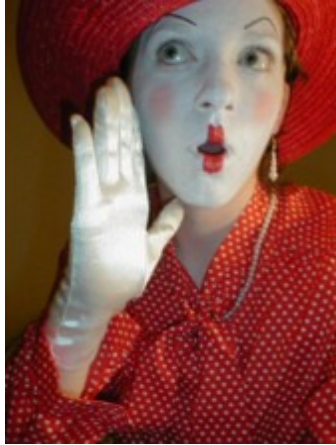
considered myself as a comic, or as a particularly funny person. Neither had I ever considered that being a clown was something I would actually try, much less study, and even less likely, to enjoy. One of the personally meaningful things Per Brahe had said during my first mask class with him, was that he had never planned on working with masks, and much less becoming so intensively involved with Balinese mask. He described his life as a journey, with the next step ahead often being the only one that was clear. Even though I could not give a "big picture" justification for going on to work in clowning, it was the next obvious step. I trusted that after finishing clown training, the step after in the journey would be evident.



Vivetta
as created by Linda AE Cripps, July 2005
photo by K.J. Weaverling

THE CLOWN

"The genius of clowning is transforming the little everyday annoyances, not only overcoming but also transforming them into something strange and terrific. ... It is the power to extract mirth for millions out of nothing and less than nothing."
"Grock" – A. Wettach (1969)



A Whiteface Clown – Dottie the Clown
photo by Clare Tzinski, used with permission

A Very Short History of Clowns

The *zanni* were the stars of the Commedia dell' Arte. For a time, they were creatively and thoroughly employed, but after the zenith of the Commedia had passed, the theater changed, and with it the role of actors in the theater. Most Commedia characters found no life after the mid-eighteenth century. However, the *zanni*, the clowns, were the only characters of the Commedia to survive into the present day, through pantomime theater, vaudeville, and the great touring circuses of the current era.

The archetype of the "clown" was not invented by the Commedia dell' Arte. The role of the clown can be found in cultures around the world. What is common to all clowns is that they are always the outsider, and not bound by ordinary rules and mores. Early European ancestors of the clown can be traced to Greek and Roman drama, and the Medieval jester. Actors specializing in comic roles were found in theatrical companies, including Shakespeare's troupe (McVicar, 1987). One significant of the pantomime theater actors was Joseph Grimaldi (1778-1837 CE). His clown characters, derived from the Commedia dell' Arte were considered the acme of the art form and the foundation of the modern clown. He invented a character he called "Joey" which is one of the direct

roots of modern day clowns. Grimaldi's popularity was responsible for making the clown central to the English pantomime performance, rather than Harlequin (Curtis, 2002). In circus parlance today, a "joey" is synonymous with "clown." When the royal strictures governing the theater in France were relaxed in the early nineteenth century, the English traditions of theater clowns, and the work of Grimaldi, were a great influence in reviving clowns in French theater (Rèmy, 1964). The evolution of Pedrolino, to Pagliacci, to the Pierrot of the Pantomime theater reached its zenith with Jean Gasparé Debureau's interpretation circa 1826, which was the foundation of one of the classic clowns in our culture: the melancholy clown with the baggy suit with pompom buttons, pointed hat and white face (International Clown Hall of Fame, 2005). The earliest circuses, with the variety of animal, acrobats, and other acts, were performed in theaters whose size was determined by the equestrian acts. The ring was no larger than could be reached by the ringmasters whip. One legend has it that another archetypal clown – the Auguste – character originated when a stable boy wandered into the ring in oversize clothes. It was funny. Subsequently, the ringmaster, a Pierrot-type white face clown, and this new stumblebum, the Auguste, became a staple of circus comedy (Rèmy, 1964).

Other significant clown performers to note are Charles Adrien Wettach (1880-1959 CE), a Swiss clown known as "Grock," who was the highest paid artist at one time in Europe. His appearance was a satire on men's dress, an oversize man's suit, and his signature acts were playing miniature instruments (Burgess, 2006). The Fratellini family of clowns, Albert, Francois and Paul were also important early twentieth century clowns. Albert Fratellini's clown became the standard of the Auguste archetype as we know it today influencing Lou Jacobs of Ringling Brother's Barnum and Bailey Circus (RBB&B) circus, the Ronald McDonald corporate symbol, and thousands of others. A distinctly American contribution to the clown taxonomy is the character clown – in particular "The Tramp." Charles Chaplin's "Little Tramp" character of the silent films is the most well known precursor. Emmett Kelly's "Weary Willie" of the RBB&B, and Red Skelton's TV clown "Freddy the Freeloader" are also examples (Raymond, 2006).

Most clown comedy today is derived from the antics of the *Commedia dell'Arte zannis*. A "bit of business" for a clown is still referred to as a "lazzi," whether it is slapstick humor or not (Pisoni, 2006).



The Baphoon Clown Family-
Two Auguste Clowns and a
Little Whiteface
photo by Just 4 Laffs
Entertainment, used with
permission

On the Being of a Clown

"The art of the clown is more profound than you think. It is the comic mirror of tragedy, and the tragic mirror of comedy." Andrew Soares

What makes a clown a clown? "A red nose doth not a clown make" was an oft repeated phrase at the Ultimate Clown School. There is the archetypal imagery of the whiteface clown, the auguste clown, and the character clown. There are the typical antics and "lazzi" that are expected behavior for a clown. The red nose of the clown is a symbol that ordinary rules do not apply in the "clown zone." As Dick Monday (2006) puts it, in the clown universe it is accepted that anything is possible, than ordinary reason does not apply, and juggling toilet paper with a leaf blower can be "normal." The viewer, by being invited into this universe, can be similarly released from ordinary restrictions.

Ginevra Sanguigno (2006) describes that the function of the clown as a healer in ancient traditions was that they excited people in order to heal them. The clown obliterates the barriers of the expected, the devil aspect of the clown, and in so doing opens up others to new possibilities. The deliberate confusion at the beginning of clowning is the strategy to enable people to be receptive to change, and therefore, to be receptive for healing. The healing aspect of the clown is then able to function, and reach others on a fundamental level as the barriers are down.

Lecoq incorporated the work of clowns in the last stage of his method, as the overall goal of the entire Lecoq method was to enable the actor to work from their "universal poetic self," rather than from an artificially applied technique. He used clowns, as upon finding one's inner clown, the actor is "liberated from himself" (Lecoq, 2001).

Lecoq (2001) describes his "universal poetic sense" as the essence of life.

"Here we are dealing with an abstract dimension, made up of spaces, lights, colours, materials, sounds which can be found in all of us. They have been laid down in all of us by our various experiences and sensations, by everything that we have seen, heard, touched, tasted. All these things are there inside of us, and constitute the common heritage, out of which will spring dynamic vigour and the desire to create."

This is a similar dimension as described by Dorothy Ling in *The Original Art of Music* (1989), the core of being, the original essential self. Lecoq (2001) describes a theater professional as an "architect of the inner life." If so, the clown is the master architect of this inner life, creating a universe in which everyone can remember their essential selves. This was most brilliantly exemplified by "Slava's Snow Show," an off Broadway show which played over a thousand performances in New York City and is currently on a world tour. The show is the inspired work of Russian clown Slava Polunin, which has won numerous awards including New York's 2005 Drama Desk Award for Unique Theatrical Experience and the Helpmann Award for Best Visual & Physical Theatre in Australia. It is a purely clown show integrated with original music and dramatic visual effects. As the scenes unfold, the fourth wall of the stage is gradually obliterated, so by the dramatic end of the show, the audience is much a participant of the action as the clown performers. Under a continuing shower of paper snow, the theatergoers and clowns become common participants in a game of bouncing huge rubber balls back and forth, up and around. Whatever one's state of mind was at opening curtain, by the end of the show, young and old are exhilaratingly – happy. The review of *The Independent* (Taylor, 2004) in London summarized the experience as "'Simply thrilling! It fills you with innocent amazement. It restores childish wonder in adults. After the show, nobody wants to leave the theatre. Laughter and tears have never been harder to distinguish." One small disappointment was that the ushers made theater patrons clean off the "snow" before leaving; many wanted to wear it throughout night as residual "fairy dust" to remember the experience.

FINDING MY CLOWN

"We [should] put the emphasis on the rediscovery of our own individual clown, one that has grown up with us, and that society does not allow us to express."
Jacques Lecoq (2001)

The Protoclown

At the conclusion, of the second year of the Creative Pulse program, I had decided I needed further study and training to be a more effective *zanne*, either by studying commedia more formally and/or clown school. I investigated professional clown training opportunities at Mooseburger Clown Camp in Minnesota, The Clown School of San Francisco, and the Ultimate Clown School in New York City. I also investigated Commedia training in New York City, Texas, and at the Accademia dell' Arte in Arezzo, Italy. In completing a master's program, one should have mastered something, and I questioned the wisdom of making a foray at this point to a new experience, clowning. Perhaps it made more sense to master the Commedia genre. The Accademia dell' Arte offered a six week summer program in Commedia dell' Arte work, and in Italy one would be returning to the source. With this rationale, I began to make preliminary preparations for application to this program and travel abroad for the summer of 2007.

However, the more conventional genre of clowning offered the only real opportunities for actual work in the meantime. The journey was not going to go on hiatus for nine months; I was going to create opportunities to explore. I was going to put myself into the original Commedia environment by busking, a lone *zanne* though out for fun in public. However, rather than dress as an "authentic" Commedia player, I would dress in the vernacular of more conventional clowns, as then the public would understand what I was, and be less confused about what they were supposed to do. I did not know much of what the realm of modern clowning was about, what a clown actually did. I was after all a person who was nearly thirty before I attended the circus for the first time. My artistic grounding in this area was nearly a tabula rasa. I have called these first experiences that of my "protoclown", as they were prototype experiences for more bona fide ones in the future. What I didn't understand at the time, that this process is the bona fide methodology of clown work: devise a plan for the work, execute the plan, reflect on the experience to tinker with the work for the next time, and so on.



What Does A Clown Do Anyway? – Working at Riverfest 2005, Wilmington, Delaware, September 2005 photo by K.J. Weaverling

My first activity was to go to a city-sponsored summer festival. As in all of the clown work to come there were a few spots of success, and a much lengthier list of issues that required attention and improvement. I nearly got arrested when crossing the street, for “clowning around in traffic,” while I merely was maintaining character on the median strip waiting for the light. It was blazing hot and the makeup would be described kindly as problematic and was saved only by hiding most of the face behind the out-sized glasses. Hesitancy was a big issue, as I didn’t have a script for working without one. I was just “out there” muddling through the experience and seeing what it was about. Despite the inner and outer confusion, one four year old child knew exactly what I was about, even more so than I did. She spied me from a distance, and instantly came running full tilt toward me with her arms wide open, and locked my legs in a bear hug. She said only one word, “clown”, and hugged me with a sincere passion that took me aback. I was amazed. I hadn’t “done” anything at all.

I also returned to the same Mardi Gras event that I had attended as Columbine the previous year. I created a bright green faux fur clown jacket, as it was in winter in the Northeast and many of the venues were around a courtyard, and the temperature could get a bit chilly. One of the advantages of what I now know is called “carpet clowning,” is that although the work may last several hours, the same *lazzi*, or bits of business can be repeated over and over. My “project” was to attempt to trim the hair of the male staffers who sported ponytails without their knowledge using oversize clown scissors. This was a bit of a play on the known distaste of some administrators for such sartorial choices. I was always surprised when people laughed; it couldn’t be this simple. I had

other bits of schtick, primarily encouraging folks to boogie to the numerous musical ensembles. At one point in time, I got a message from the singer in the headline band. The clown was wanted in the main event room. The room atmosphere was too funereal for her liking, and she commanded me to "get these folks up and dancing." It is always nice when one's marching orders are clear and precise. A discovery was made then that doing the Electric Slide in standard issue eighteen inch clown shoes is – different. Overall, I was still pretty unclear about what a clown was "supposed" to do, but this time, I was enjoying the confusion tremendously. I was paid a great compliment that night by the President of Wilmington City Council, who stated that I was the best clown he had ever seen.



Clowning Around At Mardi Gras, February 2006
photo by K.J. Weaverling

After Mardi Gras, it was time to move forward with making a formal application to the Accademia dell' Arte in Arezzo, if I was going to attend their Summer 2006 session. However, these two brief experiences had awakened an inner voice that was demanding to be heard. My inner clown was not going to accept any other activity than attending clown school. She was awakened and ready to work.

Clown School

I packed nearly every piece of "clownage" I owned to go to the Ultimate Clown School in New York City in July 2006. I had no idea what I was going to be doing, and I decided I'd rather have it and not use it, than get there and realize I really needed

things that were left at home. Dick Monday and Tiffany Riley invite clowns to come and teach at their intensive course every summer. In 2006, there were clowns that had worked with RBB&B, Pickle Family Circus, Cirque du Soleil, Big Apple Circus, and many others. Many, such as Larry Pisoni, one the founders of the Pickle circus, and Hovey Burgess, currently of Circus Flora and NYU Tisch faculty, who was Larry's mentor are living legends in American circus theater. The Ultimate Clown School presented the fundamentals of clowning in five sessions a day for two weeks. Basic skills such as balancing, and juggling, and even water spitting (from Clown Hall of Famer, Barry Lubin) were taught along with many sessions in character development, developing material, and clown makeup. Wednesday evenings were an opportunity to present material for critique by the faculty, and at the end of each week, a clown show was presented on the weekend which was open to family and friends, and the curious passerby. No one particular style or type of clowning is emphasized. Tiffany Riley explains the goal of the Ultimate Clown School "to enable each clown to become the best clown they can be."

The work in the character and story classes were based on creative exercises that had a prescribed structure, but we students had to create and present our own material based on that structure. For example, the direction would be to present a 3 minute solo piece based on a personal weakness or to present a skit in which two clowns try something twice and fail, and then try it the third time and succeed. Larry Pisoni describes the cycle of clown work as one of observation, experience, reflection, and then manifestation. This cycle was intrinsically embedded in the instructional method as well. In this manner, the course was an intensive immersion in creating material, presenting that material, and receiving discussion and critique. It was significant that frequently we were asked critique ourselves first. Then the other participants were asked for comments, and lastly the "master clown" would critique the work. This made the entire experience completely about the work and improving it, and not about gaining approval (or disapproval) of elite judges.

The notes in my journal from clown school fill nearly an entire volume. Rather than describe in detail the daily activities, which would explain only what occurred, reporting on my reflections of these activities is more noteworthy, as it illuminates the inner journey. The first days of clown school were filled with positive excitement and energy.

It was the excited discovery of another physically based art form, and my aptitude for movement was a decided advantage. It was the morning of the third day, sitting in the risers of the Flea Theater where classes were held, that I became aware of how badly I wanted to learn to clown, and to perform it well. That evening was the first performance workshop and I had signed up to “present,” even though I had no clue of what I was to do, and little time to prepare. I had put together bits from the first classes, a little balancing, a little movement, no clear logic, to be performed to some traditional circus music. Larry Pisoni’s axiom: “Energy trumps content” was my mantra. Standing behind the curtain for my entrance, I felt like a parachute jumper on the first jump. The cue came, and I went out for broke.



First Presentation Workshop
at the Ultimate Clown School,
July 2006
photo by Carl E. Jones, used
with permission

If this were a maiden flight like that at Kitty Hawk, the craft of the clown was launched with intense vigor, obtained a smidgen of altitude, and then landed. Hard. It was a high stakes moment for me. It was going to be the first time I might get some concrete critique indicating that this art, that I had so recently realized I wanted to learn so badly, was out of my reach. I expected little in the way of positive feedback, but the comments on the character herself were positive. The discussion offered a lot of concrete advice about creating and maintaining focus, and other performance details. One revealing insight from the feedback, is that although the audience may not laugh out loud a lot at my clown, it doesn’t mean they don’t really enjoy watching her. I had done it. I had clowned in front of the crème-de-la-crème of clown pros, and though I felt entirely clueless, I had held their attention.

Every day of work seemed like a week. At the end of the first five days, it seemed like I had been there a long time. It had been five days of feverishly stretching the imagination for ideas, putting something together alone or with others, trying it out, and for the most part failing to succeed. If there was one element that actually succeeded among the dozens of elements that didn't work, any one of us was elated. Those moments were few and far between. Class work for most of us was an unrelieved progression of failure, from the minor to the grandest and most grotesque. I still had a great deal of internal anxiety that fortunately I had no time to reflect much upon. One troubling thought that occurred to me came during a discussion of timing. Dick Monday stated that in essence comic timing can't be taught per se. What if I didn't have it and couldn't figure it out? What if I work hard, and really can't learn it? I found one small note of encouragement when Mark Renfro confessed that when he was performing with RBB&B, he "wasn't a particularly funny clown." However, he went on to add, he always looked fabulous. One of the few areas I had confidence in was in wardrobe and makeup. I decided that I too, would always look fabulous.



Working on a Fabulous Face
at the Ultimate Clown School,
July 2006
photo by LAE Cripps

The end of the first week culminated in a two hour showcase presented by the class, based on selected bits of the work that had evolved out of the first week's classes. Unlike a formal show, after each presentation we got notes from the faculty. One of the pieces I was scheduled to present was to "play" a duet with a partner, Jacob D'Eustachio, a young talented juggler, with a party favor blowtoy and snapping fingers. I was experimenting with the look of the clown and decided to try to see what I would look like as a fat clown. However, I succeeded only in looking like a pregnant clown. I

had a moment of inspiration and suggested to my partner that we incorporate the idea of going into delivery into our piece, but he didn't think I looked particularly pregnant. My lack of confidence and stupidity in trusting the judgment of a sixteen year old was further reinforced when in the wings just before we went on stage, he turns to me and asks, "How does our piece go again?" I was then certain that we were at the edge of an abyss and all that remained was to step off. Fortunately the descent to the bottom was only going to take about a minute and a half.



Two Clowns Play a Duet at
the Ultimate Clown School,
July 2006
Linda Cripps and Jacob
D'Eustachio
photo by Carl E. Jones, used
with permission

The personal challenge of the clown school experience was intense. One morning at the beginning of the second week while waiting on the subway platform to go into class, I was seized with an unreasonable desire to take the train from the opposite side, and disappear on the outer reaches of Long Island for the day. No one would know me there, and I wouldn't have to present something that failed. I was concerned that I wasn't going to be able to piece the process together and do something reasonably well before the end of clown school. Another meaningful session occurred early in the second week, with Barry Lubin, whose clown character "Grandma" was a star of the Big Apple circus. Besides being introduced to the secrets of spitting water by a master, he talked about his early experiences in clowning. He described his first days as going out and performing and not doing well. However, his desire to be a good clown always prevailed over the immediate failure. He described clowning as going out there and failing, time and time again. What mattered was that one persevered until the work improved. I realized that my clown school experience to date wasn't unique to me, but rather universal in the learning curve of a clown.

I signed up to present for the Wednesday night performance workshop in the second week. There were many differences between this presentation and the one the previous week. This time I had a script, which was my take on the ubiquitous light bulb jokes – “How many clowns does it take to change a light bulb?” The joke is that this clown doesn’t have any idea how many clowns it takes to change a light bulb, and the narrative of piece is based the internal emotional consternation of the clown in finding herself in this predicament. I had a clear idea of what I wanted to accomplish, and how to do it. All that remained was that I deliver it well. If this were another flight at Kitty Hawk, this time I soared. The laughter started at the first beat of the joke and never stopped, and I had my first great success at clown school. This was a small event, but it was an important one for me. I was not going to leave clown school without ever performing a successful piece. I had discovered some personal strengths in clowning, including putting my years as an outfielder to good purpose in being an expert hat tosser. I had also discovered that I could learn this art. The process was not going to be complete by any measure in two weeks, but I had settled some of my personal doubts.



And One More Will Make It Ten – at the Ultimate Clown School, July 2006
photo by Carl E. Jones, used with permission

The “graduation” show of the Ultimate Clown School is presented as an actual live clown show. The course participants perform in solo, duo, and trio pieces with big ensemble clown dance numbers to open and close the show. On Saturday, the pieces are rehearsed with specific faculty mentors assigned to shape and polish the work. I was to perform a solo piece with a hat, and a duo piece that I had written with my

partner. The preparation was focused but not feverish. I was calmer for this presentation, than I had been for most of the work in the sessions of Clown School. I was reasonably rehearsed, and had started to develop an inkling of what elements would facilitate success. The show went well enough. I wasn't thrilled completely by either of my two individual pieces, but they stood up well enough to the audience. My spouse posted two short videos of these pieces on the Internet on Google Video. They have received over 800 views, and even more surprising to me, over 50 downloads. I had crossed the threshold. I could do this, I wanted to do this, and I was going to do this. After the show, I felt like I had shed about 100 psychic pounds, and felt timeless, neither old nor young. Even though I am older than the mother of my frequent partner, we seemed to be exactly in the same universe. I had never felt more like myself.



Happy Clown School Grads –
at the Ultimate Clown School,
July 2006
Linda Cripps and Jacob
D'Eustachio
photo by LAE Cripps

First of May Clown Year

A "First of May" clown is the term applied with great affection to brand new clowns. My clown, Vivi-Ann, is a direct derivation from the Commedia character, Vivetta that I created. The name "Vivi" was chosen, obviously, as the diminutive form of Vivetta. The suffix "Ann" was added, as it is a tradition in my family that females are given Ann as part of their name – Joanne, Linda Ann, Diane. Even female dogs have been included – Betsy Ann, Lady Ann, etc. Vivi-Ann belongs in the family of character clowns classified as "the innocents," Her inquisitive mind is continually seeking and learning, in some ways she is like a child-savant. One of her significant traits is that she is quite the fabulist. Whenever asked to solve a problem or answer a question out of her own small

store of factual knowledge, she will cobble together lengthy imaginative explanations, As the explanations get more fanciful and unlikely, she will always come to a realization that she is a wee bit out of her depth, and she will conclude with a tag line: "It could be true."

Vivi-Ann's traits evolved out of my own personal work with her in creating situations for her, and playing with them. Driving along in the automobile is a great opportunity to let her speak on ideas. In researching clown history, and significant clowns, it was a bit spooky when I was reviewing Lily Tomlin's work, and came across the descriptions of her character Edith Ann. I can recall having seen Lily Tomlin's little girl character that sits in the oversize chair which makes the comedienne look most childlike. However, I had no conscious recollection of the character's name or any of her characteristics, until well after Vivi-Ann had taken on significant form. I believe the Ms. Tomlin and I have drawn on the same archetypal girl-child clown character, rather than one consciously emulating the other.

The opportunities for work in my First of May clown year were somewhat circumscribed due to the fact I underwent dental implant surgery. The recovery period for this lasted months and required a lot of adjustment in regaining clear diction. A weekend off-season trip to Ocean City, New Jersey was taken to give the clown an opportunity to apply and experiment with what had been introduced in clown school. I chose a rather archetypal Auguste clown appearance, to make it clear that I was "a clown" walking down the boardwalk. A large plastic inner tube worn around the waist with an inflated beach ball completed the ensemble of the day. I clowned the entire 2.5 mile boardwalk, with one stint on the beach itself, concluding with a well deserved clown nap on a bench.

It was a tremendous success. I was a more than adequate clown. Busking is an experience dreaded by many clowns, however it is something that I particularly enjoy. (It is usually legal as long as one is not "soliciting" for donations) One of the most important things I learned in this type of work, is that there are really three levels of audience. The first level are those who get involved directly with the clown as "players," and the second level are those that can be directly seen watching this interaction, the "audience." It is important for the clown to actively include the second group. There is however, a third audience, folks that are not necessarily directly played

to, but are watching from afar. Unless a clown has a confederate among the watchers, the reactions of this third audience will not be known. Busking is also excellent training for being open to possibilities, and living in the clown world of "the moment." Prior to clown school, a slow-motion mental loop always occurred between encountering a situation and reacting to it. In Ocean City, any delayed response had completely disappeared. There were over two miles to play with similar themes over and over again. "At first you don't succeed" A lot of busking "schtick" is setup in advance, and I had a few tricks in my purse. Or rather all three purses – the very teeny tiny purse, inside the small purse, inside the big purse/tote. Whenever the clown has to pay for a snack, the little routine commences – searching the big purse for the small purse, taking everything out of the small purse item by item, to encounter the teeny tiny purse, which is so small that a dollar bill has to be folded up, which enables it to be unfolded with a flourish.

It was very interesting to watch and work with the reactions of very small children. The clown face is such an exaggeration of the human archetype that many of these little people are not sure how to interpret it. Shyness and hesitancy is a common response. The clown must take her "tone" down to a minimal level of intensity, and invite approach but not demand it. A common interaction on the boardwalk, was to respond to a small child hiding behind a parent, to hide behind something (or someone) as well and let a game of peek-a-boo commence. When informed by an older child that they "hated clowns", I got good opportunity to practice crying on demand. That day in Ocean City was extraordinarily windy, and several impromptu clown scenes were played down on the sand "struggling" with the wind. There were many memorable moments in my clowning on the boardwalk that afternoon, but two stand out. The first occurred at the very beginning of the busking stint as I was walking toward the ocean. A very small boy saw me from across the street and I waved at him. He ran inside to re-emerge quickly and run after me on the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street, showing off "his" inflatable beach ball which was identical to mine. We had some great moments mimicking each other. The other occurred near the end when I was leaving the boardwalk proper. A car drove up, and the lady in the passenger's side looked up and lo and behold – it was a clown. With a beach ball and inner tube. And a wilted flower. What transpired between us was a fleeting bit of direct eye contact and a

wave, but that is exactly what was required. At the moment she looked up, it was obvious that her day had not been going well. When she saw me, she did a quick take, and then she just started laughing and laughing.



Vivi-Ann Rides the Carousel at
Ocean City, New Jersey,
September 2006
photo by K.J. Weaverling

I went to college on Halloween as “Vivi-Ann” who brought along her blankie and dollie as well. She was seeking to sign up for a remedial reading class numbered “000000000000000001” which the Registrar informed her was already full. Not to be discouraged she went on to the cafeteria, where she organized the “unclaimed” food, and when tired, climbed up on a table and took a snooze. This event led to my first paying clown gig in November. One of the staff members loved this girl clown so much that I was hired to deliver a birthday cake to her daughter’s school birthday party. Vivi-Ann was interviewed by the fourth graders. A little part of me was in wonderment that there was so much laughing and I was only standing still - clowning.



Vivi-Ann Goes to College,
October 2006
photo by K.J. Weaverling

In May 2007, Delaware Technical & Community College's Employee Recognition event was themed a "60's Flashback", and Vivi-Ann the clown was invited to attend and liven things up for the faculty and staff along with the sports mascots, Rody and Terry C Hawk. I donned my nose and my 60s themed clown couture, and spent two and a half hours in impromptu entertainment, mocking the mascots, playing air "guitar" on my happy face flower to the sixties hits on the music system, and mingling with the guests.



Vivi-Ann Entertains at DTCC
Employee Appreciation Day,
May 2007
photo by K.J. Weaverling

As with most of my other previous experiences in "carpet clowning," I was personally unsure of exactly how well it was going. However for days afterward, I continued to receive positive comments. Also, like previous experiences, my own post event reflections continued to revisit the list of things I can work to improve.

Debut at Parade of a Thousand Clowns

The event selected to commemorate the conclusion of the First of May Year was to participate in the second annual "Parade of a Thousand Clowns" in Vincennes, Indiana. This is Red Skelton's home town, and the University of Vincennes has built the Red Skelton Performing Arts Center, dedicated in 2006. City sponsored events, including a parade, are presented to commemorate their favorite clown. Although this year's event was a few hundred short of a thousand clowns, it was a good opportunity to experience working with other clowns. The actual parade was a mixed experience. As a clown

"newbie," I was there with hundreds of representatives of many mid-western clown organizations, folks who had been clowning for years. I was a bit surprised that of these, there were a significant number of clowns didn't really get into ... well, clowning around. In the clown "alley" rest-area, it is understandable that a clown might drop character. This is the spot for clowns only, and it is the individual's choice whether to keep character or not. However, I wondered at the number of clowns that didn't seem to change much in or out of the clown alley. I was reminded of the aphorism oft repeated at clown school: "A red nose doth not a clown make." After attending this event, I had some understanding of why this statement is often emphasized. J.T. "Bubba" Sikes, a well known working clown for over 20 years, was the featured clown of the parade, and he gave a seminar for clowns after the parade. He encouraged the clowns to find their character, and stressed that a clown character was more than just a whiteface or an Auguste clown. "For gosh sakes, be a clown," he said over and over again. The small note of uncertainty that had crept into my clown psyche after the parade vanished. Clown *is* the collision of character and situation, not just a great outfit, an oversize prop, and the red nose. I did understand. Bubba also emphatically and passionately asserted that a clown is more than a "human balloon twisting machine or a robotic face painter." Hearing this stated so unequivocally by a veteran clown performer allayed one of my major concerns about developing repertoire for the party audience, the bread and butter of clowns. In essence, he gave me permission to be the clown I was seeking to be, one that does other things than balloon animals, and, while trying to enter the ranks of working clowns, not to feel beholden to strictly emulate other clowns and their repertoire, or the typical expectations of the public.



Vivi-Ann Makes Her Official Debut, June 2007
photo by K.J. Weaverling

ON THE MISSION OF CLOWNS

"To become conscious of what is horrifying and to laugh at it, is to become the master of what is horrifying. The comic alone is capable of giving us the strength to bear the tragedy of existence." Eugene Ionesco (1998)

J.T. "Bubba" Sikes always speaks freely of his sense of mission in clowning. In particular, he works in clown ministry and is an active volunteer with Camp Sundown, a summer camp for children with xeroderma pigmentosum. Volunteer work is common for many professional clowns, and there are clowns whose primary purpose is to work as a clown "healer" in the areas of health care and humanitarian work.

The Physiology of Humor

Curiously, though the clown can be found throughout many cultures, the acceptance of laughter in public has varied in different times and cultures. Even in America, a hundred years ago, it was considered impolite to laugh out loud in public (Fry, 1987). It is only within the last few decades that formal research on laughter and health, both mental, emotional, and physical has been considered an acceptable field of study. Although it may have seemed obvious to a layperson, Western medical science has finally accepted through research, what Asian philosophy has postulated for centuries: that "emotional states can produce ...real and ... measurable changes in the structure and the function of the body" (Moody, 1978). Laughter is a cathartic release that functions both emotionally and physically. It has been shown to have a positive impact on the immune system as well (Berk and Tan, 1991). The limbic system releases neuropeptides in response to emotional stimuli which can interact with body cells. It has been shown that when attached to white blood cells, these neuropeptides can alter its action (Pert et. al., 1986).

Humor is a cross-brain activity that requires the integration of both right and left brain functions. The left side of the brain is required in processing the language or other symbol system that delivers the narrative of the story or actions, but at the "aha" moment when the viewer gets the joke, the activity moves toward the right brain. Dr. Alice Isen of Cornell University has researched the relationship of humor and creativeness of thought. She postulates that active use of humor requires movement

from a mental position of "functional fixedness" to one of "creative flexibility" (Isen, 1987).

Clowns in the Healthcare Environment

"As it is not proper to cure the eyes without the head, nor the head without the body, so neither is it proper to cure the body without the soul." Socrates

The term "caring clown" is the one that has come into use to describe the work of clowns in the field of health care. The work of a caring clown is considerably more low-key than the work of a clown entertaining at a party or in the circus. Whereas in these other environments, the work of the clown can be quite physical and "large," the work of the caring clown occurs primarily from the neck up, with the face. What distinguishes a caring clown in the therapeutic role most from other types of clowning, is that they strive to meet the needs of their small audiences, rather than attempting to draw the audience into their performance (Snowberg, 1992). Caring clowns work closely with hospital (or other institutional staff) within established schedules, routines, and procedures. One of the primary elements of caring clowns is that the patient is always in control of the interaction. The clown always asks permission to enter the room and visit, and if the patient says no, the clown respects this choice. It is also encouraged to incorporate choices within the clowning routines for the patient to direct the action. The caring clown considers visiting the room similar to visiting the patient's home, as at that moment, it is.

Another significant characteristic in caring clowning, is that no response from the patient is demanded or required. "By not asking for anything, we relieve the hospitalized individual from the strain of talking or interacting" (Snowberg, 1992). The caring clown focuses on compassionate versus caustic humor. Wooten (2002) characterizes compassionate humor as inclusive, creating bonds, relieving tension and discomfort whereas caustic humor is divisive, can perpetuate negative stereotypes, and can increase hostility, distress and defensiveness. She also advises that while clowning in the caregiving environment, vocal expression is more significant than the actual words, and that non-verbal communication is the most potent tool.

As the clown has a role outside the normal medical routine of health professionals, the clown can often evoke smiles and laughs, or even conscious response when others fail. Snowberg (1992) relates an incident when a caring clown was leaving the intensive care unit, and a woman walked up and embraced the clown in tears. Her mother had been in the ICU for over a week, and had been completely non-responsive to hospital staff. Some clowns entered her room, and the patient said instantly, "The circus is in town." From that point forward she began to progress rapidly, both physically and mentally. The tears were tears of joy, in appreciation for the work of the caring clowns.

There are now many caring clown organizations, most notably the Big Apple Circus Clown Care Unit which has their own training program and currently visit many New York City hospitals. The Clown Guild of metropolitan Chicago provides clowns through a federally funded therapeutic humor project at St. James Hospital in Chicago Heights and Clowns on Call is an organization in La Crosse, Wisconsin. There are many, many other formal and informal clown care programs in hospitals and nursing care facilities in the United States.

Clown Relief – Red Nose Diplomats

"When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on. And swing."
Leo Buscaglia (1986)

Any discussion of clown care in the field of healthcare would be incomplete without a discussion of clown relief workers. Clowns are becoming members of first response teams in disaster relief, and participate in humanitarian teams going abroad in ongoing projects. One of the most well known sponsors of these ventures is the Gesundheit! Institute founded by Patch Adams M.D. The Institute's humanitarian clown trips have the goal to "relieve suffering and promote joyful living" (Adams,2007) and have completed over ten trips in last four years to various global destinations. These trips utilize clown volunteers in 24x7 non-stop clowning. The goals of the Gesundheit! Institute's humanitarian clown missions address equally the growth of the clown volunteers as they do the needs of the residents in the destination country. They are:

1. to give the participants a magical clown troupe experience
2. to spread as much fun and love everywhere as is humanly possible

3. to expose the clowns to many people in host country to make friends with at least one

4. to give each clown the opportunity of two solid weeks of finding and spending time their clown self

5. to expose the clown volunteers to poverty to educate through experience the discrepancy between rich and poor.

Caring Clowns International – USA, Clowns Without Borders and Red Nose Response are three other organizations are dedicated to clown relief work, but there are also many others.

The qualities needed in a clown relief worker are similar in most respects to a caring clown in other health care situations. However, many organizations require the clown worker to have been certified in basic disaster training courses by the Red Cross. Compassionate humor is also the most appropriate, as is knowledge of the types of humor appropriate to the different stages in psychological recovery from a disaster. In the immediate aftermath, the “heroic” stage, humor functions largely as a means of anxiety reduction. In the “honeymoon” stage which can last one week to six months, survivors are not focusing on any negative aspects, as denial is actively functioning. Humor can be upbeat, and the humor found in the absurdity of the situation is common. The “disillusionment” stage can last up to two years after the disaster, and is the period of intense grieving. Survivors can use caustic humor as a coping tool. However, they can be unresponsive to joking by outsiders and humor can often be misinterpreted. In the final, “recovery” stage, ordinary humor slowly returns as the survivors work toward acceptance of their situation (Wooten, 2002).

Ginevra Sanguigno (2007) describes her experience as a “Nose Diplomat” in her frequent trips to Russian orphanages as follows:

“By being close to us and interacting with us for sometimes every year, these kids get to ‘read’ a different ‘book’ from the one they were destined to ‘read’: in our simple, clear and direct behaviour they ‘read’ LOVE, Understanding, Humility; they ‘see’ our shortcomings as well, they see us taking off that veil omnipotence our ‘western civilization’ has given us. ...

“These trips set the base to build a ‘culture’ of peace, starting from ourselves as a group, when we travel we get the chance to make peace ... everyone of us is a clown, we go and make peace with a people and its country we hardly know, we make peace in our own hearts, we, with our small-big everyday problems...compared to tragedies we witness, bigger

than life, we see peace blooming even inside these tragedies...it looks like a paradox, doesn't it? "

A PERSONAL MISSION

"Your joy is your sorrow unmasked. And the selfsame well from which your laughter arises was oftentimes filled with tears. And how else can it be? The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain." Khalil Gibran (1923)

In Buddhism there is a concept called changing poison into medicine (Hendoku Iyaku). It is a difficult idea to grasp, except through experience. How one's sufferings could be translated into benefit in any sense, seems farfetched, especially to those trapped in the immediacy of their suffering.

The practice of Buddhism, especially Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, emphasizes that overcoming one's own sufferings through practice is the essential ingredient in one's "human revolution," or path to enlightenment. The process of human revolution is an internally creative act. Many years ago a SGI (Soka Gakkai International) lay leader was discussing his own experience of human revolution, and elucidated clearly for me that in some way, some how, at some time, the difficult experiences of my current predicament would eventually become the foundation of my mission in life. In some way I would be able to translate my own internal human revolution into a means to transform the lives of others as well. Over 20 years have passed since then, and though I had often thought on this, I never could clearly see how to put this into specific action.

At the beginning of the second week of classes at the Ultimate Clown School, we had a session with Kim Winslow, one of the founders of the Big Apple Circus Clown Care Unit. At this point in time, I was clearly aware that I was in love with clowning, but I hadn't thought too far past the end of the workshop. At the end of Kim's session, there was an informal discussion of caring clowns and the discussion turned to clown relief workers. Several of the workshop participants had participated in overseas goodwill tours as clown ambassadors, and related their experiences. There was a precise physical sensation that I felt at that moment. I understood. This is it. *This* is how I am going to put together all the pieces. As a clown, I can be a relief worker, and transform the "poison" of my own suffering through disaster, into great "medicine" for others through my art. Clowning is an art form that is not dependent on place, age, time, money, or most importantly the funding of arts organizations. It is an art that I have a

great deal ahead yet to master, but I need only my own passion to pursue the path, not anyone's permission.

Finding my "inner clown" was not just an artistically liberating exercise as an artist as Lecoq might use it, or training in playing comic scenes that would assist in working with the Commedia dell' Arte genre, but was the discovery of an art form in which I wish to spend the foreseeable future honing my craft. At the time I first wrote the quote of Joseph Campbell of following one's "bliss" and then "doors will open where you would not have thought there were doors" in my personal blog in August 2004, it seemed like a nice idea but was just rhetoric. In a circumstance to make even a hardened skeptic reconsider, within weeks of becoming active in the Clown Forum online, I was invited to join "Red Nose Response" a clown relief organization that was inspired into action by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which is forming communications networks in all fifty states.

There are many specific steps ahead, including completing training in a clown and dog visitation program through a local animal shelter, to begin my work as a caring clown, and beginning my Red Cross disaster response training. The most significant change will come through the removal of impediments to being available to be a first responder, including early retirement from full time teaching and beginning a life as a professional performer and part-time teacher. What is important is to remember that "the purpose of the journey, is the journey itself" (Lecoq, 2001). Red noses are probably required.



Calling All Clowns -
photomontage by Chip
Christy, used with permission

"By laughing at me, the audience is really laughing at themselves, and realizing that they have done this, gives them a second wind for going back into the battle of life." Emmett Kelly (1954)

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APPENDIX A
Workshops, Training, and Observation

June 9, 2007

Clown Seminar at 2nd Annual Red Skelton Festival, Vincennes, Indiana: "How To Be Funny While In Clown" presented by J.T. "Bubba" Sikes

April 1, 2007

Mask Workshop at Studio 5, Brooklyn, New York: "Love" presented by Per Brahe. The workshop focused on love and its affects on the artist's body and used several different series of masks to explore Brahe's 5 steps to become the "ultimate artist" - Reproduction, Inertia, the Teacher, Liberation and The Free Creator

November 25, 2006

Mask Workshop at University of Illinois Chicago, Chicago, Illinois: "Laugh Making Masks" presented by Ginevra Sanguigno. A movement based workshop to develop comic gesture culminating in the use of Commedia Dell' Arte masks made by Jeff Semmerling.

August 19, 2006

Cole Brothers Circus, "Circus of the Stars", Newark Delaware
<http://www.colebroscircus.com/>

August 4, 2006

Creation: A Clown Show! Created and conceived by Lucas Caleb Rooney and Orlando Pabotoy; Theater 5, New York City. <http://www.creationclownshow.com/>

August 1, 2006

Slava's Snow Show; Union Square Theater, New York City.
<http://www.slavasnowshow.com/>

July 24 – August 6, 2006

Ultimate Clown School, New York, New York: Two week intensive professional study program of the art of clowning. Unlike other types of clown schools, its focus on character development and the comic narrative (story) to enable the students to develop their own clown character and clown material. It was started after RBB&B discontinued their Clown College training, and many former teachers of the Clown College present classes. The 2006 faculty included co-directors Dick Monday and Tiffany Riley, Larry Pisoni, Mark Renfro, Hovey Burgess, John Lepiarz, John Gilkey, Kim Winslow, Barry Lubin, Evelyn Tuths, and "Dikki" Ellis.

April 23, 2006

Voice Workshop at Brooklyn, New York: Fitzmaurice Voicework, Michael Chekhov, Monologue Workshop presented by Aole Miller. The workshop combined the Fitzmaurice voice deconstructing and restructuring technique with "the actable action" of character transformation inspired by the Michael Chekhov technique.

March 4-5, 2006

Mask Workshop at University of Illinois Chicago, Chicago, Illinois: "Basel Masks in Performance" presented by Ross Brown. An explorative movement based workshop using the basic "Basel" character masks.

February 26, 2006

Mask Workshop at Studio 5, Brooklyn, New York: Presented by Per Brahe. The workshop focused on steps to a deep inspirational release featuring clown masks.

October 8, 2005

Conference in Chicago, Illinois: Masks of Transition: Interdisciplinary and International Conference on Masks and Masking

Workshop with Larry Hunt – Mask Movement Workshop. A movement based workshop explored walking and other nuance leading to character personality, and explored the use of masks of his own design to discover inherent qualities within each mask through group work and improvisation and music.

Workshop with Jeff Semmerling - Message Bearing Parade Masks & Giant Puppets: Recycle and Reuse! Simple mask making workshop using corrugated cardboard where participants saw "examples and techniques to inspire them to make their own large masks with an artful difference."

August 28, 2006

Cole Brothers Circus, "2005 Show", Newark Delaware <http://www.colebroscircus.com/>

APPENDIX B

Vita of Artist, Actor, and Clown Instructors

Brahe, Per

<http://www.perbrahe.com/>

Per Brahe is the artistic director of the New Moon Repertory Theatre Company and Studio 5 in Brooklyn, New York. He has been a professional director, writer, actor, and teacher for over forty years. His most recent production with New Moon is his own translation and modern adaptation of Strindberg's "Miss Julie". He is a Master Teacher of the Michael Chekhov acting technique, world renowned mask teacher and expert in Balinese Mask. He is on the faculty of The Actor's Center, Yale School of Drama, NYU Tisch School of the Arts, and many other organizations.

Brown, Ross

<http://www.darksidemasks.com/>

Ross Brown is an Australian artist, mask-maker and performer.

Burgess, Hovey

Hovey Burgess is currently a faculty member of NYU's Tisch School of the Performing Arts and member of Circus Flora. He is a past president of the International Jugglers Association.

Ellis, Richard aka "Dikki"

<http://www.dikkiellis.com/dikkibio.htm>

Richard Ellis is the co-creator of The Hanlon-Lees Action Theater which has been featured in film, television, and live performance for over 20 years. He has performed in numerous venues, and is most noted for "Dikki" the flying clown, as seen on CBS' "Great Circuses of the World." He works with the "Big Apple Circus Clown Care Unit," as "Dr. Trikki" and as a clown/movement instructor and guest artist at North Carolina School of the Arts, New York University, University of Texas in Austin, Wake Forest University, and many others institutions. BFA – North Carolina School of the Arts, and study at the Circus Dimitri School in Switzerland.

Gilkey, John

John Gilkey is best known for the creation of comic characters in the Cirque du Soleil productions of Quidam and Varekai. He currently is coaching for the Cirque du Soleil and teaching for numerous organizations.

Hunt, Larry

<http://www.masque-hunt.org/>

Larry Hunt is the founder of MASQUE, an international touring company which performs original theater works focusing on mask and puppetry. An actor, director, mask-maker, and educator he has performed throughout the world.

Lepiarz, John

John Lepiarz is a graduate of the Lecoq school in Paris and best known as "Mr. Fish"

of the Big Apple Circus. He has appeared (with Trent Arterberry) in "Super Scientific Circus" presented as part of the Stephen F. Austin State University's Children's Performing Arts Series. He has appeared on ABC's "Great Circus Performances of the World" and other television programs. He won the first place in clowning at the International Circus Festival in Sarasota, Florida.

Lubin, Barry

Barry Lubin, 2002 inductee into the International Clown Hall of Fame, best known for his "Grandma" clown character performed with the RBB&B circus and the Big Apple Circus. He is a graduate of the RBB&B Clown College. He served as a writer/consultant for CBS's "Circus of the Stars" and as creative consultant for other network and cable television shows. He has been the director of comedy segments for current RBB&B shows, including "Bello & Friends", starring Bello Nock.

Miller, Aole T.

<http://www.perbrahe.com/>

Aole Miller is Creative Director of Studio 5 in Brooklyn, New York and a Certified Associate Teacher of Fitzmaurice Voicework. He is the first African-American Mask Dancer of Bali, a member of VASTA, and is on the faculty of the Chautauqua Theatre Company, and has presented workshops in Fitzmaurice Voicework, Chekhov and Grotowski acting techniques at many colleges and universities. He was the coach of Michelle Williams for her Academy Award nominated performance in Ang Lee's Brokeback Mountain. He holds a B.F.A. from NYU Tisch School of the Arts.

Monday, Dick and Riley, Tiffany

<http://www.nygoofs.com/>

Dick Monday and Tiffany Riley are the organizing members of the New York Goofs, and presented in March 2007 "God, Me, Slappy" (with Larry Pisoni) at the Watertower Theater in Dallas, Texas. Dick Monday also is the founder of "Slappy's Playhouse", a family theatre in Dallas, TX which presents European-style marionette shows. Monday and Riley were producers of "Clown Brain" which had a successful six week run at the Flea Theater in New York city in 200x. Tiffany Riley has performed with circuses worldwide, including Big Apple Circus and Circo Atayde in Mexico, and has choreographed for Bindlestiff Family Cirkus and International Children's Festival at Wolf Trap.

Pisoni, Larry

Larry Pisoni, one of the founders of the Pickle Family Circus which is recognized as the groundbreaker in what is now called the "new American Family circus". He is most famous for his clown "Lorenzo Pickle". He began as a child performer with his grandfather Al "The Wop" Pisoni touring on the Italian vaudeville circuit. He performed with the Circo dell Arte and the San Francisco Mime Troupe prior to organizing the Pickle Family Circus. He appeared in the solo clown show "Clown Dreams" and wrote and performed in the show "Clown Clown Clown Clown Clown Clown Clown". He appeared as Chico, the Dishwasher, in the 1980 movie "Popeye" starring Robin Williams.

Renfro, Mark

Mark Renfro, formerly of the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey, is expert in clown makeup and teaches regularly at Mooseburger Clown Camp and the Ultimate Clown School

Riley, Tiffany

see Monday, Dick and Riley, Tiffany

Sanguigno, Ginevra

<http://www.clowns.it/>

Ginevra Sanguigno is an actor, clown, and author of Il Cuerpo Che Ride, (The Laughing Body). The founder of Clown One Italia, a humanitarian clown relief organization which has worked with Dr. Patch Adam's Gesundheit! Institute to bring teams of healthcare workers, which included clowns, for humanitarian relief assistance in disaster areas. She has appeared with the Proskenion Theater and has trained at the Civic School of Dramatic Art in Milano, Italy, the Dance Academy's "Body Weather Laboratory" in Japan (Butai-Min Tanaka style).

Semmerling, Jeff

<http://www.insideoutarts.us/>

Jeff Semmerling is a master mask maker with over twenty years professional experience, and the co-owner of the Inside Out Arts Studio in Chicago, Illinois. The Inside Out Arts Studio has regularly scheduled classes for adults and children in many aspects of art, and sponsors workshops in mask at the University of Illinois Chicago with world renowned mask faculty. He holds a B.S. in Theatre from Northwestern University.

Sikes, J.T. aka "Bubba" the Clown

http://www.bubbasikes.com/index_main.html

J.T. "Bubba" Sikes is a clown, author, instructor and motivational speaker as is recognized as one of the premier Ministry clowns in the United States. He has trained other clowns at COAI (Clowns of America, International) events, Circus Magic, Clownfest, and ClownTown. He has won awards in makeup, skit, and parade events. He is a national spokesperson for the XP Society, a foundation to support the children who have xeroderma pigmentosum and their families, and volunteers at their Camp Sundown.

Tuths, Evelyn MSW

Evelyn Tuths is a founding member of both The New York Goofs and the all female clown troupe, Those in the Nose. She has performed Off Broadway and in national commercials, the TV series "Ed", and in several films including "Meet the Parents". Her teaching experience also includes Clown, Bouffon and Acting workshops for NYU Tisch School of the Arts, Marymount College, Friends Seminary, Elizabeth Irwin High School and Atlanta's Pebblebrook Performing Arts High School. She has worked with Arts Connection bringing the arts into NYC Public Schools and is currently working with Cancer Care social workers exploring the benefit of Clown work for their clients.

Winslow, Kim

<http://www.bigapplecircus.org/CommunityPrograms/ClownCare/>

Kim Winslow is an actor, puppeteer and clown. He has worked with the American Conservatory Theater and the Ragabash Theater. He has toured extensively internationally, including in Japan with "Pandemonium and the Dragon Fly," participating in the Osaka World Performers Festival and appearing on Japanese national television. He is one of the National Creative and Educational Coordinators for the Clown Care Unit ® and has helped in the creation of CCU programs in nine U.S. cities and programs abroad.

APPENDIX C

Personal Performance Appearances

February 5, 2005

Commedia dell' Arte appearance as Columbine at Mardi Gras Educational Foundation Fundraiser for Delaware Technical & Community College; Newark, Delaware

September 17, 2005

Clown appearance at Riverfest in Garrett-Tubman Park, Wilmington, Delaware

October 31, 2005

Clown appearance on Halloween at Delaware Technical & Community College; Newark, Delaware

February 25, 2006

Clown appearance at Mardi Gras Educational Foundation Fundraiser for Delaware Technical & Community College; Newark, Delaware

August 6, 2006

Ultimate Clown School Commencement Show; Flea Theater, New York, New York

September 23, 2006

Busking as a clown on the boardwalk, Ocean City, New Jersey

October 31, 2006

Clown appearance on Halloween at Delaware Technical & Community College; Newark, Delaware

November 2006

Clown appearance at St. Elizabeth's School, Wilmington, Delaware

June 9, 2007

Clown Professional Debut:

Parade of a Thousand Clowns and "Paint the Town Red", Vincennes, Indiana as part of the 2nd Annual Red Skelton Festival co-sponsored by Vincennes University and the city of Vincennes.

July 9-12 2007

"Vivi-Ann Full Throttle", Missoula, Montana; Professional appearances at the Creative Pulse