

Here and Now (ਏਥੇ ਤੇ ਹੁਣ)

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S FINAL REPORT



The cast of Here and Now

Left to right: Seth Ranaweera, Natasha Ali Wilson, Raminder Thind, Balinder Johal, Jas Grewal, Shawn Cheema, Jagdeep Singh Mangat. Photo: David Cooper

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Some quotes from media and audiences

“A genuinely gripping piece, which is powerful enough to prompt heartfelt responses that can only help deal with the problem.”

Peter Birnie, Critic's Picks, Vancouver Sun, November 24, 2005

“Tremendously important...I found myself talking about nothing but this play (**Here and Now**) the next morning.”

Jerry Wasserman, The Province November, 2006

“Few plays (**Here and Now**) offer such an opportunity for collective understanding, and such a powerful catalyst for change.”

Kathleen Oliver, Georgia Straight, November 24, 2005

“I saw **Here and Now** on Thursday night and stepped in for a character. It was an amazing experience. This was my first exposure to forum theatre and it is incredibly powerful. It really gave me a greater perspective on the issue of gangs and the individual struggles that encompass it. And what is so cool, is that this form allows, and even forces, the audience to think about it, struggle with it and explore problem solving. It is very empowering to be reminded that we all have choices.”

Shana Orlowsky, December 10, 2005

“What an original and great idea to make **Here and Now** so broadly interactive, to embrace the world. People who otherwise would not have been present at the theatre, were there too, by the magic of technology. I was impressed by the interventions and the perplexities of the courageous people that stepped up to find out that it is not that easy to get out, to face threatening individuals, to deal with reality. I loved how at the end you pointed at the humanity of Kam and Sunny and their predicament. At the end of the day, we are all humans, sometimes trapped in our own stories, disconcerted, not knowing how to undo the knot.”

Estela Torres, December 21, 2005

“I thought **Here and Now** was extremely effective in telling a story and revealing an issue that needed to be heard. It was amazing to see people, who were not actors, engage in a process that allowed them to change the outcome of such a huge societal issue. This type of theatre needs to continue, because it involves our audiences, and gives them an outlet to express their feelings and much needed opinions. It brought awareness around an issue that I had only seen through the newspaper, or the news, that I felt distant from. It also allowed me to see that there is hope for all people.”

Barbara Tomasic, December 21, 2005

“The **Here and Now** project holds a great deal of value within our local community and within our larger global community. As a member of the local Indo-Canadian community, to introduce this production with a discussion on the politics of race was valuable. By illustrating this point with an example of the non-racial identification of a 'white'/Caucasian' gang like the Hell's Angels - it does hit home with individuals that have never considered the racial profiling conducted by the media. And the exercise of interrupting the play and re-placing one of the performers and performing the "choice" was extremely useful. Many of us can sit back and judge what needs to be done but by performing the actions - you become involved in not only critical evaluation but the common sense factor. I think this project was highly effective and positive on multiple levels.

I came with my mother, brother and partner. Sitting within the family context was important to me as many of the issues were mirrored in our lives. As much as that exact story doesn't live out in my reality - it is far too close of a possibility in my world. I think it is important to see how something may play out. Personally, I found mirrors for all of us - and perhaps not embedded within one specific character but with certain mental constructions or characteristics. It is so easy for many of us to stand back and say call the cops - but it isn't as easy as that. There are so many strings that are interwoven and if you tug one - it impacts all of the rest - there isn't one all mighty fix all. Thank you for allowing us, as a family, to view this.”

Bindy Kang, December 22, 2005

“I was a workshop participant for the Headlines Theatre production of **Here and Now**. I was amazed at how all of the material that was covered in this play was a vital mirror of my own personal experiences inside my home, and the South Asian community abroad. I think that the content of the performance was very timely. It was exquisitely displayed on-stage.”

Shyam Wazir, December 27, 2005

“Here and Now was very worthwhile, exciting, timely, important, necessary for breaking stereotypes, and developing awareness. Extremely educational and bold. A daring process that is safe in its structure - one that illuminates not only when it succeeds, but, even more so when failure is allowed to be witnessed. I was educated about gangs - indoctrination and exiting gangs - I'd never been aware of some of the issues that your cast presented.”

Drue Robinson Hagan, December 28, 2005

“Here and Now is a compelling ripped-from-the-streets drama about gangs and violence. It is, as always with Headlines, phenomenal theatre created by community workshops that make the resulting performance almost unbearably authentic. We are losing a whole generation of kids to gangs and violence, and this play asks fierce questions about what we are going to do about that heart scouring loss.”

Tom Sandborn, list-serve, December 2005

“Here and Now was significant, poignant, powerful and thought provoking. I was very impressed at the way it worked to stimulate such interesting conversation and interventions. I left that production really thinking -- and very much realizing that there are no easy solutions. As an Anglo-Canadian, the production gave me a rare opportunity to see inside and hear from an Indo-Canadian family and that for me was hugely valuable. Furthermore, to hear from other members of the Indo-Canadian community in such a frank and intimate setting was eye opening.”

Heather Frost, January 3, 2006

“Sometimes the interventions (in **Here and Now**) succeeded and other times they failed, but throughout the interventions four things were constant: meaningful learning, deep pleasure, and the celebration of public courage and civic intelligence. In short, riveting theatre.”

Adam Ward, Organic Press, (State of Washington, USA) Volume 2, Issue 5

Before Reading this report

Probably the best thing to do in terms of reading this report is to first read Kashmir Besla's "*Here and Now Community Action Report*". Kashmir's document is the paper culmination of this human project: a synthesis of the ideas that came onto the stage regarding suggestions for action around the issues of gang violence.

I also want to draw your attention to:

Dafne Blanco's *Community Outreach Report*
 Jen Cressey's *Publicity Report* and
 Manjot Bains' *Publicity and Outreach Report*

These reports deal very well with the complexities, successes and challenges of Outreach and Publicity and can be found at:

<http://www.headlinestheatre.com/Hereandnow/finalreports.html>

Why and what

In late 2004 a series of what we at Headlines considered to be sensational articles on Indo-Canadian Gang Violence appeared in the Vancouver Sun. These articles stimulated a conversation in the office, which was reflected in the lobby display audience members saw coming into the theatre. The display was blown up copies of these articles over the years with very sensational headlines. To view the lobby display, go to:

<http://www.headlinestheatre.com/Hereandnow/display1.html>

Isn't it interesting, we thought, that 15 or so years ago these very same articles were being written about the Chinese and Vietnamese communities. Then seven or so years ago the focus shifted to Latino communities. Right now it's the Indo-Canadian community. Some years from now, in all likelihood, the focus will be some other community.

The truth of the matter is, though, that the issues of violence and gang violence are woven through all of our communities. Why is it that the Hell's Angels get to be called the "Hell's Angels" and are not identified as a "white gang" or some ethnically defined gang, and yet it is Honduran Gangs, Indo-Canadian Gangs, etc.?

Out of this conversation the idea for this project bubbled up. Because the current focus of the media was the Indo-Canadian community, we approached people in the community with the idea. We got a very positive response.

And so, almost a year later, after a great deal of networking and fundraising, twenty-two people from the community who were living the issues of gang violence gathered together in a week-long **THEATRE FOR LIVING** workshop. The cast were part of that group. When I say "living the issues" I mean that some of them were ex-gang members; some of them from inside families who were touched in various ways by the issues. The age range in the group was 19 – mid-seventies.

After the week-long workshop the cast, production team and I had almost three weeks to make the play. Not a play that told any one person's story. No one played themselves or any one workshop participant in the play. Our job was to make the best theatre possible that told the truth of the living community.

We worked very hard to invite the general public to the production. Our hope was, because theatre is symbolic, that diverse audiences would come to the production and be able to recognize that the symbol on the stage – a gift to all of us from the Indo-Canadian community – belongs to us all. That the family on the stage could be any family. That the gang members could be any gang members. And that if we could agree that we all share the problem, we could use Forum Theatre to work on the issue together – to seek grassroots solutions, not top-down solutions, but grassroots solutions to the issues that we share.

Some successes

Here and Now (ਏਥੇ ਤੇ ਹੁਣ) was a broad-based collaboration. The outreach network included over 70 organizations and individuals, as detailed in Dafne Blanco's and Manjot Bains' Outreach Reports. This does not include the over 30 people who were directly employed by the project, the majority of them being community members.

One of the project's many successes was its ability to bridge cultures both in community and in the media. We have been hearing from people that they believe that the project actually redefined the conversation about gangs on a local and national level, in that,

- a) it helped people to recognize that while the issues are real, they are not limited to one ethnic community, and
- b) it helped people realize that gang members are not 'the other'; they are our children, siblings, neighbours – they are us.

Here and Now (ਏਥੇ ਤੇ ਹੁਣ) was very successful at achieving its goals:

The creation of good art

It is not enough, I believe, for theatre like this to have good intentions and/or good politics. To be effective, it must also be good theatre. We have a responsibility to make the best art that we can – attempting less is disrespectful to both the community members with whom we are working and, ultimately, to the audiences who come to performances. It is, after all, not Forum *meeting*, not Forum *lecture*, it is Forum *theatre*.

To be a true voice that stimulated a multicultural conversation

The play was, as is confirmed by some of the quotes used above, a true voice of the Indo-Canadian community that also served as a mirror for various communities to see the complexities of the issues of gang violence. It was and is my contention that because theatre is symbolic that we can all look at the symbolism of the theatrical event and work on the issues that we share together. You will see in the Forum Theatre section of the report (November 17 onward) that there are many examples of this in the audience interventions. Here is one:

A young woman of African descent (this is important because she came to me later and was so happy with the production and that the family felt to her like her own family – Jeewan in particular, she said made a “perfect African Dad”), replaced Sonia at one of the performances. She really asserted herself inside the family, in a wonderful way. She both embraced Sonia’s passion for her cell phone and her need to connect with friends, and at the same time balanced that with the father’s need to share his news with the family. It seemed so simple but we all agreed that the way it was done empowered Sonia and at the same time respected the father.

The learning in the room about both navigating this family moment, and about how the family could be any family – that the issues really do transcend culture, was palpable. This is the reason we tried so hard to bring a multicultural audience to this production that grew out of the Indo-Canadian community. This kind of thing happened many times, with many different interveners.

To get beneath the sensationalism of the news headlines

So many people commented to us that the play presented them with both information and a perspective that was new to them. In particular because it humanized the players in an issue that is often presented to us in a binary, “good and evil” manner. The play, while not condoning criminal behaviour, really sought out the reasons people make decisions that lead to gang violence.

To reach a broad audience

Here and Now (ਏਥੇ ਤੇ ਹੁਣ) performed to a remarkably diverse audience of 1,409 people in the two theatres, which translates into an overall calculation of 66% houses. The live telecast was seen by an estimated 15,000 people in the Lower Mainland. Our web counter indicates that 660 computers logged into the video page of the live web cast. We understand that there is usually more than one person at a computer for a viewing like this so, while it is impossible to know exactly, we can safely estimate about 1,200 international web viewers. Viewers did not have to log into chat space to see the production.

Viewers did have to log into chat to make interventions. The chat log contains entries from such places as: many parts of Australia, across BC, Bellingham, Berlin, across Ontario, Belgium, Calgary and Edmonton, the UK, Japan, Tennessee, Montreal, NYC, the Philippines, Regina, Holland, San Francisco, Spain, Surrey and Vancouver.

The tele/web actors took interventions from these places: San Francisco (1), Perth, Australia (1), Windsor, Ontario (1), Brisbane, Australia (1), Aldergrove BC (2), Vancouver (10), Fernie BC (2), New York City (2), Surrey BC (5) and Toronto (1). Of course only a portion of these made it to the stage. There were also many interventions live, in the theatre, from that night’s audience.

A DVD or VHS tape of the live tele/web cast is available (for personal viewing only – i.e. non-commercial) by contacting Headlines.

To be the catalyst for the creation and distribution of a Community Action Report

Kashmir Besla's report is available in the **Here and Now Final Report** section of our web site: <http://www.headlinestheatre.com/Hereandnow/finalreports.html> and has been accessed already by interested parties around the world. It has also been distributed to the many Social Service Agencies who helped us network the production, and also to the funders who supported the project. Our hope is that the report will have a life beyond the project and that the suggestions in it, drawn from the grassroots, will be taken seriously and form policy and programming on these complex issues. In particular, the idea for "safe houses" that make it possible for gang members to exit gang life strikes me as having immediate urgency.

Headlines, a theatre company, can only do so much. It is now the role of social service agencies, individuals and Government to take the suggestions in the report to the next level of becoming reality.

Some challenges

Of course the project also had its challenges. The bulk of this report is an edited version of my daily journals, which start on page 11. The reason to share the project in this kind of detail is to give you a sense of the complexity, the ups and downs of a community-based process.

While the audiences were very varied, we also had a difficult time getting them out to the show and helping the Media focus on the root causes of the issue, rather than the symptoms. We ran into skepticism from all sectors that a play about these issues could be a) entertaining and b) manage to stimulate real community dialogue.

Here are some insights into these issues from Outreach and Publicity Reports.

First, from Dafne Blanco's Outreach Report:

"Looking back, I believe that there is still a sense of denial in our communities around the subject matter. During several conversations with members of the Indo-Canadian community and others I kept hearing, yes this is so unfortunate, but is not us it's *them*. People articulated the denial in several forms: *gang involvement happens in non-educated sectors of the community; it happens only in working class sectors; drug trade is associated to extremist Sikh separatists; the issue is big in the Indo-Canadian community now, I'm Chinese/Caucasian, etc, why call me?; my family never experienced it, etc*. The stigma associated with the issue was a huge barrier for many, to some extent during recruitment, but more acutely when trying to bring audiences to the show. Of course, the fact that we chose to focus on the story of the Indo-Canadian community as the starting point for the exploration of the issue was necessary, but added complexity to the articulation of my invitation.

Describing the project as an initiative looking for solutions to the issue was received with skepticism in some cases. There is cynicism in our communities since there have been so many initiatives trying to "solve" the problem and yet, the death toll keeps rising. I became

aware of it after the first performances and my articulation evolved to focus on the amazing potential of Forum Theatre to explore the root causes of the issue, explore the human relations' complexities feeding into it and the shows as an opening door to a safe space where ordinary community members could investigate a convoluted topic.

Another barrier was the ever present Headlines' dilemma: the prejudice against the concept of community-based theatre in the larger mainstream community and I think that works against us on many fronts, during outreach and ticket booking. Community-based theatre equals low quality theatre in the eyes of many. Even workshop participants and cast members commented to me during the closing night celebration: "when you were recruiting me, I thought, humm... I don't know about community theatre... and now, after the project is over I'm blown away by the professionalism of the company and the high-end product that we delivered to the public!"

I believe that part of my challenge as Outreach Coordinator – and of Headlines in general – is to convey to the mainstream community an image of the company and the process itself that does justice to the impact and high quality work that the company produces. The big question for future projects is: How do we do it without resorting to glossy marketing tactics while remaining true to the grassroots process?"

Another insight is also in Jen Cressey's Publicity Report:

Here and Now worked with members of the Indo-Canadian community on an issue that had been described by the media as being "theirs". From the earliest conversations about the project, there was a fear that the people who weren't from the community would consider the subject to be outside their experience, and not attend. With this in mind, it was necessary to create both a short slogan that emphasized the commonality of the play's themes, and also a longer message that walked media representatives through the logic behind the slogan.

The slogan was "We all share the problem. The solutions are Here and Now". The explanation delineated that yes, we were working with members of the Indo-Canadian community, as they had been targeted by the media, but the stories onstage were common stories. At that point, examples were often useful. Intergenerational conflict is not exclusive to any one community, and something that people readily understood.

This message was repeated in all communications, and resulted in a generally positive response. In most cases, we were able to frame the discussion around common issues, rather than supposedly foreign, divisive concepts of cultural difference. Only a couple of media people had difficulty with the idea. In particular, Camille Bains from the Canadian Press was adamant that the gang issue was a racial one, and Priya Ramu at CBC Radio went so far as to ask if we felt that "enough Indo-Canadians were in the audience".

And in Manjot Bains' report:

"South Asian media and audience members were pleasantly surprised with *Here and Now*. Many were skeptical about the play, but after seeing it, were moved and motivated by the questions and answers it had the potential to present. One such audience member was a founding director of VIRSA, an organization working on gang violence prevention. He attended the play with many reservations, but, after doing two interventions, appeared on Radio India encouraging parents to see the play. The use of actors who knew the issue and the use of Forum Theatre set *Here and Now* apart from other violence prevention projects in the community"

In other words. Although the project was a great success, it was a great deal of work to convince people to attend. Once they did they were very surprised at both the quality of the theatre and the depth of the event.

This applied also to people outside the Indo-Canadian Community. We made a very strong choice with this project – that I still believe was the correct choice. That was

to tell a specific story and to acknowledge that that story was a symbol that applied to all of us. We found that agencies outside the Indo-Canadian community wanted the project to have come from their own community and had to be really convinced to network performances in their communities. This was very frustrating. As indicated above, once we got them into the theatre, they saw clearly that the issues belong to all of us.

We also chose to run performances for four weeks. A lengthy run for a play like this. Having decided that there would be two venues (the Ross Street Temple and the Surrey Arts Centre), the question became, ‘how many performances in each venue?’ It seemed like not enough to do one week in each and unbalanced to do one week in one and two weeks in the other. We ended up with four weeks. In retrospect, I think the run was too long and is one of the reasons that attendance percentage numbers seem low. **Practicing Democracy** performed to about the same number of people but over three weeks, not four. This makes the percentages of houses lower for **Here and Now (ਏਥੇ ਤੇ ਹੁਣ)**,

Legacies

The legacies of a project like this are varied. First there is the human transformation that occurs, transformation at both a personally individual level and a much broader ‘living community’ level – things that we cannot know about right now, but, as is the case with other projects, will hear about years from now. This legacy is qualitative, not quantitative.

Then there is the shifting perception that occurs through all the media attention – media attention that highlighted the perspective that the issue is one that belongs to us all. We are confident that **Here and Now (ਏਥੇ ਤੇ ਹੁਣ)** helped shift the way conversations happen about gang violence.

Lastly, we hope there will be a result that will come from the Community Action Report. We have been informed that Canadian Heritage will be making the **Here and Now Community Action Report** part of its presentation to the Federal Government when it presents the conclusions of the “Group of 10 Report” – an Indo-Canadian initiative seeking solutions to gang violence. This is an indicator that the Here and Now report is being taken very seriously. We will also distribute the report to the dozens of community organizations who were involved in supporting the project, with the hope that the recommendations will be taken up and will influence their programming. Of course the report is also available to anyone who is interested via our web site.

We have also just been informed (on January 18, 2006) that Pacific Community Resources Society in Surrey, having read the Community Action Report, are considering taking up the recommendation for a toll free phone line for information on gangs.

“It has been evident for quite some time that members of various communities do not feel safe accessing resources that are currently offered to families that are dealing with issues of violence and gangs. A toll free telephone number would be helpful for the communities that want to get information about resources, learn about different options, simply be heard, or share information confidentially. They do not have to involve the authorities, but can still give information that would be helpful in solving crimes and keeping communities safe. The

toll free resource lines would be available 24 hours of the day, and would be answered by skilled individuals that are fluent in the various languages spoken in the lower mainland. This would be a confidential resource line. The caller would be assisted through referrals and other appropriate interventions. This number would also allow callers to be directed toward safer options, such as safe houses.” (From Kashmir Besla’s Community Action Report)

Thank you

Thanks must go out to the cast:

Balinder Johal
Jagdeep Singh Mangat
Jas Grewal
Seth Ranaweera

Natasha Ali Wilson
Shawn Cheema
Raminder Thind

all the workshop participants:

Balinder Johal
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Jagdeep Singh Mangat
Jas Grewal
Karuna Agrawal
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Nitasha Rajoo
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Raminder Thind
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Surrinder Bring
Vivek Balachandran

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To the production team:

Dylan Mazur
Dafne Blanco
Jackie Crossland
Jen Cressey
Manjot Bains
Harry Hertscheg
Craig Hall
Kitty Hoffman
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Julie Martens
Amos Hertzman
Movement Coach
Kashmir Besla
Julius Fisher, Chris Bouris
Dafne Blanco

Production Manager
Community Outreach Coordinator
Financial Administrator
Publicist
Publicity and Outreach Assistant
Core Operations Management
Technical Director
Stage Manager, Lighting Operator
Lighting Designer
Set, Props, Costume Designer
Sound Designer
Sudnya Naik
Community Scribe
Webmasters
Graphic Design

And also to those who contributed in other ways. They are:

Here and Now Advisory Committee (Pre-Production): Shashi Assanand, Ravinder Dhir, Hemi Dhanoa, Charan Gill, Suki Grewal, Aneeta Jandu, Kamal Sharma, Nav Sanghera, Sadhu Binning, Amar Randhawa, Gurjit Toor, Parm Grewal, Daljit DJ Parmar, and Kabir Shaukat Ali.

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What follows is an edited version of my daily journals in the creation, rehearsal and performance process. I hope it gives you an insight into this wonderful project.

Sincerely,

David Diamond
Artistic and Managing Director/Joker

Journal entries

Pre-production

July 11, 2005

It seems like a good time to start these journal entries. The community workshop doesn't start until mid-October, but there is already a great deal that has happened and is happening.

Negotiations with the Ross Street Temple

We will be doing the community workshop at the Moberly Arts centre in Vancouver. The creation/rehearsal process and the first two weeks of performance, will be at the Ross Street Temple, in the Activity Room, adjacent to the actual Temple. The decision to do the project at the Temple is a radical one. The room itself poses difficulties – it is relatively small and a very strange shape, but we feel confident that we can get our portable stage in, lights etc., and seat 100 people – although it will be tight. The reason to be at the Temple is to really reach into the community.

Suki Grewal did the initial negotiations with the Temple Executive. This seemed really simple – a signed contract came with ease. We asked to meet with the Executive for a production meeting and it was here that we ran into difficulty. The Executive member who signed the contract was not present, and had not informed anyone else of the Executive about the project. It was a unilateral act. This became apparent fairly quickly in the meeting as we (Headlines) wanted to talk about the nuts and bolts of physically building a theatre in the Activity Room and the Executive wanted to know what the project was about. When we showed them the contract they were very surprised – not a good moment for any of us. They were gracious but obviously taken aback. We all agreed that they needed time to talk it over.

I sent them a message, through Suki, that I recognized the situation they were in and that I wanted them to know I had no intention of trapping them into a contract that was signed, but unknown. The project, if it was going to be successful, needed to be truly welcome, as it was bound to deal with controversial issues.

A couple of days later we got word that they had agreed that the project was very worthwhile and that they would host it, under the terms of the already signed contract. We met with Kashmir Dhaliwal, who became our Temple contact and had a productive and straightforward meeting in which we discussed the parameters of the project including but not limited to:

- No meat consumption or smoking at any time on the premises.
- The Temple Executive understands that the play and Forum will be an expression from the community and will need to be portrayed with a sense of reality. This will likely mean violence on the stage and also rough language. They were concerned about nudity – but we have assured them that we do not see the potential of the need for nudity arising.
- We have exclusive use of the space.

We will provide 10 free tickets for each performance (to be distributed by the Temple) so its members, who are used to attending events for free, have access.

Difficulty finding a designer

We have been having a very hard time finding an Indo-Canadian set, prop and costume designer. Those who might have been able to do it are working in film/video and are unable to commit the time. We are still looking but it is starting to appear that we may have to look outside the community.

The Choreographer

Sudnya Naik is working on the project as choreographer. This is not because I think there is going to be dance in the play. I had an idea, though, early on, to work with shadows in a way that could give an interesting theatrical underlay to the play. somehow to have cast members make emotion-based shadow images with their bodies that would be the backdrop for some of the scenes. It's a vague idea but Sudnya liked it and we agreed to work together to see if we could bring it to fruition.

September 6, 2005

Summer is over, we are back in the office from the long-week-end, Manjot Bains and Jen Cressey have started officially as Publicity/Outreach Assistant and Publicist respectively; we are now starting to fire on all cylinders.

We had a series of good photo shoots with David Cooper and have come up with a striking image that will be the poster and postcards. This proved to be the most complex poster design for me, starting with the fact that we lost the initial designer. (We did finally re-establish contact with Baljit Deo, the original designer. It has been very friendly – he explained he got busy, without any mention of all the messages we left or that we were inconvenienced in any way. We have let it go.)

The image is very strong but needed contextualizing. The feedback we were getting was it looked like an image of Elder abuse. So, we went back into conversations about placing a funeral in the image somehow, but this soon proved to not be the answer. Dafne said she would play around with images of 'the street' and went to Baljit's latest rock video and froze a frame of dark SUV's in a back lane. We got Baljit's permission to use the image. Over this she created a police 'do not cross' tape. While the poster image becomes quite literal this way, I think its necessary to contextualize the image itself. It needs to give us some sense of what the project is about. In text we will insert: "The problem belongs to us all. The solutions are Here and Now".

Finding an Indo-Canadian designer has continued to be problematic. We have talked with everyone we know and interviewed numerous people. What appears to be the case is that while there are performers and writers coming from the community, there are not people going into the technical side of theatre. Film, possibly, but these people are not interested, it turns out, in the small amount of money for the long periods of time that theatre projects pay. Film is short and lucrative. We talked with interior designers, feeling that our Technical Director,

being a designer himself, could navigate the theatre territory, as long as the designer had a design sense. We found, however, that while people were interested in the project, no one was willing to commit the time it would take to have the kind of creative process necessary for a professional design. We have now started looking outside the community.

September 20, 2005

We have gone into overdrive now, knowing we have the budget for the entire project. The poster/postcards are at the printer, we have confirmed hiring on all personnel except the Community Scribe (still looking). Interviews with workshop participants / cast members start in two days.

Manjot and Dafne did a TV appearance on Kamal Sharma's Community TV show. Within minutes of it airing our phones started to ring with people wanting to be involved in the project. We have space for 25 participants and will be doing 33 half-hour interviews Sept. 22 – 24. The schedule is now full. We are looking at the possibility of doing a few more interviews the afternoon of the 26th.

The lesson in this is that while the traditional networking was really spreading the word about the project, this community, in particular, seems to be really plugged in to their own radio and television.

September 27, 2005

The interviews were extremely intense. We saw a good number of strong young men, all of them with direct experience in the issues, and one strong young woman. Some grandparent possibilities and mother possibilities, who have experienced the issues from that angle. We have no one who could play a father at this moment. I have considered simply accepting this and making the mother character a single mother, but feel strongly that this signals a very bad message: broken family = gang violence, which is simply not the case. It feels imperative that we find a father.

We have gone to the people we know to try to network this but without success. Of course the men of this age range would be hard to bring into the process. They are working, they also may not be interested. Today we started looking through the talent agencies. This may mean that the person in the role does not have the kind of direct experience I would want, but....I will keep my fingers crossed.

The posters and postcards arrived from the printer today and look great.

October 16, 2005

A lot has happened. The talent agencies netted zero. I did find a father by, interestingly, recalling someone who I had already interviewed.

And so we have a confirmed cast: Balinder Johal (Grandmother), Raminder Thind (Father), Jas Grewal (Mother), Natasha Ali Wilson (Daughter), and Shawn Cheema and Jagdeep Singh Mangat who may or may not be members of the family.

The community workshop starts tomorrow and all the participants are confirmed, as is the catering (lunches for 29 people for six days). In the last few days we have had a production meeting with the design team in which we have started the process to understand the lighting and set, costume, prop requirements and also a tele/web cast production meeting, to start creating the crew and web network for the live telecast and web cast on December 11.

The Community Workshop

Monday, October 17, 2005

Day 1

Day 1 of the workshop, and so it feels like a big start of something, but as Dafne mentioned in the introductory circle, it has taken us over a year to get to this day.

We had 25 participants, lost one a few days ago and lost two this morning. One had a friend die and has gone to the US to the funeral and the other is also catering the workshop (his company is), and he has discovered he is short-handed and so has dropped out.

Still, it's a strong group – very varied and the work today was great. They took to analyzing the imagery in the games pretty much right away. Some of the things that were discussed early on was how some people follow blindly – how, in the community, one is either a leader or a follower and there is a sense among some that its better to be a follower....so people follow. Also discussed were the many reasons people have for not getting involved in trying to deal with the issues – respect for others, not wanting to expose them, fear of others, fear of what others will think, and fear of shame to family. All of these in their own way being silencers.

We have already had images of extreme violence – parents beating their children and discussions of how that violence leads kids to seek out peers with whom they feel they can belong and feel protected. An image of a funeral and a family in mourning and shock – how could this have happened?

In one of the images a grown son is on the floor, curled up, while a woman is slapping him....very strong....he has, perhaps, done something terrible and the violent reaction from his family drives him further away.

The final circle took almost an hour – a surprise on the first day – people had lots to say about how amazing it is to have a space to really discuss the issues, about the diversity of experience in the room. One concern I have is that the cast members (most of them) are being quite quiet right now – I am wondering if this comes from the talk I gave them about “being sponges”. Do they think I don't want them to participate fully? I will sort this out with them tomorrow.

Tuesday, October 18, 2005

Day 2

I spoke with the cast first thing in the morning and told them that I thought some of them were sitting back a lot yesterday, and that when I talked with them at the contract signing (the 1st time they met each other) about 'being sponges', I didn't mean that they should not participate fully in the workshop. They seemed to understand why I was saying this and acknowledged that they knew they needed to be more activated.

The final Group of 4 image was very strong – a mother begging her son to stay – he is on his way into violence. In the background is a father, reading a newspaper – not paying any attention and a daughter on a cell-phone, deeply inside some other world.

On animation this Image was very strong and led to a long discussion about various aspects of the issue:

Many mothers came onto the stage to 'stand with the mother' and when they spoke, none of them knew what they wanted (for themselves). Always it was "I want him to.....stay, stop his behaviour, be a good son, etc." That's what you want HIM to do I kept saying – what do you want? They couldn't answer – and so this was obviously the answer – and also, we discussed, part of the problem. The mother, being focused so completely on the son, wanting the best for him, also pushes him away. The group talked about how he leaves because he has no space – he goes to find "family" in which he can feel safe because he does not feel safe in the claustrophobic environment in which he is living. The mother gets exactly what she fears by allowing her fear to govern her behaviour.

At the same time the father keeps saying (in the animation) 'I want to be in India'. He leaves the problem to his wife – he has already left.

Throughout this, the daughter is walking out the door – to do what? No one knows. Know one asks. Why? In discussion we hear that the daughter does not matter. She does not belong to the mother or the father – she will belong to some other family and so is not a concern to them. This caused quite an uproar in the room but when I asked the room who knew it was true – they didn't have to think it was good, or right, or agree – but was it true – about 70% said yes, its true.

All of this from one Image.

We have created 5 groups with Magnetic Image and animated one of them. We are at a funeral of a young woman. The scene is complex. Young men are there very upset, guilty, blaming each other. Young women are there, some of them saying, she got what she deserved – I am so glad this happened to her and not me. Some of them are also, as they mourn in a traditional manner – admitting secretly that the traditions have no meaning – they are doing them because they want people to think well of them – and a lot of the image is about how things look on the surface.

On animation the young men get into a physical fight – at the funeral – about who is to blame for the death.

In the final circle many spoke about how amazing it is what has happened in 2 days – how they had no idea how deep the work would be – how the whole community should do this.

Its fascinating – one of the women talked about how the games draw so deeply on traditional Indian Culture. What is happening is what always happens: the work itself is extremely flexible. It gets inside people and speaks to them on primal levels. If they are still attached to traditional ways in their culture – the work seems to fit those traditional ways - I have witnessed this in Namibia, in New Zealand and in First Nations communities across North America. Living Communities need to use primal language to tell their stories.

Wednesday, October 19, 2005

Day 3

Another intense day. Got the news this morning that it is possible that on Friday the hall we are in, a Civic building, is going to be behind a picket line. Dylan has made arrangements for us to go to the Temple that day if necessary.

The games went well in the morning, and, much to my surprise, most of the group did the Intestine. Is was a big deal for many of them – trust is an issue – and as I hoped it would, the experience deepened the connections in the room.

There was a really strong image of three guys – one is on the ground, knocked out. The other has a gun and is trying to get his friend to shoot the passed out guy. The scenario is that they beat him up and then realized that he is from a more powerful gang than they have. If he lives he will come and kill them – but they don't kill him. The improvization about needing to kill him and one of them not wanting to was very powerful. Most powerful was a moment when one friend put the gun to his other friend's head and threatened to kill him if he didn't shoot the other guy....but then he backed off. The decision to NOT pull the trigger was huge.

This improvization affected the room very deeply – many of them recognized the truth of it. When I asked the room how many of them had held a gun that was not for sport, about 65 – 70% of them raised their hands.

Thursday, October 20, 2005

Day 4

A lot of the activities today were chosen to bring the group 'into the moment' in preparation for Rainbow of Desire this afternoon and making plays tomorrow.

The Journey helped them understand, experientially, that reality is perception-based. In one of the pairings, the leader created a scene where her partner was getting ready to go to work at a construction site – putting on boots, a hard hat, etc. His experience of this was taking off his shoes, preparing for prayer. Which one is

the true experience? Both, of course. And its easy to see how this translates into different perceptions inside a family. This doesn't mean that everyone is right, of course – the abusive father isn't correct in what he is doing, but can we understand that he has a perspective on the events that lead him to believe he is correct? We must do this if we are going to portray a character with integrity – especially a character with whom we disagree.

I spent a lot of time on Speed Gestures – an exercise I have developed to stimulate improvization skills. By the end of an hour of moving from simple sound and gestures into exchanging gestures and sentences, accepting realities that were being thrown at them, they were swimming in complex improvizations that were focused.

We broke for lunch and then, after a game to get them moving, went into a three hour Rainbow of Desire exercise.

The room chose the story of a young woman. Its about her and her father. She is sitting watching TV. The mail is on the table. He enters the living room and picks up the mail – a bank statement in her name – and goes to open it. She tells him not to – its her mail – and the ensuing argument is all about power, she being under his control, he will open her mail and look at her money if he wants to.

A young man offered to play Dad. The young woman's Rainbow fragments included: wanting to punch him in the face; wanting respect from him; wanting the letter; and a fear that he would hit her. His Rainbow fragments included: a fear that she would never understand him; a desire to leave the room and have peace; a desire to put her in her place by slapping her; and...another one I can't remember right now.

The work was very strong and deep. Her fear empowered the father, it gave him exactly what he wanted and in the end, he had no respect for it/her. In another improvization the levels of anger rose so high – the two characters were screaming at each other. The scene was certainly going to escalate to violence. Then there was a moment – when he was talking about how he wanted her respect – she replied – well, if you do then you must see...the mail belongs to me – and he heard this. He tried to ignore it but he couldn't – we all saw it go in....it was like emotional judo – and it was done calmly. A moment in the theatre – but maybe there is a clue.

In another moment, when the father's desire to slap her was onstage – he was saying – what's wrong? Don't I take care of you and your mother – why are you afraid? All the while with his hand raised above his head, ready to slap. She said – well then why is your hand raised – and it was amazing....the father had forgotten it was there – a 'true moment' – he is so accustomed to this, it is normal now – how can he stop if he has forgotten it is even there?

The insights in the exercise today are not, I think, about finding actual solutions to that story – the story is a symbol. We are all reflecting the moments back into our own lives and investigating what we do – how we perceive the actions and behaviour of others...also deepening our understandings of character for the play.

The final circle took an hour today – the longest yet. Everyone spoke (first time) and there were some long stories and lots of tears – from some of the very young people

– stories about their fathers and mothers and homelife, stories about friends who died. We make plays tomorrow.

We will be working at the Ross Street Temple tomorrow. The hall we are in is going to be behind a picket line for the day, in support of the Teacher's Strike.

Also.....I have been considering that we may not be able to tell the story we need to tell with one young woman and two young men....(and grandmother, mother, father). We may need another youth. I have checked budgets today and, we do have the funds in the year to hire another actor. I am talking with Seth Ranawera, one of the workshop participants.

Friday, October 21, 2005

Day 5

We had to be in the Temple Hall today. This meant moving all the catering materials, coffee and tea etc., some sheets over. We are back at the Moberly tomorrow for our final day. It was strange to change space, but a good dry run for being at the Temple for the next five weeks. Big issues that we need to be on the look-out for:

- a fairly constant stream of curious people wandering in – who have ownership of the space.
- The lack of water access, except in the downstairs washrooms

Other than this it was pretty smooth. After we are there for a few days I think it will start to be home.

The Magnetic Image work took a fair bit of time in the last few days and so Rainbow happened yesterday afternoon, which meant creating the plays this morning, rehearsing two this afternoon and two tomorrow morning and then doing Forum tomorrow afternoon. It didn't work this neatly. We got most of one play rehearsed this afternoon and have a lot to do tomorrow morning. I need to keep reminding myself that these plays are not actually going to public performance – I don't need to give them the detail that I normally would...this is what happened with the first play today and I spent too much time on it.

I have confirmed that Seth is joining the cast. The money works. At lunch break I asked the cast to join me for a quick chat and explained what had happened so far: my sense of needing another youth. They responded immediately that they had been talking together about exactly that, and for the same reasons: they feel the work is weighted too far right now into the domestic and not enough into the gangs. I agree. With a fourth youth in the cast the weight will shift in creation. They asked me who I was considering and I told them Seth. They were very, very happy with the choice. He is a strong performer and also brings experience into the group. Then I confirmed with Seth and he has agreed.

Of course Song of the Mermaid was a strong experience for many. Very emotional. It has created powerful and complex plays. I worked the biggest cast (eight) today, because it was also going to be the most complicated.

Play #1 (secrets at home) Grandma, Mom, Dad and older Daughter (22) are at home. Grandma is making tea. Mom is wandering about while Dad and Lakshmi are watching TV. Dad wants his tea and Grandma tells Mom to take it to him – in the process what is revealed is the sour relationship between Grandma and her daughter-in-law and the husband and wife. Because she is upset, Mom sends older Daughter into the kitchen to help Grandma.

Son comes home – the favourite (and only) son. He is in a rush. He wants the car. And he wants \$500 for hockey tickets. Mom and Dad work out between them how to give him the money. Older Daughter is outraged and says, ‘do you want to know what he is doing with the money?’ – he quickly silences her. Grandma pulls him aside and wants to know what he is doing. He knows she knows, and she knows he knows she knows. He gets his way by loving her. She tells him to promise to be good. He kisses her and leaves.

Younger Daughter enters, the youngest daughter (14). She is getting into fights at school and has had detention. Her parents want to know where she has been but she won’t say. She goes to the kitchen. She loves her grandma and compliments her on her cookies, eating one – grandma takes the opening and brings over a book with pictures in it – of a man in India – a man she wants younger Daughter to agree to marry. Younger Daughter is repulsed, she is 14 – an argument starts between her and grandma in which younger Daughter is disrespectful. This infuriates grandma who grabs her by the hair. Younger Daughter starts yelling – her mother gets involved and immediately backs the Grandmother up. She starts to slap younger Daughter. Older Daughter, who has tried to stop it in vain, calls the police.

This is as far as we could work it – it took way too long today. After the above happens, the police come and, of course there is nothing visible – they question younger Daughter who stands up for her family. The police leave. The family think younger Daughter called the police. When they find out it was older Daughter, they gang up on her and beat her.

I will need to find a way to work three plays in the morning...and hopefully, finish this one as well. (!?!)

The group is happy, especially with the journey of the week. They asked for a contact list of each other today and Kitty is facilitating that.

Saturday, October 22, 2005

Day 6

We got a lot done today. In the morning we spent one hour on each of the three other plays. They are:

Play #2 (the perfect daughter) A mother and father are in their home. Mother is up late and worried about both older kids who are not home yet. Its 3 AM. Dad enters and, in a caring way, wonders what is going on – realizing she is waiting for the kids, he says he will wait up with her. She doesn’t want this, knowing if he is there when they arrive there will be trouble. He insists.

The two youth are in the car. Son and Daughter. Daughter is very drunk and Son is taking care of her, getting her home. On the way there they discuss how he is always getting the trouble and she gets away with everything. She promises that he won't take 'the heat' over this.

They arrive home and the father immediately launches into son. Son says he was just driving his sister home from a party – in an attempt to save her brother, Daughter says it was she who drove home and is the reason they were late – now they are caught in a lie and it escalates. Dad assumes son has been driving drunk.

Their little sister enters and rats them both out – saying that Daughter has a boyfriend – something the parents do not believe because their daughter is perfect and that Son is hanging out with a drug-dealer. Dad goes ballistic and confronts Son – it gets physical and into violence.

Play #3 (reluctant killer) Sister and Young Man are characters in love. They are in Young Man's car sharing life stories. Brother is Sister's brother, on the phone in their home, talking to a member of his gang. They have been ripped off by Sam (who we never meet), a member of another gang in a drug-deal gone bad. Sam is Young Man's cousin. On the phone he gets the news that Young Man and Sister are seeing each other. He sees them in the drive-way as he looks out the window.

He calls Sister's cell – she sees it is him on call display and is immediately worried. She silences Young Man and answers. He interrogates her about who she is in the car with and orders her into the house. He hangs up on her. She knows she must go and tries to explain to Young Man. He insists on taking her to the door, saying he isn't afraid of Brother.

Brother meets them at the door. He is civil in a very cold way and gets Sister inside, stopping Young Man from entering. Young Man tries to make a connection but cannot. He is sent away. He returns to his car.

Inside Brother and Sister argue about how much control he exerts over her life. He explains about Young Man being Sam's cousin and Sister yells that Young Man is not Sam. Of course Brother does not operate at this level.

He notices Young Man hasn't left yet. Sister knows that it means the car won't start. She runs out with Brother and tries to give Young Man her keys, just to get him out of there. Young Man sees it as an opportunity for him and Brother to bond, over car stuff, and sends her away. Brother starts his car and then suggests they go for a drive to get to know each other. Young Man agrees.

Sister watches through the window and is panicking. She calls Young Man's cell. Brother tells him not to answer it – it's likely Sister and she drives him crazy with her interfering. They stop at a beer store. Brother says he has forgotten his cell and asks to borrow Young Man's – who agrees. Brother enters the store and throws Young Man's cell away. He buys a 24 of beer and gets back in the car.

They drive up the mountain. Brother plies Young Man with beer, keeping his own consumption down. At the top they exit the car and look out over the City. They

have a talk about Sister – Young Man loves her. Brother talks about Sam and Young Man says he isn't close to Sam and he knows he's into heavy shit, but he isn't Sam – and whatever has happened between Brother and Sam has nothing to do with him. The conversation feels friendly. Understanding.

Brother laments that Young Man is a good guy – too bad the circumstances are not different and walks behind him. As Young Man rises, Brother shoots him in the head.

He goes home, to where Sister is waiting up, frantic. She has been calling. Young Man isn't answering his phone. She's called his mother who is also very worried. What did he do to Young Man? Brother, in a loving way – tells her its all OK – he took care of Young Man. Sister knows what this means and screams at him – crying – he tells her she will get over it and, exiting, tells her he's going to bed and not to bother him.

Sister goes to her drawer and, in a moment of revenge on her brother, takes a great many sleeping pills.

Play #4 the meddling brother Grandmother is making tea for Older Brother. Older Brother tells her in a while – he is waiting for his Younger Brother. Younger Brother enters and Older Brother confronts him with what he found when he was going through his drawers. (A bag of drugs). Younger Brother is incensed that his brother has gone through his drawers and they argue about privacy and who's house it is and who has control in the house.

The Grandmother intervenes and says it is all their house.....the argument escalates, bring the mother in. she tries to separate her sons but the yelling is escalating. Dad arrives home and is, of course immediately drawn into the fight. Older Brother tells the father what he has found and Dad is furious. Younger Brother yells at him – why would you be concerned now – you never have been before – and pushes the father. Older Brother attacks Younger Brother physically for this – punching him in the face.

We had two and a half hours to do Forum on all four plays. Of course we had to rush through all of them, but the purpose of this afternoon was not a deep investigation – it was a continuation of research and also a closing off of the workshop for the participants who are not cast members.

There were, I think, a lot of powerful moments in the Forum, but two in particular:

In the “reluctant killer” play, Shyam replaced Brother when the two guys are up the mountain. He recognized Brother's struggle having to shoot Younger Man. It sounds strange, but VERY important, I think, to recognize that from the character's perspective, in order to retain his place in the community – in order to remain 'safe' in the world in which he now lives – he must retain a reputation for brutality. A part of him does not want to kill this kid who loves his sister, and who she loves. He is convinced, though, that he must.

The heart of this, and something I think that is important to the play we will make, is the human side of the Brother character. He cannot be a monster. He must be a

recognizable human trapped in a seemingly impossible situation – even one of his own making.

The other moment was in the “secrets at home” play. The interventions were all about the youth – none of them dealt with the terrible situation in the home with the mother or grandmother. I asked the room if they saw the struggles of these women – yes – then why no interventions, I asked? This brought us to the same conversation we had a couple of days ago: the gang issue is ‘sexier’ and so it is getting attention. Elders, particularly women, can be beaten, emotionally abused etc., as is too often the case, and no one notices – no one wants to know.

Nitasha (different than Natasha) replaced the Mother in this play and refused to give Brother any money. She was ‘winning’ – Brother was on the verge of staying home, when the grandmother decided to give him the money herself. This was a great shock to everyone. Off went Brother – to the drug deal. Why did you do this? I asked the grandmother. Harm reduction – she answered. Well, what I saw, I said, was that you gave him the money because his mother wasn’t going to – it had nothing to do with Brother – it had to do with the battle between you and your daughter-in-law. She thought for a moment and admitted that this was likely the case – on a subconscious level. The room agreed. The two women are at war, and the battleground is the young people in the home.

In the final circle the group was very happy – very moved by the Forum. For many of them this was the puzzle fitting together and they understood why we had done the many things we had done throughout the week.

Many of them have expressed interest in helping with publicity – I didn’t think to have a stack of posters / postcards there today....we will need to contact them individually now from the office to follow up.

On Tuesday the cast, Kitty (SM), Sudnya (Choreographer) and I meet at the Temple and start the process of figuring out the journey of the play.

Creation and Rehearsal

Tuesday, October 25, 2005

And so now it is just us at the Temple– the seven cast, Kitty, Sudnya in and out, and of course Dylan, Dafne, Jackie (and Harry at the moment), Jen and Manjot in the office and about town. The design/Tech team (Caitlin, Craig, Julie) are waiting for something concrete they can work with.

We got a lot done today – all ‘background work’ but it will pay off shortly. We started to understand the relationships in the family. We did a lot of talking and I also had the actors make images about how they feel their characters might fit into the play.

It took the actors weeks to find their character names. For the purposes of this report, I am going to start calling them by their character names now.

Balinder Johal is the Grandmother	Daadi
Raminder Thind is the Father	Jeewan
Jas Grewal is the Mother	Rupa
Natasha Ali Wilson is the Daughter	Sonya
Shawn Cheema is the Son	Jay
Jagdeep Singh Mangat is a gangster	Kam
Seth Ranaweera is a gangster	Sunny

Daadi and her late husband came to Canada with two of their children when she was 40 years old. Jeewan (her eldest son) was 22 at the time. She had him at 18. After eight years her husband died. She didn't want to return to India so Jeewan, the dutiful son, came to Canada when he was 30. He left behind a young woman who he loved. He came on a visitor visa. In India he had been overseeing their family land. They are an agricultural family. He was a landlord.

One year after arriving, his mother arranged for him to marry Rupa so he could stay in Canada. It is a loveless marriage. Shortly after marrying, they had Sonya, who is now 20. This makes Jeewan 51 (very close to his real age). Daadi in her early 70's (also close) and Rupa in her late 40's (also very close.) We don't know right now if Jay is their child or not, but we think he is, and he is 16, as he is in real life.

Jeewan is driving taxi. He was a powerful man in India. Rupa is working, we think, in an office. They are both working, though. Jeewan feels that everyone, his mother, his wife, his kids, blame him for the trouble in the family. They do not communicate internally. No one in the family feels respected. We acknowledged today that the respect issue is important and, it isn't that kids and parents don't respect each other – it's that the respect doesn't manifest the way people want it to. The parents aren't respected the way they want to be. The kids aren't respected the way they want to be. And so, no one feels respected.

Jay is smoking dope pretty much every day and may, we think, be selling crack cocaine. He has found somewhere to belong and it is with Kam who is providing him with 'materials' and a phone with which to do business. Jay believes he is going to be rich – going to have everything he wants – which includes being nothing like his 'loser' father.

We don't know a lot at the moment about Sunny or Sonya.

Sudnya gave some of the cast individual and interesting exercises to do today at home and throughout the day. Things she is giving them instinctively to, I think, start a physical process with them.

The young cast members also agreed that the idea that there is a "park" as part of the set was very important, as this is where their business tends to be done.

We were very happy with the progress we made today in understanding some of the foundational relationships in the play.

Wednesday, October 26, 2005

In the morning we finished looking at each character, by asking them to create an image of themselves in the play. I have never done this before – it's a nice discovery. The images led to deep and complex discussions about each character and the other character's relationships to them.

Then we started putting a list of 'things that need to happen in the play' together. Here they are, not in any order other than how they came to us in discussion:

Jay gets recruited into a Gang or "crew"

- we believe this happens to Jay, although at this point its still open.

A family member is assaulted (inside the family)

- there is some kind of abuse, physical, emotional....aimed at either the grandmother or the mother. It is a secret inside the home.

There is a cultural disconnect between generations

- the generation (sometimes Agrarian) coming from India has great difficulty communicating with the younger generation (in the City now Urban) in Canada. They have different values, experiences, expectation. Words, which are always symbols, have very different meanings to each 'side'.

Someone gets shot

- someone in this play either gets shot, or is threatened with getting shot. We don't know if it is Jay, Sonya, the father, the mother, Kam or Sunny. It doesn't appear to be the grandmother.

We see the family in a good light

- if we see that dysfunction of the family, we cannot understand it without contextualizing it from within the caring aspects of the family.

Convenient denial empowers Jay

- Jay starts getting money. Someone in the family (Father, Mother or Grandmother) knows exactly what is happening and where the money is coming from and could stop it if they tried. Instead they are either as allured by the power of the money as Jay is, or they are frightened by the possibility of exposure and 'decide' to not know.

There is a power struggle in the gang (of two)

- Kam and Sunny have known each other since early childhood. Kam is about 27, Sunny is about 30 or 32. As children, Kam looked up to Sunny, but in adulthood, it has become Kam who holds the authority. This, and other factors we do not yet know, creates tension. There is a power struggle inside the group.

Sonya tries to assert herself

- Sonya cannot fit into her family. She cannot be the compliant girl that her Grandmother and Father, in particular, need her to be. She has tried. Somehow, we need to see her try to assert her individuality as a young

woman and see how the reaction to that alienates her even further from her family – drives her away.

A youth struggles to get out

- Sonya and/or Jay get embroiled in the gang, and then have to face their desire to “get out” and how difficult this is. This does not mean physically. The discussion centered around the addictive nature of entering that world and how the struggle is not with others, but with one’s self. I believe this scene could be highly symbolic and be, somehow, about internal voices.

A youth seeks safety / “home”

- Sonya and/or Jay are both in a home that they do not feel is either ‘safe’ or ‘home’. It is the reason they go looking for somewhere else to belong. They find safety in a much more unsafe place.

Reaching the point of no return

- there has been a lot of discussion about reaching the point of no return – of having to kill someone, one way or another – having to do the drug deal, having to commit to the violence....we need to see this happen and are not certain at the moment how.

Of course there are holes in all of this – some of it is the play and some of it is not. There will be other things that come that we have no idea about right now. Tomorrow, though, we will start to try to find an order in what we have and start to stand ideas for what these events look like, feel like, onto their feet. The group is happy and excited.

Thursday, October 27, 2005

We have, of course, been in talking mode this last couple of days. Part of my task today was to move us into working on our feet.

The better part of the morning was taken with discussion, that started with BC Attorney General (AG) Wally Oppal’s statement yesterday, in response to recent gang shootings, that ‘sometimes there are people who we just need to give up on’. The feeling of the group seems to mesh with my own, and that is that as Policy this is extremely dangerous and a highly inappropriate thing for the AG to say. If we embrace this concept, where is the boundary? Is it not the case that Jagdeep, who is an articulate, concerned and active part of the solutions in his and other communities – and who was a deeply involved gangster years ago – would have been ‘beyond caring about’?

Interesting, that this is precisely the argument that Augusto Boal, founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed and I were having when he articulated that there are ‘monsters in the world who are beyond our bother’, as a response to my assertion in Theatre for Living that everything is interconnected and that we have to honour the humanity of even those with whom we disagree.

We also explored, in the morning, how the family functions: Sitting watching TV, reading, just being together. It was like getting our toes wet. Then I meant to do the same with Kam and Sunny but it evolved into a far more meaningful exercise:

I asked them to be the small children they were when they met, when Sunny was 10 and Kam 7. They rolled their eyes and I knew it would be hard for them. I am very pleased that they trusted me. And so, Farina (workshop participant) who had come to visit, played Sunny's mother and introduced the boys. Kam's parents had come for dinner. The adults were upstairs drinking and the boys had 30 minutes downstairs alone until dinner. Sunny wants this kid to like him and so he starts 'playing host' – getting Cokes from the downstairs fridge (knowing he shouldn't) and chips from the cupboard, and the boys bond eating food they shouldn't before dinner. We realize later that this first moment sets the relationship and is the reason there is tension between them now. For so many years Sunny has been 'getting sugar' for Kam – its just the definition of sugar that has changed. We skipped forward 10 years. Sunny has his first car and is taking his friend Kam for a ride. They stop at an A & W for burgers. We can see how close they are – even when Kam spills ketchup and mayo on the seat. Sunny brings his friend into a crime world that he himself has entered.

Now they are 27 and 30. Both adults – not kids anymore. And its Kam who is the more ambitious of the two. Sunny moves too slow, is too conservative. The leadership role is switching and this is making them both tense with each other – these best friends.

(Omygod – I think I know who gets shot at the end of the play. Its Sunny. Kam forces Jay to shoot Sunny.....is this too corny? – I will run this by people tomorrow.)

After lunch we went into mush-land and it was scary. I think it happened because I chose the wrong moment to focus into – trying to find, perhaps, the most difficult thing we need – the bridge, the connecting scene that brings Jay to Kam and Sunny. We thought for a while that it was Sonya who did this, but there was great resistance from her. When I say we, this impulse came initially from the two guys (Kam and Sunny). This is interesting space, of course, because the only way to find out if something works or not is to do it. Really do it. If the cast or cast member won't commit to trying it then of course it won't work. Part of a director's task in creating work like this is to figure out how to create an environment where all the cast members will 'dive into a moment', just to see if it will work, even when they don't initially think it will. It takes really a lot of trust. Anyway – we decided to leave this moment for a while – a good choice – because I don't think (in retrospect) that we had enough information among us about the play yet to be able to work on the moment.

And so I decided to take a stab at the family dynamic again and had a lovely surprise. I think we may have found the opening of the play. I asked that we investigate the "rituals of the morning". We worked it a lot. Its "normal land". Its mostly movement with some phrases thrown in. It is mostly physical and all timing:

Its morning. Jay (J) is asleep on the sofa (so – now we have a sofa as part of the set – a big decision). Grandmother (GM) enters with tea for him, stands and admires

him. Puts her finger in his ear – toying with him He moves, she touches his neck, having fun, she tickles him – he starts awake, startled, but realizes he is home. She gives him tea.

Before he can drink, Sonya (S) runs in from her bedroom, takes his cup, sips, gives it back to him, goes to the kitchen (off or in a far upstage left corner?) to get her own.

As she is crossing Mom (M) enters (up the stairs) from her night work, she is exhausted. She sees GM and J but says nothing and heads for the kitchen – she meets S and they say good morning – S crosses asking where her shoes are and exits stage right to her bedroom while J goes after M looking for food. She tells him to ask GM. She turns back and crosses stage right while Father (F) is coming up the stairs from the temple. They circle each other and exchange hello's...M says she is going to bed and exits stage right, F watches his wife go and says OK to himself and is left at the sofa with his mother, for whom he has brought a morning ceremonial sweet. She pulls up her shawl, eats it, a prayer moment.

While this has been happening, J has crossed stage right and entered a bathroom and is brushing his teeth (this works in mime – does not need a location). S knocks on the door, (good naturedly, as happens every morning) and tells him to hurry up. He exits and goes to the sofa where GM and F are, while S enters the bathroom. J asks F for money – F signals he should go to his mother, GM says, “give him the money”. J gets his daily \$20, kisses GM (not thanking F) and runs out the door – down the stairs. F says, in Punjabi, ‘you are spoiling that boy’. S exits the bathroom, yells goodbye and runs down the stairs. GM says, in English, “I am not spoiling him.”

This works in a choreographed way – a morning ritual, and through it we are introduced to the family. The next thing that will happen will be meeting Sunny and Kam, in mid argument about something that went wrong on the street last night.

The cast were very tired at the end of the day, both Kitty and me, too, but happy to be discovering on our feet.

Friday, October 28, 2005

Today was the deadline for the cast to ‘sign off’ on their bios – what will be sent to the media about them and printed in the program.

We then picked up where we had left off the day before with Kam and Sunny. The others went to watch Practicing Democracy on DVD. My assumption has been that having seen some of the show when they came for their interviews, and having just been through a week-long THEATRE FOR LIVING workshop they understood the kind of theatre we are making. Not so. They have so many questions – seeing the whole DVD is really helping them understand why we are structuring the play the way we are. Those who are not working on stage will continue to work their way through all of the two hour DVD tomorrow.

The Sunny / Kam relationship is becoming beautifully clear and the two guys play very well together. The scene will be in the park in daytime. In it we meet the two young men, who are childhood friends, in mid-argument. We understand they are gangsters and see that Kam is far more ambitious than Sunny. Even in this first scene we can see that the power relationship between the two is shifting.

Then we fast forward to dinnertime. Grandmother (GM) is making chapattis in the kitchen. Mother (M) is watching TV from her chair beside the sofa. Father (F) is watching TV from the sofa.

Jay (J) comes home. Claims the sofa and the television. F gives up on TV and moves behind the sofa, on his way to the kitchen. Sonya (S) enters, talking on her cell (to Sunny or Kam, but we don't know that yet). She is laughing, making plans to meet later. She moves through the living-room on her way to her bedroom when F calls to her. "Sonya". And again. She stops. Who are you talking to – (in Punjabi). No one...a friend. Who are you talking to? A friend. You don't say just a friend – and F takes her by the arm and drags her away from the bedroom, into the living room. An argument starts between S and F. M intervenes and gently tells her to go, it's OK. S kisses her Mom and leaves.

F is annoyed that M has undermined him – he says that Sonya needs to behave and M says that he has to try to understand her better. F says he would never have been allowed to talk with his father that way and M responds that he isn't in India anymore. GM has by now come from the kitchen and stands with her son against her daughter-in-law. It gets more and more heated until the two women are yelling at each other about whose family this is and, because M is talking back to GM, disrespecting his mother, he slaps his wife across the face. Jay has been trying quietly to stop this as it has escalated but when F explodes he leaps at his father who, in a rage, turns and pushes him onto the floor. J, shocked, yells at his father "fuck you" and runs out of the house. S, who has come back into the living-room as the fight has escalated goes out after her brother.

Lunch time was filled with a production meeting. The Design team are, rightly so, chomping at the bit, wanting to know what the play is that they are designing. Of course, we don't really know yet.

After lunch: What follows is a lovely little scene between the brother and sister – on the stairs. They sit in silence for a bit – S breaks the tension by joking with J about his muscles and being a tough guy but this quickly turns into her embracing him – he has stood up to his father for the first time. Silence. She tells him that she is meeting some friends for dinner. He suggests that they should probably get into the house for dinner, but it is she who says 'no way'. She asks if he wants to come with her. 'really?' – she has never suggested he hang out with her friends before. Sure – and they leave together.

Its fascinating how this little scene is in many ways what we were trying to find a couple of days ago – the linking tissue between Jay and the gang members. Kam and Sunny thought it would be Sonya but she didn't have a way to see that – because we didn't have the scene before – or perhaps she didn't see it could be inadvertent, believed it would have to be conscious. At any rate, it was coming out of sequence. It was such a natural thing today.

Kam and Sunny are at the restaurant. They are once again in the conversation from the first scene but it is interrupted by S and J arriving. They like S and are happy to see her and are surprised but good about her bringing her little brother. We get a lovely scene here, full of friendly chat and banter, in which they rib J, because they know he is dealing a little grass, being a 'kid gangster'. At the same time they are congratulating him – building him up – because they hear good things about him. The scene is full of warmth and laughter and it is obvious that this dangerous place is a much nicer place to be than at home. Eventually the banter ends and they sit in silence. Sunny and Kam have things they need to discuss and can't do it in front of S and J.

But, in the silence Kam has an idea. He sees Jay in a new way for the first time and, without consulting Sunny, which would be normal, he starts to sound him out about working with them. Jay is eager for this. It makes Sunny very uncomfortable. He is insulted that Kam is doing this on his own and tries to shut it down but can't. Sunny makes an excuse to leave – pissed off.

Kam gets straightforward with Jay. There is work for him if he wants – he could make a lot of money. Sonya hadn't intended bringing Jay so he could join Kam, who she knows is into very heavy shit, and she tries to get herself and Jay out of the situation but Jay wants to work with Kam and the two guys tell her to relax. Kam tells her to leave. He wants to talk with Jay alone – she doesn't want to and Kam insists in such a way that she knows she has no choice. Jay allows this. Once alone, they agree to proceed – Jay will work for Kam, and not tell Sunny anything.

I think we are about half-way through the play. Before we went home, we ran what we have and it held together pretty well, of course there is also a lot of work to do.

The opening is lovely and the first Kam/Sunny scene will work. The family fight scene happens way too fast. We have to slow it down, although we also all know that it needs to be early in the play in order to make sense of Jay's journey.

The restaurant scene will also work but I have a set concern and that is that in order to do it we need to build some extension onto the downstage right edge of the stage. And, is it chairs? Or a perpendicular booth (making one side of a square)?

DESIGN TEAM: (could it have its own platform at a different height than the rest of the stage? And could we get a booth? The lighting possibilities of neon, I like it being a booth, actually....visually.

I had to confront a design dilemma today and that is that as we understand more and more of the play, it takes place in very strange space. As we discussed I have to allow the play itself to define the space, not the other way around and so I have decided to throw design concerns aside, in a way and just let the drama become what it needs to be. I know this will put us into a time crunch but...

I am also thinking seriously about letting go of the shadows idea. I talked it over with the cast, as Sudnya isn't around right now, and we agree that each cast member will be who we know they are, even in shadow. And so, is it Mom and Dad making a certain shadow? Kam and Sunny? Unless we have a whole other group of people to do it, we cannot achieve the anonymity of the shadow-makers that we

would need for them to be ‘open-ended images’, without definite character identity attached to them.

A couple of the cast expressed today, at the end of the day, how intense they are finding the process and the deep questions they are asking themselves because of it about their past experiences. I had a long and good talk with one of them after rehearsals. I have also reminded them the counselor who was part of the community workshop is also still available, if they want to access her.

Saturday, October 29, 2005

The end of a powerful week and the sense that we are doing good work. Why am I so frustrated?

We reworked the restaurant scene so that Sunny leaves, but waits outside, without telling anyone. At some point in the scene Sonya’s phone rings, she checks it, notices it is her home # calling and doesn’t answer. Eventually Kam sends Sonya away – she tries to stay but he and Jay insist she leave and wait for him in her car. Kam and Jay strike a deal for Jay to do work for Kam. Jay leaves. Kam leaves and is accosted by Sunny in the parking lot. Kam is so surprised that he pulls his gun, not knowing for a moment, it is Sunny. They have an intense conversation about the inappropriateness of Kam recruiting Jay without first talking with Sunny. The gulf between them is widening.

We go, I think, to black. In the darkness we hear Sonya’s voice-mail greeting and her grandmother’s voice leaving a message: “Sonya. Dinner is waiting. Where are you and Jay?”

Lights up slightly on stage. Daadi is waiting. It is 10:30 or 11:00. Rupa has gone to work. Jeewan is asleep (or trying to be). Daadi is waiting up. The kids come home; Sonya pushing her younger brother to tell her about the conversation between him and Kam. He won’t and orders her into the house, the way Kam ordered her out of the restaurant. She stands her ground (which I think at the moment, is the wrong choice for the scene) so he goes in.

(I think Sonya needs to enter first because we then have the potential for her to tell her grandmother about what has just happened. Of course she won’t, but the potential creates an intervention window for the audience before Jay enters.)

Daadi is so relieved to see them, and the kids try to calm her down. They love her.

When Daadi feels safe, she lays into Sonya – gently, of course. Sonya should understand that she is her father’s honour – she has heard this lecture before and tries to escape but of course her Daadi won’t let her – she is doing the best she can for her grand-daughter. Father has heard the voices and enters. He is also very relieved they are home. He approaches his daughter – but she doesn’t want to be near him. He asks her if a Father doesn’t have the right to ask his daughter questions. She answers he has the right, but the daughter has the right to not answer. He says that he needs to know sometimes what she is doing, where she is going – she replies that in Canada, girls talk to boys. He says to her in Punjabi that she doesn’t understand, but when she has children of her own she will understand

and she replies in English that she doesn't have to have children to understand this. And tells him to speak English.

Sonya confronts him about the violence to her mother. Her Daadi comes across and behind her in support of her son. Sonya is trying to stand up, but is outnumbered. Her brother, who could help, and who no one has asked about anything in this exchange, announces he is going to bed. He exits.

It took hours to get this scene today. The cast members, while saying that they wanted to get under the surface of the scene, kept finding ways in the improvisations to avoid doing just that. This happens in any rehearsal process sometimes and if we all agree that it's something we want to do, then the director (in this case me) has to find ways to do it – not to be mean, of course, but because we are all there wanting the same thing – to get to some truth.

In one moment, just when we were getting somewhere in what had quite a superficial improvisation – Sonya left and 'went to her bedroom'. Jeewan stopped the scene – she had left. I suggested he go after her. He just looked at me. Go, follow her to the bedroom, continue the conversation, I asked. I decided, as a director, to push this and trap the Sonya character. Jeewan said – but she is off-stage. I reminded him, as we have discussed so many times, that there is no off-stage. He went in and....the characters agreed to "talk about it in the morning". OK...its morning.....It took two or three more exchanges to get the father and daughter sitting together, actually having the conversation that the daughter and father needed to have.

What we are experiencing in rehearsal is the difficulty of confronting the issues in real life. This is, of course, why we rehearse. It is theatre about real life, but it is not real life – it is the theatre. There is no point just putting real life on the stage, we can see that at home. If the theatre is going to be an opportunity to get deeper into the hidden issues, then we have to find ways to put those hidden issues on the stage in theatrical form.

At the end of the day we then ran everything we had. I am trying to remember that I have been in these self-questioning moments before with both **Practicing Democracy** and **Don't Say a Word** (and every other project?) – in the middle of creation, running what we have got so far in the midst of a process and finding that what seemed like strong material yesterday or three days ago is seeming like its nothing now - so thin. Of course, all of us were exhausted by the end of the week – the work has been extremely intense – and the cast don't really know what the scenes are beyond skeletal structures. Although I know all this, I was nevertheless in a panic for a while after the run.

I have to remind myself that material like this, material that is not script based, relies on emotional engagement, not on words. Its very difficult at this stage for the actors to feel their way through the emotional engagement – they are too busy trying to remember what happens next. We all have to be patient.

We have a photo shoot Tuesday morning and then have Tuesday and Wednesday to finish finding the skeletal story. Then we have to get into the scenes in detail and start putting flesh on them. We have a lot to do.

Tuesday, November 1, 2005

We did a terrific photo shoot with David Cooper this morning. We have the enviable problem of having too many lovely shots to choose from – including some good new shots of me – very happy to have these, as my headshot is over a decade old. The shoot was wonderful and took most of the morning – I think it was time very well spent, because of the quality of the work.

Before lunch I went over various suggestions with them that I considered over the week-end:

- Mom can't work nights, which will mean reworking the opening. Working nights eliminates her from the night scenes, and therefore from the rest of the play.
- Kam and Sunny need to work out minute details of their current situation. The two guys did this over the course of the afternoon, and it's great. They have charted out who their own and the other local 'crews' are – names and numbers. The size of an upcoming drug deal (with amounts in kilos) and the reasons, both financial and territorial that Kam wants to take it over and eliminate the guy who would be their superior. Sunny feels it's all getting out of control. Doing this led them to understand that they were not, in fact, working in the 'same world' last week. So, this was a great step forward for them and they had a good time doing it. They also agree that the Sunny character wants out. This becomes the reason he finds himself at the end of a gun at the end of the play, in the same way that people today are being shot for wanting out.
- Jay can't be a gangster off the top of the play – the character has no where to go.
- Sonya needs to stay with her mom after Mom gets slapped – not run directly out to Jay. This will extend that family scene and let us explore the Sonya character's dynamic in the family more.
- When the kids return from the restaurant, Sonya must enter first and decide not to tell her Grandmother what happened at the restaurant.
- Kam and Jay need a scene in which Kam gives Jay a gun.
- We need to find our way to the end of the play.

After lunch Sudnya did her first movement work with the group. This was also very good – re-awakening their body awareness after the workshop and also, at a very basic level, waking them up. We will try to do this 20 minute routine every morning from now on. The cast seemed to like it, too.

We did detailed work today on the first family scene and then the scene where Mom gets hit. Because the scene escalated into an argument in which the characters are overlapping each other vocally and then violence, it needs to be very detailed. The actors need to be completely confident and safe inside the chaos of the scene. The scene, which is 2 or 3 minutes long, took over 3 hours to work. When we ran it at the end of the day, the structure was there but all the lovely builds, the ebbs and flows that had been in it were gone. We will come back to it.

Tomorrow we must now redo the scene where the kids come home from the restaurant, to bring the mother into that scene. Then we will be where we left off at the end of last week. I am hoping that by the end of the day we will have found the structure of the whole play.

Wednesday, November 2, 2005

We did what I thought was highly unlikely at one point today and made it to the end of the play. It is possible we have a very strong story.

We reworked the scene where the kids come home – now that Mom is no longer working nights. This took all morning. It was excruciating work. We have retention problems with some of the cast. The only way, it seems to be able to repeat a moment (not a scene – a moment) the same way twice is to do it over and over and over again. At one point we spent almost an hour on a three word moment.

Here is the scene: Daadi is pacing – Mom enters and we see them try to speak about the earlier violence but not be able to. Jay enters followed quickly by Sonya. She is trying to get information out of him regarding his exchange with Kam. He tells her it is none of her business and orders her into the house. Furious and frustrated, she goes. He remains on the stairs.

She is hoping everyone is asleep, but there are Daadi and Mom. Shit. Daadi asks her where she was. Out for dinner. Was your brother with you? Yes. Where is he? Just outside. Daadi goes to the door and Sonia calls to her, wanting to tell her about Kam, but chickens out. Daadi calls Jay into the house while Sonia goes and checks on her mother.

Daadi calls the two kids together and, in a loving way admonishes them. Jay tells her not to worry – they are safe and, calming down, Daadi turns her attention to Sonia. She is her father's pride...etc....Sonia doesn't need to hear this right now and tries to get away, Daadi insists. Mom tries to get her mother-in-law to stop, but she has to get it out. Its not angry – it is full of caring – if only she can get her grand daughter to understand.

Dad enters and listens to his mother tell his daughter that she is his pride. If people see her 'running around' it is bad for him. Dad thanks his mother – both meaning this and also telling her he will take over. Sonia does not want to deal with him at all and heads for her room – her refuge. Daadi and dad stop her – she is going to listen.

A lovely scene now where Dad tries to reach out across a great cultural divide to his daughter. She laughs at his Punjabi and his insistence that he has rights over her. Yes, she says, you have the right to ask questions, and I have the right to not answer.

Jay – having been left alone....abandons his sister and announces he is going to bed – he has no need to listen to any of this. Sonia is furious that they just let him – the boy – go and are interrogating her – especially considering what she knows happened tonight. She lays into her father – you have no idea – no idea what is going on in this family. Her yelling infuriates him – he tells her he wishes she had

never been born. She responds by asking him if he thinks she wants to be in this family and we escalate into a frozen tableau – need light help here – and...frozen in this terrible place – we cross-fade into a lively scene between Kam and Jay.

It is 6 to 8 weeks later. Jay is so excited about his new and expensive car and is like a puppy at Kam's feet as they walk along the sidewalk. (The tableau dissolves upstage and the actors exit.) We learn that Jay is managing to keep the car a secret from his family, because he is parking it two blocks away. They have no idea. (A true story.) They enter the restaurant. Kam has something serious to discuss with Jay.

Kam compliments Jay on what he is hearing about him from the friend who Jay is now working for. He lays out the trouble with Sunny and talks about loyalty. He starts to explain how serious the competition from other gangs is – and Jay, in a moment of bravado, suggests they just blow them away. Kam, though, is a serious mentor. He tells Jay to relax – that is exactly everyone's problem right now – too many headlines, too much media – things have to happen quietly. He explains to Jay that he is taking him to the next level. When they are finished talking, they are going to walk out to the parking lot, and Kam is giving Jay a gun. Is he ready? Jay wants to say no – he hasn't expected this – he is absolutely not ready – but he now owes Kam many things and both wants to please him and is afraid of him. Are you ready, Kam asks again – yes – yes, I am. They exit the restaurant, into the parking lot, and the gun is given. Jay is very confused – what is happening? Kam walks around behind him, looking at him. They catch each other's eyes – Jay has this one last chance to say he doesn't want this – but he can't – and Kam turns his back and walks away. Jay, literally now, has Kam's back.

Jay stands in the parking lot. He puts the gun in his pants – the only place he can hide it – and goes home. He sits alone on the sofa. He goes to sleep there.

In the morning we start a repetition of the first scene. Daadi comes from the bedroom, to the kitchen, gets tea, goes to the sofa and tickles Jay, like she did in the first scene. This time he jolts awake and up. He never sleeps deeply anymore.

Daadi knows many things. She says to her grandson, 'Jay – who are you?' 'Your grandson', he says. Then why can't I tickle you anymore? Jay won't have this conversation. She continues – she wants to know where he got the expensive ear ring he is wearing, the coat, where is the money coming from? He is working he says. Where? At his friend Kam's carpet company – you making so much money? I am saving my money – I saved up for the ear ring. And the thousand dollars I found in your room? And the bag of ganja? Daadi knows. You have no business going into my room he tells her – getting angry now – she is treading a fine line. Look, my grandson, she tells him...use the brain in your head. Don't get into something you will regret. But she will tell no one, and Jay knows it. He tells her he has to go – to school, (adult classes he was going to in order to make up his grade 12, which he has dropped).

During this scene, Sunny has wandered into the park. (downstage right) he is waiting. It is raining. Jay leaves his home, (lighting change), enters the park. Sunny takes the opportunity to tell Jay that if he keeps doing what Kam is telling him to do, he is going to get himself killed. Jay says he can take care of himself.

Kam enters – asks why Jay didn't meet him at the car like he was supposed to – Jay says he came here instead and Kam puts him in his place – tells him to leave him and Sunny alone. Jay moves off.

We just found the skeleton of this scene at the very end of the day today in one attempt, but roughly:

Sunny tells Kam that he wants out. Its too big, its too dangerous. He is getting out. Kam has suspected this was coming and seems to understand. He tells his oldest and best friend that he is sorry to hear this but knows it is inevitable. They embrace. He walks away – and, behind Sunny's back signals Jay. Jay moves quickly behind Sunny and, pulling out his gun puts it to Sunny's head. A scene here in which Sunny does not plead for his life – but tries to get Jay to understand that if he pulls the trigger there is no going back. Jay is here, at the precipice. At the point of no return. He is shaking like a leaf, as the lights go slowly out.

Some other big things today:

I had a VERY bad sightline moment today. As we have developed the play, the set has emerged to serve the story we need to tell. We have seven cast members. A living-room and restaurant on the stage. We expanded the set from 24 feet wide to 28 feet. The restaurant is downstage right. I have been checking sightlines but not seeing reality. The pole, in the centre of the room, which has become invisible to me, is a very real obstacle. We always knew we were going to have to seat in a "V" but the staging that has developed has taken up more and more room. The sightlines were literally impossible for both the restaurant and the stairs up to the home. (Two scenes are on the stairs.)

Kitty and I have reduced the stage back to 24 feet. Along with Craig (TD), who came in late in the day, have brought the restaurant upstage a little, eliminating the stage extension. This makes the sightlines a little better, but we are pretty certain we won't fit the 100 seats we have been planning.

Craig and Kitty are going to put the seats in the hall out very soon and see. The hall seats are wide. If we can get 90 of them, we can get 100 of others that we would rent. If we can get 80 of them, then we have maximum 90.

My suggestion to box office right now is this: for the next few days, assume we have a maximum of 80 seats at the Temple. Its probably not an issue yet – as I have no sense that we are filling any of the days just yet. Craig and Kitty will get to this ASAP and then we will have a seating number.

Also – Craig is going to build the stage right part of this stage to accommodate the needs of the restaurant. He is bringing in a kitchen unit for up stage right, which we will talk to the cast and Julie about filling with appropriate items (spices, cans of things, etc.)

Rupa is bringing in a picture of the family Guru that will hang in the living room and Julie is going to look at the family portraits that David shot for one of those. There will be a cross-over upstage....fabric hanging like the drapery of a large living-room window.

We have the story and now, on schedule, the physical space will start to take shape.

Next phase – rehearsal – making each moment work.

Thursday, November 3, 2005

A good day. We all agree it feels like we have entered a new phase. I brought in \$100 of homeopathic flu remedy because Sonya has gotten sick and Rupa is starting. They all agreed to take it and hopefully it will stop the bug in its tracks.

The morning started slowly – a lengthy conversation about the CBC radio interview Kam and Sunny did yesterday evening. They did great for the most part and also felt that Pria, the interviewer was very aggressive.

I talked about how it is becoming apparent that this project poses a puzzle for the media and we have to have a way to clarify what we are doing. On the one hand we are saying the issue is everyone's, not just the Indo-Canadian community and on the other, making a play by and about that community. Why?

Of course this has always been the intention of the project from the very beginning : to respond to the sensational Headlines by using the current focus as an opportunity – telling a clear and specific story that will grab people's attention and then invite the general public. The play, like an Image, is a symbol. Isn't it true that we all share our own connections to this symbol through our own lives and communities? Once we can acknowledge that (never denying that the issue of Indo-Canadian gangs is real – simply insisting that the gang violence issue also permeates all of society), then it becomes possible to work together to solve this problem that we all share – using the specific story as a model.

I think Pria at CBC wanted an answer to this question and she didn't get it. It set up a tension in the interview – live radio already being filled with tension. Jen (publicist) and I didn't brief the cast members well enough – it never occurred to us to do that. They are experts in discussing their lives and the issues as the issues attach to their lives, but can't be expected to answer questions that would normally go to the producer of the project. And so, this morning, I managed to touch on some of these things with all of them, hoping to prepare them for the onslaught of media attention that it feels like is coming.

Sudnya did about an hour of movement with the cast this morning. They are enjoying their time with her although some of the bodies are getting sore – we must be careful. I am hoping the movement idea will be able to translate into the play. We need to start thinking about the specific spots now, as we have blocked out the story.

CBC National TV News (reporter Terry Milewski and producer Cedric Monteiro) came this morning and, while Sudnya worked with the cast, we talked about the project and what they want to do. We have agreed that they will get an hour (after we finish the cue to cue process and have some runs) to shoot 3 or 4 scenes. It sounds like they are going to bring in 2 or 3 cameras. Then they are going to shoot the preview audience. Terry and I had a frank talk about this, as it will be my only

time to really understand how to Joke the Forum and I am kind of nervous about doing that on the National News! He does, I think, understand where I am coming from and, anyway, the focus of the story is the issue – not my Joking, so it should be OK. He told me, good naturedly, that unless I am bleeding, they promise not to air things that seemed like mistakes.

I have redone the rehearsal schedule to accommodate CBC and also Channel M, which got scheduled in daytime when the room is flooded with light – making lighting cues invisible.

Then, finally, we got to some work on the play – just as Eileen from CBC Radio / North by Northwest arrived for her second interview installment. That was fine, we worked with her microphone in our faces – the cast were great.

And so we found the emotional content of the final scene, in which Jay holds a gun to Sunny's head.

After lunch we ran the opening, which works well – just needed some fine tuning and then the first gangster scene. The guys had done great planning work and, as I got them just walking circles around the room – the physicality and the precise detail of the conversation – how much drugs, how much money – how many people....really brought the scene to life. Of course it will have to be played in front of the stage in more stillness. The key, also, is that Sunny thinks Kam's plan is funny – its so bad, so dangerous, its laughable. He can't take it seriously.

Now into the scene where Mom gets hit. Difficult. We needed to get into detailed work again. The cast was really focused. And, something great happened. It got real. Mom (Rupa) has been so reluctant to "go there" – this is of course completely understandable, but is realizing that its what the scene is about and, having been a part of creating it – its time to make it work. I think also she is feeling safer. She is seeing the risks others are taking. I also freed it up and got all three (Mom, Dad, Daadi) to do their lines in Punjabi. Miraculous! It flowed and the emotional content was there. This surprised them, as two of them are fluent in English. So we have agreed to work this way and slowly transfer as much to English as necessary for the general public to understand.

At the end of the day there was a kind of solemnity in the room – a very different energy. I think the cast experienced, for the first time today, the depth of what we are doing – what really being 'in the moment' feels like and how exhilarating, how draining it is. It is the space we need to occupy.

Friday, November 4, 2005

We couldn't work on the restaurant, where we left off yesterday, because Kam had to attend to something outside rehearsal and so we went back to the beginning of the play – I didn't want to move forward out of sequence – a bad idea in this delicate stage.

The opening went well and they did the family fight really well the first time. I inserted a 'suspension' in the fight scene – which will work beautifully, we all think, and then, without making any actual changes to the scene, it started to change on

its own again. We tried again and it changed more – the retention problem we are having – the cast just start to wander and I can't get them to repeat the scene the same way each time. The dynamic then is that they all start to tell each other what to do and it gets more and more confused and complex. It took so much of everyone's energy to sort this out – I wish I could find the way to just get them to focus on their own characters.

Rupa is also facing, as I mentioned earlier, the truth of the scene and how it hits home for her. We had a lengthy talk about ways she can allow her character to 'surrender' to the emotion that is necessary and not have it be Rupa each time. We have agreed to start a costume ritual so that Jas puts "Rupa" on each day for rehearsal and takes her off at the end of the day.

We moved into the restaurant and found some more detail. Kam is drawing Sunny a diagram now – hoping he will understand the takeover plan. One of my concerns is that we don't get to know the two guys (Kam and Sunny) much at all. They need to be more than 'the gangsters'. And so we have built a connection between Sunny and Sonia – she helped with his sister's wedding a couple of weeks ago, and comments on his appearance in a fun and affectionate way. They have history. Then we have this lovely scene about making fun of their the parents, there is a lot of genuine laughter.

Sonia will not stop, though, and she continues the ribbing into the moment when they are ordering beer and embarrasses her brother – who is trying to impress the guys, and the scene shifts. Kam sees this kid in a certain way and questions him about his reputation of being a "one-puncher". Jay responds with: "you gotta do what you gotta do". Sunny suggests that Jay reminds him of Kam when Kam was a kid and Kam turns it around on Sunny. Its true – you have to do what you have to do. The subtext here, Kam to Sunny, is that he has lost his edge.

Kam then starts to work on Jay – its obvious what he is doing – Sunny and Sonia both call him on it but he tells them its just talk and they should relax. We can see its not. This leads to a short exchange between Kam and Sunny and Sunny leaves – very angry. The air is thick. Sonia tries to take the opportunity to get her and her brother out but neither of them will let her. We are seeing Jay transform before our eyes and she is forced to go wait at the car while the guys talk. They strike a bargain and there is a handshake – Jay pausing, and then deciding.

Jay leaves the restaurant. Kam, pleased with himself, leaves and Sunny accosts him in the parking lot. Kam is so shocked he pulls his gun – we worked this in detail – broke the moments down into portions of seconds and the guys play it well – Sunny almost gets himself killed. There is a short scene about trust – Sunny insists he trusts Kam with his life and that Kam MUST run the plan by Sanjay – their boss. Kam refuses and they part, further apart than before.

The kids go home. We ran into a quagmire now – back in the family. Its so difficult. This scene has become a repetition of the previous family scene and also the two women have been starting it in such a heightened state of distress.

I realized at this point (about 3PM) that I hadn't had a break all day because of the production meeting at noon and stepped outside. The fresh air was good. It was

necessary to consider throwing the scene away altogether in order to be able to imagine reworking it into something useful.

The solution turned out to be simple, actually. The women need to start from a very different place. The fight was hours ago – they have let go of it. Its normal in the house. They are not terrified for the kids – they don't know about the restaurant (aha!) – they are, in fact, mad at them now.

So when the kids come, its much more direct. The words are almost the same – its just that it has purpose and energy and is not about another family fight. Its about going after Sonia because she is not fitting into the mold that her Daadi and Father expect of and, as they focus there, their son, who can do no wrong, is getting drawn into gangster life. Sonia could tell them – but she doesn't because she believes they would have no idea what to do – they understand nothing. The silence allows Jay to escape. He wants to escape.

Tech / Design side is coming together – after much searching Kitty and Craig and the electrician found where to get a stove plug in for power. We have made decisions in the last couple of days about stage size, restaurant size, photos hanging, cloth, how areas are defined.

We have six working days with actors until an invitation only Forum. Seven days to cue to cue, when a lot of the work on the scenes stops and is taken over by runs and tech. Nine days until preview. It sounds scary but we are not in bad shape, as long as we can figure out the end of this final family scene tomorrow morning.

I have found only one place so far for this image suspension idea. I figure we need at least 3 or 4 to do it in the play. The shadow idea is gone. Is this the right piece to experiment with that kind of physical language? I am not certain.

Saturday, November 5, 2005

We may have a play on our hands.

We found the end of the final family scene this morning. Dad does come in. Jay leaves and the family lets him, unquestioned. Sonia can't believe it and complains. Dad says the issue is about her and not Jay. She responds, Oh, of course, he comes in every day, he watches TV, he does nothing...you have no idea what is going on in your own family. Yes, its true – because I work 18 hours a day...Daadi intervenes again, which brings Mom in and the whole argument is starting all over again. Dad sits as the women argue and puts his head in his hands, and the lights fade out as the arguing continues.

Live sound cross-fading – we hear Kam and Jay's voices emerging from the family. Lights cross-fade and now we are on the street. It is 6 weeks later and Jay is bragging about his hot new car. They head to the restaurant and we have the scene in which Kam tells him about loyalty and takes him to the next level – giving him a gun. Shawn (the actor) is understanding Jay's dramatic journey and is starting to be able to play with the balance between his fear and his exhilaration.

They move to the street and Jay gets the gun. He goes home, falls asleep on the sofa and Daadi awakens him in the same way as in the opening scene.

We have what could be a lovely scene here of Daadi interrogating Jay – he is changing, what happened to her grandson? Jay would never hurt his Daadi but he cannot tell her what is happening. He escapes by saying he is late for school, which he has dropped out of.

Sunny is now waiting at the park in the rain. Kam is supposed to be meeting him. Instead Jay shows up. They have a conversation in which Sunny tries to get Jay to see that Kam is out of control, that Kam is going to get Sunny killed. This is also Sunny's fear but again, he can't admit it – Kam gets him everything he wants.

Kam arrives and is angry at Jay for coming to the park – he was supposed to wait at the parking lot. He sends him there so he and Sunny can talk. Sunny tells Kam he is getting out – another friend was found dead (in a ditch) and Sunny knows that Kam's plan is going to get them killed. He's too tired of it all. Kam is silent through most of the scene. He asks Sunny if he has really thought this through...yes. They embrace and Kam walks away – he touches Jay who moves into the park and, as Sunny is walking away put the gun to the back of his neck.

The Kam / Sunny scene is playing too melodramatically at the moment. The Sunny / Jay scene could be very powerful. It ends with Jay yelling over and over again, first to Sunny but finally to himself: 'you gotta do what you gotta do', trying to convince himself to pull the trigger. This 19 year old kid's mantra as the lights go down.

In the afternoon we did a "stumble through". I did this only because Caitlin (light) and Amos (sound) and Julie (set, props, costumes) were coming – just because I wanted them to be able to see a run and expected it to be a mess. It was, incredible, really, how much the cast held it together. There were many rough spots, some scenes disintegrated (but they kept going) and so there were some key moments missed, but all in all they were terrific and I told them three times before we left how proud I was of them.

Feedback from the three: There was some confusion about how the gangsters connect to the family (Sonia and Jay), also about the Mother's relationship to her family – I think it's true that it is kind of invisible because it's so hard to work in that area. There was a desire expressed to have a stronger sense of "danger", but I have been thinking about this over the last couple of hours and wonder if that isn't a desire to have it more recognizable as 'movie – TV' danger. I think one of the good things we have done is been able to tell a story about how, through very small and normal moments a kid enters gang life, and it isn't highly 'dramatic' and that is why it's so hard to get a handle on it. This will, I think, make for far more valuable Forum Theatre.

Design side things have come together very quickly in the last couple of days: a sofa is coming, the hanging photos are here, the kitchen unit is starting to get dressed, a restaurant booth is coming, the drapery for upstage has arrived.

Things I am wondering about:

- is it OK that we leave Sonia near the end of the play and focus only on Jay?
- Where are the other Image suspension points in the play?
- How do we make Mom more visible?

At the end of the day, in the circle one of the cast members mentioned how amazing it is that they met three weeks ago – strangers. We did the workshop. We met at the Temple and looked at each other and said, “what’s the play”? And two weeks later we have a play, seemingly out of nothing.

The cast were very pleased and energized at the end of today. I gave them tomorrow morning off (Daadi and Rupa and Kam have things to attend to anyway). We will work 1 – 5, have Monday off and then enter the next phase of rehearsal on Tuesday.

Kitty got the Temple chairs out today. It was great to do this, for everyone - a step closer to reality for the cast. We think the front row is too close - the stage really is 3 feet high and also the stairs are bigger than what we have taped on the floor. We also need more walking space in the aisles so people can get in and out easily.

We are considering using these chairs because they are far more comfortable than anything we would rent. We are going to make adjustments tomorrow and come up with a final number.

Tuesday, November 8, 2005

So much happening now, its hard to write.

We have settled on 75 seats at the temple. This makes more sense now than renting chairs for there, as doing that would only get us another eleven seats – if we filled them each night that would equal about \$1,500 in income, which is what the seats would cost us in rental. We can make up for the low number of seats by adding seats in Surrey.

Saturday, November 12, 2005

Saturday morning

Of course a great deal has happened. The play has been blossoming, lights and sound equipment arriving, the program getting finished, publicity and outreach continuing. We are all working very hard.

Then, at about 7 PM last night the phone rang. Jagdeep was in Emergency at St. Paul’s Hospital, having been beaten up badly walking downtown by Gang Members, who are evidently angry about his having left gang life. This is not the first time this has happened to Jagdeep. Kitty and I both raced off to the hospital. He believes the beating has to do with “previous events”, not the play. He is very visible in the community for his anti-violence work.

There is obviously a much bigger story here which I am not writing about. The fact that this happened is public knowledge – the details, while known to me, are Jagdeep’s private life. He did, though, insist on coming to work. We had our first invited Forum this afternoon.

During the morning we did very good work on the family scenes. Cleaned up some areas and refocused part of the final family scene, where Mom brings Sonya back to her father. Mom has given up in a way. She decides not to get hit anymore by making sure her daughter listens to her husband. This brought a complexity to Mom that we hadn’t had yet.

The cast really needed an audience. They had a great run, perhaps the best so far. It was focused and seemed quite tight.

This was our first chance at Forum and my first chance to experiment with what to say, how to introduce it, how to Joke it. All in all it went very well, although it took three hours. It seems to me, though, that the first Practicing Democracy Forum was also that long.

Some discoveries:

1. This is the first time I have realized how very powerful the play is. People were stunned. Truly shell-shocked. I I am going to have to find a way to transition out of the play and into the Forum. The curtain call will be essential.
2. We should start the Forum at the third scene – after we have introduced all the characters. Its where the “meat” of the play starts – perfectly appropriate for this play.
3. The audience, even the workshop participants, were very intimidated about intervening in the gang scenes. We must expect this. I can deal with it, though, by talking about the need to experiment with how to get out once one has gotten in. If we can’t imagine, even in the theatre, maybe the Attorney General is right, and there are people we should just give up on – if there is no hope, what do we do with them, shoot them all?
4. I need to keep it moving, and find a way to do it without being rude. This will be a challenge. We have a lot of material to get through.

The cast were great. It took them a couple of interventions to start to figure out the balance of how to respond to things – the fact that they just need to be authentic – but once they did – and they all seemed to do that at the same time, the Forum really took off. This is why we did the invited Forum. To break through the barrier from straight performance to audience interactive event.

Tomorrow is cue to cue – where all the light and sound cues come together.

Public Performances

Thursday, November 17, 2005

We had a very good preview last night and also a great media call in the afternoon - with EIGHT television crews. Feedback on the show and the Forum (difficult Forum, but appropriately so) is raving positive.

But then, as we were getting ready to leave, the water main at the temple burst. It took the City over an hour to arrive, after numerous calls. Finally someone who knew how to turn the main underground pipes off got there.

It flooded the secondary temple building with about 4 feet of sewage. We had to remove everything from the building we are in for fear of the flooding reaching our building. The bottom floor of our building got about 1 or 2 inches of sewage. We also quickly unplugged all the power and moved their computers from the floor to on top of counters, etc.

Crews came in very quickly late last night and have done a great job of cleaning, but of course there is still work to do. We have power back but will not have access to any water, so will be bringing that in ourselves - and access for us and the public to washrooms in the main temple building next door. Dylan is making a map for people. We have moved the actors' dressing room into the upstairs balcony.

Is this all dramatic enough for opening night?

November 19, 2005

So much has been going on its been impossible to write for a few days – I am going to try to catch up:

The restoration people and the Temple did a great job of cleaning up. Its still in process but we have water again and access to the downstairs washrooms, although that floor looks like a construction zone.

We had our fourth performance last night and the Forums have each been so different.

Response to the play itself has been mostly fantastic. I have heard over and over again, from ordinary audience members, from people from the Temple, from workshop participants, and also from media people that the play is so much more powerful than they expected it to be. This is, of course, very gratifying for us all.

I have also heard from a couple of people (but very few) that they have had a hard time following the play. There are time shifts in it, for instance. When we did the invited Forum and the Preview I purposefully asked people who had not seen it yet (also designers when they came for the first run) and heard from, literally, all of them that the chronology of the story was clear – they understood the passage of time, and yet there are some people who are expressing this confusion – hard to know why its working for most and not for some.

For me it feels like the most exciting Forum so far was the Preview. It was the most 'vital' audience so far, I think. Navigating Forum is very difficult. We must be able to meet the audience where it is each night – not demand that it come to us or be disappointed that it isn't at a level of understanding the issues that we wish it was. As the performances progress this is very difficult; difficult to not compare one audience to another. Each performance, though, has to exist on its own.

At the Preview there was a really mixed crowd – all paid at a 2 for 1 – it was full of people who were there because they were drawn to the issue. There was a level of knowledge in the room that made the investigation quite deep. We had interventions from various races, ages, from ex-gang members (known to cast members) from very tough young men and also from the 'innocent but very concerned'.

One intervention I remember involved a young man replacing Jay near the end of the play and giving Daadi the gun. This initiated a string of events that led to him going into hiding and a discussion (one that is coming up every night, of course) about what mechanisms exist for people involved in gangs to get out. There are none, really, and going to the Police is not an option, as they are going to want the person to name names etc., which is going to put them and their family in extreme danger.

This was our first real audience and while the Forum went well I also felt that there was a great deal of "blocking" going on in the family scenes during improvisations. Not from everyone but from Mom and Dad in particular. The actor's job is not to defeat everyone who comes on the stage, nor is it to be so agreeable that they will do anything – but to know their character and tell the truth – even if the truth is inconvenient, as it often is. I talk with the cast about this in the hopes that the family would 'relax' a little on the stage – start to really be present in interventions – all those listening exercises need to come into effect.

The first opening (we spanned opening invitations across the Thursday and Friday nights) was also a good night with a deep investigation. This night a lot of the community-based supporters of the project came. Again it was full.

An intervention that jumps out for me: a woman replaced Jay in the restaurant when Kam is giving him the gun, recognizing that he is surprised and uncomfortable with the news that he is expected to take it but is unable to refuse. She did. This led to understanding Jay's situation more clearly – he has said 'yes' to many things at this point – he has been dealing drugs for the Crew, has made a lot of money – has a flashy car (that is a secret to his parents), etc. There are expectations of him. His refusal has ramifications. He is likely going to get beaten – although after the beating, he may be allowed to back out. Again, calling the Police is flagged as a dangerous option for him in this circumstance. It's what some of the public want him to do but the cast and some audience members, who really are experts in this matter, are firm that this desire is naive. The Police can't protect him, even if they want to – and they have a history of just wanting information from him and then leaving him exposed to harm.

There was also a lovely intervention near the end of the play, in which a man replaced Sunny and very honorably, gave Kam his gun. Unarmed, he announced he

had to leave. This had great symbolism and, Kam – who is usually very hard edged, let his best friend go – but not without saying to him that while he could leave town, his family had to stay for insurance that Sunny would not tell anyone sensitive information.

The Forum was very valuable and the feedback intensely positive – people suggesting it should perform in every school, for instance – the logistics and finances of which is impossible. Dylan made a rough calculation and we figure that without subsidy we would have to charge between \$200 - \$250 per ticket to pay for this project. When the run is over, its over, regardless of how great houses and demand may be, unless a very large pile of money drops out of the sky.

The second opening was harder. For some reason this was when most of the VIP's booked – by that I mean people representing funders, heads of agencies (instead of workers inside agencies), old friends of Headlines. It was a far less diverse audience than usual and there were more people there who were there to observe the project. I made a point of speaking to the crowd about this and encouraged them to set their work positions aside for the Forum, and be there just as people.

There was less knowledge in the room this night and it was reflected in the kinds of interventions that came onto the stage. It was also Friday night and, historically, Friday and Saturday nights are difficult as they attract an audience that is more likely to be out for straight entertainment on the week-end. This was not so much the case this night as it was an opening invited audience, but it really factored in the next night.

We are, of course, getting interventions in the family scenes every night – I haven't written about that yet. Many people have come to me from various backgrounds (Indian, Iranian, First Nations, Chinese, ethnically undefined Caucasian – to name some specific instances) and commented on how the dynamics in the family are also the dynamics in their families, either now or as children. The family could also, in some ways, be my own family when I was a child. Its important for all of us that this recognition – that its not 'only' an Indian family issue – be operating with audiences. The issues we are dealing with in the play are social issues that span all boundaries – even though the case study we are using (because of the current Headlines) is Indo-Canadian.

There are seemingly simple actions in these scenes that can lead to profound solutions – things that involve at least one of the family members – and it could be and has been at this point – any of them, taking a leadership role and breaking the patterns that escalate the tension in the home. If this can happen, very often Mom doesn't get slapped around, the kids don't end up on the porch, they don't go off to meet Kam and Sunny in the restaurant, Jay doesn't get recruited, etc. Its not as simple as it sounds. Its also not to suggest that the only factor is the home – however – it was very clear in the workshop that the participants were certain that the young people going into gang life are doing so partly as a reaction to home life. We cannot separate the two.

I think it was this night that a woman replaced Jeevan in the scene where he has good news. She worked so hard trying to get the family to honour his needs – and it was lovely – her understanding of his struggle, as an immigrant who is trying his

best to provide for his family, in a culture that is contrary to his own – and I was very grateful to her, because its easy to overlook that he is not a bad father – he is trying to be the best he can be and in the midst of that is making some bad choices.

People from the Temple are starting to come. There are ten free tickets for each night, (total 100 tickets) which have gone to the Temple Executive to distribute. There have been problems that we did not foresee with this, namely that the tickets went to Executive's families and not to, for instance, the women who work all the time in the kitchen. Dylan has been talking with our temple contact to rectify this and in the last couple of days I have noticed people from the kitchen coming to the shows.

I got a very wonderful call from Camyar Chai (Newworld Theatre) who was at the show Friday night. He talked about how it altered his definitions of what theatre could be, and could do. He was extremely moved. He mentioned that he and his two friends (Adrienne Wong – who is also a wonderful theatre artist in town and becoming a CBC Broadcaster and Kathleen Oliver, who was there reviewing for the Straight) went out and talked for hours and hours about the issues and the theatre event – and realized that they had been so highly stimulated.

Last night's show, Saturday night, was pretty odd. We are now into ticket sales only and what will always happen is that houses will drop – we are in the real run now.

And so we had about 48 people – not bad, actually, for this point in the run before word of mouth has had a real chance to ignite. Quite a young crowd, which was good and also predominantly South Asian. Saturday night – it sometimes felt like Theatre Sports. Also the cast have swung to the opposite end now – the family, not the gangsters – and are being far too accommodating. I need to find a way to help them find the middle territory.

This was also a VERY talkative group and by the end of the evening they were highly animated. I have been managing to do the Forum in about two hours and 10 or 15 minutes. Last night we started at 8:05 and finally finished at 10:40!! The interventions were very long and meandering and multi-layered, with people wanting to intervene on interventions.

Again, the audience was very moved – the cast and I kind of swamped afterwards. A young woman came to me and talked about how she and her family were targeted by the whole 'insurance' thing. Her brother had gotten out and they had been in deep danger for some time – she was very appreciative of the project. Audience members are taking a lot of postcards after the show and my hope is that this is going to pay off soon in very, very grassroots publicity and outreach that will compliment the great job that Jen, Dafne and Manjot and Dylan have already been doing.

November 20, 2005

We had about 50 at the show last night – not bad for our first Sunday. Had a chat with the cast about the Forum and how, in the family scenes it seems to be either "yes" or "no" and that they really needed to find that in between space where they were actually listening to what the intervener was saying, doing, and respond

authentically. Again, this isn't a problem for all of them but is being a big challenge for Mom and Dad.

The play itself is running pretty well, although we are having some technical / sound problems with the computer program. Kitty is going to get Amos to come in and check it out – its not working the way it used to and is causing her grief.

There was a lovely and controversial intervention last night from a young man, who replaced Sonia in the scene where Mom gets hit. He started by saying to the Dad, "You're right, Dad. Mom deserved to get hit. I agree with you!" The audience let out a loud groan. Then the intervener went on to try to get the father to also slap him (her). "Hit me – I need to learn a lesson, too", he demanded. And he wouldn't stop. "Hit me!". The father and mother stared in silence. It was Daadi (grandmother) who finally started to speak, in a very emotional way. "Are you listening to your daughter? Do you understand what she is trying to tell you?" Dad was visibly shaken. In discussion about this we talked about how stuck the family is in the pattern and that it is true that something dramatic – not the same old thing – needs to happen to shock them out of it. The father suggested that he had actually heard this from his daughter and that it would change his behaviour.

Of course, as always, we are in this symbolic place. The intervention can be taken literally, or we can explore the symbolism of it. Someone needs to stand up in the family – not necessarily to the father, who has his own struggles, but to the patterned behaviour that is alienating all of them from each other.

The end of the Forum got very heavy tonight – heavier than usual. I don't know if it was the make-up of this audience, the chemistry of this night, or if its also me – at the end of a very long couple of weeks. Other nights we have ended on a more positive note – tonight the audience did not seem activated – just beaten up. Instead of staying and wanting to talk with each other and cast members (this has happened every night so far) they all left. Maybe it's a function of Sunday night, but part of me thinks I need to find a way, as Joker, to not leave us in such a heavy place at the end. I am not certain this serves the issue or the play in the best way – its not that the cast should be responding differently – if anything, its something I could do.

As is the case every night so far, there was also discussion about how the "Sunnys and Kams of the world" get out. I asked the audience at one point how many of them have "Sunnys" in their lives and about a dozen people raised their hands. This strikes me as a lot in an audience of 50.

Wednesday, November 23, 2005

Well – an interesting night. The same number, about 50 and tonight a very high percentage of Caucasians – probably about 70%. Wish I could see some pattern, but....I can't. the two previous performances were almost entirely South Asian audiences. I wouldn't normally be tracking the make-up of the audience like this, but this play comes out of the South Asian Community – generally speaking I know other theatres have a tough time attracting that community – whether they are attending or not has relevance. Representation from the community each night seems to swing.

We also had a group booking of 19 youth from Ireland – and they brought their own very strong knowledge of the violence issue into the room.

Jay came in all banged up today. He was at a club on Monday night and got “jumped” – was evidently minding his own business, just visiting with friends, and some guys attacked him and threw him off a balcony to the floor below. He has a broken wrist and a very sore ankle. He says it had nothing to do with doing the play – its attached to previous events. He is in a fair bit of pain. Kam is almost fully recovered. So now, instead of making an announcement at the top of the evening about Kam, I am making an announcement about Jay. Its amazing. I am very impressed, though, at his commitment to continue.

We did notes at 6:00 and did a run, which was a very good thing, as everyone agreed it was sleepy after two days away. We also had to re-block some scenes – we cannot have Dad throw Jay onto the floor – we have changed it to a violent push onto the sofa, which is padded, and have worked it in a way where it seems harsher than it actually is on stage.

The run of the play went very well. The audience was completely stunned when it was over – I mean stone cold silence. When I came onto the stage to start the Forum many were in tears.

Unlike the week-end, this audience was far from naïve. There were some very considered interventions, in particular regarding getting Jay and Sunny out of the life. Kashmir Daliwal, who is our contact on the Executive of the Temple Board came tonight and brought his wife, two kids and his mother. He loved it. His daughter made an intervention.

Thursday, November 24, 2005

Another night unlike any other. This audience was, again, almost entirely Caucasian but this time the mean age must have been about 55 or 60. A smaller house, too, probably about 40. For the most part we did good public education tonight – the Forum actually went quite well.

The most interesting thing being an elderly Indian gentleman who, it turns out, is the Director or President of VIRSA – an Indo-Canadian agency dealing with issues of the family. He did two interventions – both in the family scenes – and loved, absolutely loved the event. He had a long talk with both Kam and Manjot and has promised to get on the radio first thing in the morning and start getting the community out to the play.

Kashmir Daliwal , from the Temple Executive, also came back near the end this evening and told me how wonderful he thought it was last night. Here’s what we think is happening now: its certain that people know its on at the Temple, but the feeling amongst many people is that people are waiting for Surrey. Its closer to home. My fear is that people think that, because there is still 3 weeks left in the run, that they have a lot of time. It’s the old “I’ll go later” syndrome. The run will be over in a flash, though, and people will be saying, ‘what happened? We missed it!’.

Sunday, November 27, 2005

(afternoon)

I haven't had the time or energy to write for two days so here is a recap:

The Friday night show was OK – we broke the 60 mark of attendance and pulled out some more chairs – a very good thing. We all went into this performance feeling good because of the high number of reservations and the run of the play was strong. The audience had a pretty good diversity to it. Again, though, interventions were hard to solicit. I can't figure out the chemistry of this. I am saying this because the next night (Saturday night) the interventions started right away and for the most part came very easily.

Every night I ask the audience members to remain standing if the issues in the play touch their lives or the lives of people dear to them, and every night at least 90% of the house remains standing. Most nights its higher than 90%. It was the same these two nights and yet on Friday the interventions had a kind of naiveté to them and Saturday night they were spectacularly well considered, innovative, informed. I don't think I have ever done a show where the depth of the Forum swings like this one does.

Its so important in this to always meet the audiences where they are each night, because the feedback we get from people, regardless of how I feel about the depth of each night, is so appreciative.

Some highlights: on both nights people have started to bring their families, including very young children – 8 year olds and perhaps younger. We are talking with them upon entry just to make certain that they know they are welcome to attend and that they know what they are coming to in terms of the language and the violence. Its great that this has started to happen.

Friday night the most powerful intervention came, I think, at the end. Someone replaced Kam for the first time – someone who recognized Kam's humanity and his struggle to find a way not to have to kill his best friend, Sunny. We were all very grateful for the insight of this man, the actor Kam especially. In the intervention the man really had to work to get Sunny to hear what he was saying – that they had to move slowly and plan Sunny's exit with care, because both their lives were in jeopardy. Of course, as is often the case, this led to a conversation about what actual avenues there are for the Sunny's of the world to get out – there are none.

Saturday night there were many deep interventions:

- a young woman of African descent (this is important because she came to me later and was so happy with the production and that the family felt to her like her own family – Jeewan in particular, she said made a “perfect African Dad”), replaced Sonia and really asserted herself inside the family, but in a wonderful way. She embraced Sonia's passion for her cell phone and her need to connect with friends, and at the same time balanced that with the father's need to share his news with the family. It

seemed so simple but we all agreed that the way it was done empowered Sonia and at the same time respected the father.

- A young South Asian man replaced Jay (he also commented onstage that this family could be any family – when I said to him they could be my childhood Jewish family he laughed heartily and said he imagined that was true). His Jay did something no one has ever done. He stood up for his sister, and lectured (in a nice way) his family about their need to honour their daughter. Did they want to drive her away? Did they know how many of their friends' daughters were prostitutes, having being driven out of their families and then having found 'home' with a man who took advantage of them?

Of course both these interventions changed the dynamics in the family entirely and altered the course of the play.

- a young woman replaced Daadi in the scene where Jay now has the gun and she really put the screws to Jay, in a very loving way. She talked to him about her own childhood in India, and war and people dying and killing each other, and admitted that while she didn't know what was happening with him that she could see and recognize how he was changing. She could see her childhood friends, who were killing and being killed in his eyes. In the scene Jay refused to budge, but in discussion later he admitted that she had really got inside him and it was possible that when it came to his relationship and allegiance to Kam, that may be different now.

The challenge for the actor, and I am going to talk with him about it today, is to do that in the scene and not just be in the same pattern as every night and say 'no' in the scene when he is really being taken to a place of saying 'yes'.

- A middle aged man, who we found out later is an Afghanistan Veteran and a recruiter for the Canadian Military replaced Sunny in the final Kam / Sunny scene. This got very intense. It was obvious from the very beginning of the intervention that this man knew how to handle a gun and had the language of violence in his vocabulary. He pulled a 'fast one' on Kam and said that he had given a letter to a friend, and that if anything happened to him or his family after he 'got out' – which he was doing whether Kam liked it or not – that Kam would be exposed and either killed by other gang members or arrested. This infuriated Kam and the two got into what I would call 'a pissing contest', that backfired on the audience 'Sunny'. This led us into a great conversation about the various tactics for Sunny at this point and how it may very well be the case that the most successful option is not aggression towards Kam.

After the Saturday Forum we had a very hard time getting the audience members to go home. So many of them stayed and talked and talked. The room was really alive.

Interestingly, the news team from Channel M came, including the News Anchor, not as part of work – but as audience members. They had aired a news story about

the project the previous day and their interest was piqued. They, like many people, have taken postcards and promised to do whatever they can to spread the word to individuals. Two women came from Squamish and want the play to come to Squamish. After I explained how difficult that is to orchestrate, they said they would get Squamish to come to the play in Surrey.

On a technical note – we are preparing to leave the Temple after tonight’s (Sunday) show. I just realized this morning that the elevator is still not working after the flood and there are about a dozen big, heavy lighting crates upstairs in what is now also the dressing room. I talked with Kashmir Dhaliwal and the elevator is indeed broken, so Craig (TD) is going to arrange with Kashmir for a lot of strong guys from the Temple to help our tech crew carry the boxes down the stairs into the main room on Monday so we can load out.

(evening)

After the show some of us (Kitty, Dylan, Dafne, Jackie, Jagdeep and me) packed up the dressing room, the booth and the lobby in preparation for the Tech Crew doing the tear-down at the Temple tomorrow and the move-out. Its an emotional moment, leaving the temple space. It was such a foreign environment when we first got there and now it feels like home.

Its going to be very different at the Surrey Arts Centre. A real theatre. The texture of being in a place like that – the kinds of things that occur in those spaces – are very different. The kind of people coming may shift. We are hearing that many people have been waiting or the move, so I hope this will mean houses will grow. There has certainly been enough media and outreach for the production to have a real presence in Surrey.

Colin Thomas told me today that he got home to an e-mail from someone he knew who had come to the show and then put word out through a Buddhist list-serve, urging people to attend. Things are happening at that level, as well as the local, provincial and national media.

Tomorrow (Tuesday, Nov. 28) Jagdeep and I are doing a province-wide CKNW talk show and next Wednesday I am doing “Sounds like Canada” with Sheelagh Rogers (National CBC Radio). The CBC National news item should air this week, if the election call doesn’t bump it entirely. It appears the Link and the Voice (Indo-Canadian papers) are running more stories, with photos this coming week.

Tuesday, November 29, 2005

The set looks great in the Surrey Arts Centre. We will do re-blocking and then a cue to cue tomorrow, any refocusing that is necessary and then a couple of runs.

Tickets are not selling for Surrey. It is, in Dylan’s words, “crazy-making”. Outreach and publicity are great. Media and audiences are raving. Every where we go, all calls that are being made, people are talking about the play and how wonderful they hear it is and that they are planning on attending. This isn’t translating into ticket sales. We had a brainstorm about what to do and Manjot and Jen will re-contact radio and push PSA’s and stories again, and Dafne will be, once again, getting to

organizations who have told us they are eager to use the project and remind them that they only have two weeks left.

There are stories coming out in the next couple of days in Indian media and on the CBC, CKNW was good tonight. Its so frustrating.

November 30, 2005

The show looks great in the theatre – the design team did a lovely job. We had from 1:00 PM – 6:00 PM to rework entrances and exits, a few internal moments in scenes and then a cue to cue and then a run. We were done at 6:30. The Surrey tech people were booked until 10:30 but we were all out of there by 7:00. We did good.

We are very worried about ticket sales. So are the Surrey Arts Centre people, who also can't understand it. They are also saying that any show that has had amazing reviews and word of mouth like they are hearing for this – also so much media coverage – should be full every night. Its not that publicity and outreach haven't done a great job.

I am hearing lots of theories now: the Indian Community won't pay \$15.00 for theatre – it should be \$5.00 (!?). The Surrey population isn't theatre-going – except that the “Alice in Wonderland Panto” next door is selling out. People want to come but are afraid that there will be gang members present. There will be lots of door sales.

We have a sold out school matinee at 12:30 tomorrow and then an 8:00 PM show. Going to be a HUGE day.

Thursday, December 1, 2005

A full house for the matinee: just under 130 grades 8, 9, 10 from a Khalsa School. some of them seemed quite young, but we could have done interventions for hours and hours. They were very rowdy sometimes but never in a bad way – they were highly engaged.

Interestingly, at the top of the Forum when I asked them to sit if the issues in the play did not touch their lives, about 60% of them sat down. An hour into the Forum I asked them how many of the knew a “Jay” character, and about 80% raised their hands. They were very frightened, I think, off the top.

The family scenes generated a lot of “you have to respect your parents” interventions from them – a sign, I think, of the core teachings of the school. I found myself asking interveners questions in this part about how Sonia manages to have “a life” and also respect her Daadi and Father and Mother? The responses were all about balance.

The gangster scenes got a lot of attention, some of it quite informed. Kam played a very hard-hitting scenario with a young boy who replaced Jay in the restaurant and now didn't want the gun. My heart went out to the kid, who thought it would be easy to just ‘say no’ – as it got more and more serious, the room got more and more quiet.

There was also a very thought out intervention at the very end of the play. A boy replaced Jay after Kam gives him the 'kill Sunny' signal. He went to Sunny as in our play and got the gun to Sunny's head. When he knew Sunny couldn't pull his own gun, he stopped and explained that Kam had ordered him to kill Sunny, but he didn't want to. Could they work together to save each other, because he knew if he didn't follow through he would die. Sunny took the kid's gun and ordered him to leave town. The kid wanted to know what would happen and Sunny explained that he was going to go to Sanjay and tell him that Kam tried to have him killed. This was going to get Kam killed, which, in turn, was likely going to start the very war that Sunny feared.

After the play the kids swamped the stage, wanting actors' autographs. One of the teachers came to me and said, 'this is a great thing you are doing – you are saving lives here'. I asked the kids to bring their parents. The teachers promised to push publicity for the remaining performances.

The evening show was so different. There might have been 50 people, perhaps a bit less. The snow didn't help us. Maybe because it is 'opening night' in Surrey, although we have not advertised it that way at all, the audience was very heavy in politicians, counselors, therapists, social workers. It was the singularly most frustrating Forum we have had – especially after the high level of engagement in the afternoon.

When I asked the 'if this touches your life question' at the beginning of the Forum, 100% of the room remained standing. There were interventions in the first family scene and the first restaurant that came fairly easily, but also had elements of magic to them. Jay is just 'not interested' in the gangster world. Daadi is very understanding and 'makes space' for her daughter-in-law to be Sonia's mother. Both these interventions have good outcomes, but there is a level of wishful thinking in them. I had to really dig with the interveners to try to talk about the character's struggles.

Then we got into the harder part of the play and there was nothing. It took really talking to them, 'the silence here is the silence out there'.... 'the scene is not about the gun, its about the relationship' And near the end... I just need to say this – we had interventions in these scenes from grade 8's earlier today – the cast nodding in agreement. I try to not compare audiences, but it was so hard in this instance.

An audience comprised mostly of politicians, therapists and counselors. "Community leaders". It was very scary and so frustrating. One woman said, 'well, what do you want us to do – we don't know what to do'. I said to her that no one ever knows what to do – we are in the theatre to make discoveries. Its not my place to tell you what to do.

Finally, I told them I had no problem with them leaving the theatre frustrated, and brought the Forum to a close.

After we closed the Forum, of course they all had suggestions. Many went to Kam and, as he told me later, had lots of reasons why they wouldn't / couldn't bring anything onto the stage. He said to me, 'I told one woman, there are reasons, and then there are excuses. What you are giving me are excuses.'

It's so fascinating. Here's my theory: these professionals give people advice. And, in their positions, have a great deal invested in 'being right', in succeeding. The possibility that they would come on stage and fail was too much. And this is, in fact, reflected in the problem with programs, counseling, politicians' ideas. There is so little innovation – so little risk taking. People need to play it safe.

The politicians, though, wanted photographs of themselves with the cast – proof, it seems, to be posted on their web sites – that they had attended the event. They raved and promised to help bring people out.

The forecast is for heavy snow tomorrow, which the Surrey Arts Centre people are telling me is going to keep 'that day ticket buyers' at home. Dylan, Dafne, Manjot and Jen and I are busting our brains trying to figure out how to increase houses – in the midst of the mountain of great publicity the play has generated. There are a lot of phone calls and e-mails going out – agencies who promised to help network are being re-re-contacted. What gets re-enforced is that word of mouth is great.

Monday, December 5, 2005

Its been three shows since I had time or energy to write. Going to try to catch up:

We are playing to about 50 a night. Generally about half are purchases on that day. OK, but not great – we have 130 seats.

Each of the three nights the numbers remaining standing at the 'do these issues touch your life' question has been +95%. The last two nights, 100%.

I think we may have broken through something now, and may be getting 'ordinary people'; by that I mean not the activist crowd, not the counselors, etc. There are still very silent moments but they do not feel like the silence of paralysis – they are deep in thought.

The Friday evening show had a great many interventions – so different than the night before. Ideas were very considered – and sometimes quite dark. One young man replaced Jay at the end of the play and refused to kill Sunny. Kam shot him. In discussion after, he said that he knew he would likely get killed, but he didn't see a way out at that point, and at least his family would know that he 'said no' – and be proud of him. This seems bleak, but it opens up an understanding of the depth of the moment – I believe these insights affect people's lives – those who might possibly be "Jays" or those who know "Jays" and can talk with them.

Saturday and Sunday are muddy for me in terms of what happened when. This is why its important to write after each performance.

There are always 'successful' interventions at the top of the play – when changing the direction of the characters is easier. Its great for the room to clue into the reality that any of the family members are capable of doing this – all it takes is one of them stepping up to the plate.

One night a young man replaced Jay and confronted the father about how much he is working – and not spending time with his family. The father’s response was great, and very appreciated by the audience: ‘you want me to stop working so much? Are you ready to move into a one bedroom basement suite?’ Of course the room agreed that part of the issue was the disconnection in the family, but they also understood that the father has both a real and imagined pressure to bring in large sums of money – to live, to prepare for the future and also to prove himself in our very consuming culture.

Another intervention replaced Daadi in the scene when Jay has the gun. She was very strong. She pushed and pushed, and brought the whole family together to talk with Jay. The pressure made him dig his heels in and finally he just left the house – left them all standing there – although he admitted later that if they had continued, if they had actually kept him there and continued, he would have told them.

This is such an interesting part of the play, because the interveners want to ‘give him space’ and he uses that, as well, to guilt them into letting him go, because he is so afraid to tell them anything – but he actually really wants to – wants to be pressured to do the thing (tell them) that he is so afraid to do. Of course, if he does, this makes a bomb explode in the family that they then have to deal with somehow. They cannot go to the Police – who have no way to protect them.

Another intervention replaced Sunny in the Kam / Sunny end scene and was like others except for the beautiful language in it. The audience Sunny wants out and tells Kam that he will always support him. He tells him he “has a couch, and someday, when you are bloody and beaten, you are going to need my couch”. It sounds corny as I type it but our Sunny was off stage with tears in his eyes and Kam told me later that he had to force himself not to cry.

These heartfelt interventions between the gangsters are important. I have come to understand what we are doing in this part of the play; we are reframing people’s ideas of them as alien monsters. They are our brothers, cousins, sons, the kids next door. Once they are in, how do we help them out?

I did SHAW Urban Rush this afternoon, which aired a few times today and tomorrow and CBC “Sounds Like Canada” is coming Wednesday morning. We are also working some more Indo-Canadian radio and print. the phone lines are buzzing. Hopefully houses will pick up in this last week.

Tuesday, December 6, 2005

Regarding National CBC coverage: the National TV News item should have aired by now and hasn’t. We are having a very hard time pinning down when that might be. As we close in 5 days, it is becoming apparent it won’t do much for houses if and when it does air.

We also got news this morning that the National CBC Radio item on “Sounds Like Canada” that we are doing tomorrow will not go live. It will be aired from tape on December 12, the day after we close.

Are we (I know I can ask this question on behalf of us all) frustrated?

Friday, December 9, 2005

Another three shows have passed. Another attempt to catch up on the writing.

I went to do the CBC radio interview and decided on a somewhat radical approach: in consultation with the low level producer, I informed the Executive producer that I was unhappy with how things had unfolded and was considering not doing the interview at all. This brought him downstairs. We had a calm and respectful talk in which I outlined my reasons. The same things are important to Headlines as to the CBC I told him and that is numbers. We are in the same business. Essentially the 'dance' we both know we are dancing is that they get interesting and vital programming and we get something in return – namely a plug for the play that leads to audiences coming. This won't be possible after we close. He agreed. It was impossible to move the airing of the interview now but he promised to air a promo with a clip and how to get tickets on Thursday. I don't know if it happened or not, but, hopefully he kept his word.

We came in a bit early on Wednesday and I did notes with the actors to tighten up some of the scenes. The big notes are cues and, for some of the actors, emotional engagement. This is hard in a long run – especially with this level of intensity in the play.

We are still averaging about 50 a night – half of them being sales at the door. Every night is so different – its fascinating with this play. Usually in a run at this stage you can second guess what is going to happen in the Forum, but every night there are surprises.

The Matinee Thursday afternoon was hell. 140 grade 9, 10, 11 – from two public schools. Their teachers told me later that there were four gang leaders in the audience and that the play hit very close to home for many of them, which is why they were both so rowdy and there was so much fooling around on the stage. The rowdiness is always manageable. The level of intervention was surprisingly shallow – I mean – kids coming up to perform for their friends, to play tough – having no sense of what they wanted to do there other than perform. I started off encouraging them to focus – but found that whatever I said made no difference. The cast were also getting impatient.

At about the one hour mark, Kam was dealing with a 'tough' kid who replaced Jay when Kam is giving him the gun. The kid pulled the gun on Kam and was laughing, saying, 'I'm not afraid of you.' Kam grabbed the gun from him but, interestingly, this didn't stop. Because the young guy was not there making an intervention – he was there performing for his friends. The kid poked Kam in the chest. Lots of laughter. I was also standing there and knew Kam was in control – no need to worry. Kam said – you a tough guy? You want to be a tough guy? He pulled out his cell to call the Enforcer, "Jaz" and the kid grabbed the cell. Kam said – you want things? You want my car? He gently threw his keys at the kids chest. What else you want? The kid went for Kam's glasses and Kam grabbed his hand.

Kam then asked if he could speak as Jagdeep – of course, I said – having a sense of what was coming. He took off Kam's glasses and said something to the effect of: 'this is not Kam now, this is the actor Jagdeep. I spent 10 years in the streets. Did time

in jail, saw many of my friends die. I could be making \$10,000 in one day doing something very different than this, but I have chosen to spend my time trying to help people like you understand what gang life really means. I am asking you for an hour of your time. Do you think you can do that?' Dead silence. You could have heard a pin drop. 'Really – I want an answer. Can you do that?' Many yeses from the audience. I asked the young guy if he had anything he wanted to say and he declined and went back to his seat. And, of course, the tone of the rest of the Forum altered dramatically.

There was a very considered intervention from a girl who went back and replaced Jay in the restaurant and looked Kam in the eye and simply told him she wasn't ready for the gun. It was too much for her. Kam, surprisingly, let her go. I am not certain how much of this was a reward for finally bringing something serious onto the stage. In the processing of it he said that she had just cut through the bullshit and he could see she wasn't faking – just trying to get out. That this Jay revealed that Kam had made an error of judgment. He let her go with only a promise to keep her mouth shut – and a threat of reprisal if she talked.

A young man replaced Jay and told Daadi about the gun. Daadi called Sonia and Sonia called Sunny and a whole series of events went into play, that may have saved Jay's life – and certainly Sunny's. We got to talk about how this is actually what the actor Jay did in real life. He told his parents and, after they freaked out, they listened and helped him get out. We are being realistic about this and including the unfortunate truth that this does not include going to the Police – who, because they have the mandate they do, are going to try to get information from Jay, and not really be able to protect him.

Another young man tried to say no to Kam when Jay is ordered to shoot Sunny. Kam shot him. This was, though, not play-acting – a very serious moment on the stage and also, we could feel it – things were sinking into the kids.

A two show day yesterday and the evening show was tired but very warm. Lots of interventions – one of those nights when I didn't have to cajole the audience at all. Its so hard to know why this happens on some nights – the audience is just 'ready' – some mysterious chemistry. It was like being in a warm bath. Also – this audience was very diverse.

Another intervention for Dad in the family scene, this one trying to bridge the gap with his wife – but doing it in front of everyone. We got to see how much work Jeevan and Rupa have to do to repair their marriage, but also that if they can, the entire story will be better.

Someone replaced Jay and told Sonia about the gun, sensing she would be the one who wouldn't freak out. Sonia did the only thing, I think, she would know to do and that is call Sunny. Interesting – this has happened so seldom but happened twice this day.

A woman replaced Kam in the Kam / Sunny scene and tried to convince Sunny to stay with the plan. An insightful intervention, as it acknowledged the trap Kam is in and his struggle to not kill his best friend. In the end – this woman relented and

let Sunny go, in the same way Kam has done sometimes – because of their love for each other.

Lots of great feedback. We have three more shows. We are all wishing it would fill. Honestly, I am ready for us to be done, and I think many of us feel the same. Its very important what we are doing and we are all very proud of the show, but we are exhausted.

Gearing up now for the live tele / web cast. Rehearsals on Saturday. Telecast and closing on Sunday.

Friday evening

I forgot to mention earlier two nice things:

Nusrat, the Editor of the Miracle Newspaper in Surrey came and was very enthusiastic – he did two interventions! He showed me an article on the play that had published that day. Also, a very elderly turbaned gentleman, who I didn't know, came to me after the Thursday evening show. He took my hand and said, "How can we ever thank you."

We had an intervention from Herb Daliwal tonight – Federal politician. He was the Liberal Minister of Natural Resources. He replaced Daadi in the scene when Jay has the gun and almost convinced him to spill the beans. An important moment. He took the young guy in his arms and wouldn't let go. He told him how much his family loved him, even if there were fights. (Of course this also had a high entertainment factor – many of the crowd knew who he was.)

When we were done the intervention, we got into a discussion of what would happen if Jay did spill the beans. Herb said that, of course, he would call the Police. I called Kam out and we talked about the realities of this and how, unfortunately, this would put the family in great danger. The police cannot / will not protect Jay. They will want information from him. It was, I am certain, very interesting for Herb to understand this and he dealt with it very graciously – a difficult position for him to be in as a senior Liberal politician. He came to me twice after the evening was done and commented on how powerful the event had been, and that he had learned things tonight.

Another interesting intervention was done by a young woman who replaced Jay in the scene at the end, in the park, and she refused to leave when Kam sends Jay to the parking lot to wait. This initiated a confrontation between Sunny and Kam – which we agreed would lead to a gang war. Kam said that Jay would also be dead and possibly his house burned down, for insulting Kam so blatantly. This Jay was very 'cheeky'.

I asked her if she thought that, as the invitation was to come and create safety for the characters, had she created safety for Jay? She thought she had. No one agreed. Its fascinating. I am aware that the organization she is connected to is committed to, as they describe it, the "politics of confrontation". This approach created a war in the theatricality of the play tonight.

The Chair of the Surrey Parks Board came to both me and Kam tonight and expressed an interest in having the production tour the schools. Kam told her that the barrier to this was money. Evidently she told him that if we wanted to do it, money would not be an issue.

Saturday, December 10, 2005

The SHAW crew is all set up, as are the phones and the computers for the tele / web broadcast tomorrow. This is so much work to pull together and has mostly been on Dylan's plate to co-ordinate as production manager.

We did a full rehearsal for them this afternoon and, as is usually the case. Mike Keeping (the TV Director from SHAW) was very organized. We danced our usual dance around camera positions. In the rehearsal the handhelds wanted to be all over the stage and I stopped that – inevitably they are moving around in the quietest parts of the play. Its clear – we are shooting a live theatre event, not creating TV. We have to protect the play. During the Forum they can wander more freely.

They are going to need us to bump our light levels throughout the play by about 10% but Kitty thinks she can accomplish this by changing the gels on the lights to a more white gel from being so amber.

We were completely sold out tonight and tomorrow by about 5PM. When it came time for the play, though, we started with between 10 and 20 empty seats. People who purchased tickets but never came. I have asked that the box-office person get some help as the box-office at the Centre is a bottle-neck.

It was a Saturday night crowd, as all the Saturdays have been. After the last two really informed and warm Forums this one seemed like skimming across the surface. I hope, I hope it isn't like this tomorrow.

Partly it might have to do with the pace. I was pushing. During the tele / web cast tomorrow we have to start at 8:00:00 and finish at 9:59:59. It is live television. I brought us down on time tonight. Because of the box office bottleneck I held the house until 8:03. We cannot do that tomorrow. I brought us down at 10:02. There are still 2 minutes to shave off, as we have a full 3 minutes of credits! This meant really limiting audience discussion, which was, I think, hard for some audience members who really wanted to talk.

We are in the home stretch. Very big night tomorrow.

Monday, December 12, 2005

We had a great night last night. A sold out house. I hear we turned a few dozen people away. Of course getting there was not without its stresses.

The build-up to 7:30 and the house opening included:

Notes for the actors from the run last night – trying to tighten moments back up for the telecast and requests of them to keep the pacing up and cues tight. Also to be very concise during analysis after interventions.

Then we rehearsed the web/tele actors. My requests of them included not getting involved in chat with people on the web who wanted to ask questions, talk about the play, etc. This robs people of their attention when they want to make interventions. Also, especially on the telephones, to deal with any crank calls by telling the caller if they want to make a comment they can send to our e-mail or leave a message on Headlines' answering machine – giving them the info, and getting them off the line, again, to make way for people who want to make interventions. I haven't actually heard that there were any crank calls, although there were many callers who just wanted to say how amazing it was.

Rehearsal includes giving each of them an intervention to do. The tele/web actors have a very delicate task. They have to be the conduit for an intervention. And so we gave them interventions and I was able to ask them questions afterwards about how much what they did on the stage was their own impulse and how much was them trying to be true to what the request of them was. Of course they have to be able to embrace the request and 'fill in the blanks' themselves, or the intervention can become very shallow. Some people are better at doing this than others.

After this rehearsal we ran our ritual 2 first scenes as we always have been doing to get ready for the run.

Kitty, front of house, and I synchronized our watches, to the second, to SHAW master control. I went over final credits with SHAW. At about 7:40 we lost our internet connection but by 7:50 we got word that we had it back. There was so much going on at this point that I don't actually know the technical details of this – all I could do was say "fix it, please, and let me know when we are back online".

The cast did a great run of the play. The house was full and 4 people of the 130 sat when I asked whose lives were not touched by the issues. The Forum started quickly and without any cajoling. We took interventions from Australia, San Francisco and Windsor, Ontario as well as many from inside the theatre. The special counter we had installed on the website tells me that 660 computers logged onto the video on the web. We also usually estimate 15,000 television viewers in the Lower Mainland at a telecast.

There were some very powerful interventions, including from a 10 or 12 year old boy in the theatre who replaced Jay in the scene with Daadi when he has the gun. He confessed – only the second time this has happened in the run. Of course a complex series of events was set into motion from this and it made it possible to talk about how this was exactly what Jay did in his real life.

There was an enthusiastic standing ovation at the end of the Forum and then much celebrating for hours – first in the dressing rooms and then at the party in the theatre foyer.

Post-production

We are getting many requests to tour the play into schools. The logistics of this are very difficult, both on a financial and scheduling perspective and, I think, at an issue perspective.

Issue wise, I think it is wrong to target the gang issue as a youth issue. The power of **Here and Now** (ਏਥੇ ਤੇ ਹੁਣ) was exactly its intergenerational perspective. It is an issue that involves families.

The school invitations are to perform the play in the large school auditoriums, to between 800 and 1,200 students at a time. I believe this is unworkable for Forum Theatre, which demands an intimacy to be effective at an emotional level. I say this because both the cast and interveners do not have the ability to fill these cavernous spaces either physically or vocally. I prefer to do Forum for audiences of about 200 at a time. The issue for me is not about how many people are reached – it is at what level they are being reached.

Scheduling wise, while the cast are very committed, some have returned to other jobs and are now not available. We would need to recast some of the roles, which would mean going back into rehearsal. We would also need to do a lighting re-design, as a touring production could not have the amount of light that we enjoyed being stationary at the Temple and the Theatre. As is the policy here at Headlines, everyone involved would also need to be paid, above Union scale. This means raising more funds.

Headlines also currently has a full calendar until at least September, 2006 (today is January 11/06). It is also highly likely that by September/06 we will be in pre-production for another main stage project on Meth addiction – a request that has come in from the Sto:Lo Nation.

And so, as successful as **Here and Now** (ਏਥੇ ਤੇ ਹੁਣ) has been, the nature of a project like this is that it has a beginning, a middle and an end.