

Theatre for Living Report The Gagged Voice #1, Vancouver

By David Diamond

Organizers: Angelo Lam, Catherine Ho Sponsor: S.U.C.C.E.S.S. on their 25th Anniversary Focus: Diversity and Youth violence Facilitator: David Diamond Dates: March 19 - 21 Participants: 13 Others present: Shin Lee from L.A./CTO Korea Forum(s): at the Roundhouse, aprox. 120 attendance

March 19, 1998

point and turn balancing hypnosis blind magnets lead the blind blind cars complete the image energy
clap sculpting partners groups of 4 image of the images circle

This is the first of three workshops that look at issues of youth violence and diversity, and culminate in a public Cops in the Head session. There were about 20 youth from various origins registered for the workshop. 13 showed up, all Asian.

Today was really hard. The title of the work is 'The Gagged Voice' so I guess it shouldn't be a surprise that there was so much silence -- but it was a silence of non-committal, I think, not a silence of oppression. The core problem we have is recruitment for the workshop. In the opening, over 90% of the participants said that they were there because their mothers had brought them. Wrong reason to be there. These kids had no idea what they were coming to. A workshop like this isn't daycare or spring break camp. They have to want to do this.

After talking with Angelo and Catherine it seems that part of the problem that SUCCESS has is that they do not have a youth group. Communication went from the adult organizers to parents. The parents made decisions about attendance. The impulse did not come from the youth themselves. Perhaps through this workshop a core of youth will remain who want to work through SUCCESS.

In the middle of the day I stopped the proceedings. It was like pulling teeth. I am used to working with deeply oppressed groups, youth, and Asian youth, too. This doesn't feel like a cultural silence. I talked with them about how the work needed to be a dialogue. A number of them mentioned that they thought that the workshop was going to be me talking and them listening.....

Some of what happened today (after our chat) was really strong. Images of people being trapped in situations they don't want to be in.... (hmmmmmm -- maybe this is them in the workshop...)....of a 'girl fight' -- hot in the news right now -- of very lonely violence. There is a core of them who do want to work.

I am hoping that we are going to lose about 4 or 5 of the group by tomorrow morning. It will make it harder numbers wise, but easier investigation-wise. Our task isn't to make a play, so the numbers are not such a big issue.

March 20, 1998

clap exchange knots effective hand glass bottle magnetic image energy clap cops in the head circle

What a roller-coaster of a day! We went down to 10 participants. Three boys left. It was not a surprise who left.

The games went well, and glass bottle was a big deal for some of them -- trusting others to support them

-- trusting themselves to 'give themselves' to others.

Magnetic Image was very strong and led to two Images: an image of isolation where an Asian girl is separated from four others (Asian girls playing Caucasian girls) who are pointing and gossiping.....she has her face in her hands, dying of loneliness and embarrassment. The other image was an 'internal voices' image that turned into an exploration of Asian experience in a predominantly white Christian church in Vancouver -- and feelings of not being welcome. Both very strong. Activations were good, but quiet, as yesterday.

After lunch we started on Cops in the Head, as I thought it was important that they experience the exercise. Also the above Image was a good intro into Cops.

I asked for three stories but after a lot of waiting two were offered. Waited and waited. There have been a few very active members of this group but the others almost never speak, or do anything. Cops needs participation of eight or so people.....we settled on a story from a boy, who, against his better judgment, because he feels he must defend his friend, gets involved in a 50 person revenge fight with baseball bats. What are the voices in his head that make it hard for him to do the 'healthy thing' in this moment?

We managed to get two Cops onto the stage.....then, we had all the people who have been participating on the stage and it became impossible to continue. The dynamic that had been building in the workshop came to a head. I had been spending a lot of time coaxing people to participate and really felt today that finally I became their oppressor -- forcing them to do things, look at things that they didn't want to do. The silence was deafening. I was in a place I really didn't want to be and stopped the workshop.

It turned out that this was very shocking for them and created a crisis but it was the right thing. (I wasn't sure of that then but am now.) The way things were happening was just wrong, and unfair to everyone -- them and me.

We went into a circle and I explained how I felt, being careful to tell them many times that I did not think any of this was their fault. Catherine, from SUCCESS then spoke in Cantonese and (from what I understand) said much the same thing again -- that the work needed to be a dialogue, not a monologue and their non-participation was a clear statement and we did not want to (and would not) force them to continue.

Six of them spoke about how what we were doing was very different than what they had imagined would happen, but that they really liked it and did not want to stop. The rest remained silent.....even after lots of coaxing from Catherine to say something.

I said that I would accept the silence of the others as a statement that they did not want to continue and assured them that this was OK and laid out a plan for those who did want to continue. We took a break and finished the Cops exercise. There were many insights in it, it became wonderful, really. One insight came out of a joke. A certain Cop was very angry and really wanted a fight. Interveners came and gave the Cop what she wanted and she fought with them. One boy came up and wiggled his bum at her. The participants didn't like this, thought he was just 'fooling around' and perhaps they were right (you had to be there) but in the theatricality of the moment he defeated the Cop -- by breaking the rules. In discussion about this it became apparent how deeply revolutionary this was -- breaking the rules. These are very obedient kids. They just can't look silly, be wrong.....they MUST have the right answer and behave. This work is extremely challenging for them.

I talked with Catherine and Angelo and mentioned that I thought part of the problem in this workshop is that they are all (100%) Asian and I (the facilitator) am white.....Their response was that they have the same experience working with Asian Youth -- that there is such a deep training not to express anything that isn't well thought out, that the spontaneity of this work is very difficult. Maybe it needs adapting

somehow?

We have about 80 reservations for tomorrow. The plan is to get to the theatre, take 'possession' of the space with some games, decide on some images (I have been taking Polaroids of Images) to show the audience.....and then clarify the stories we will offer for the Cops exercise.....and hope for the best.

March 21, 1998

energy clap (in large space) fear/protector catch me rehearse images clarify cops stories The Gagged Voice

The International Day for the Elimination of Racism and SUCCESS's 25th Anniversary. About 120 people came.

Rehearsals went well. The participants came to the space and seemed very impressed with the fact that they were going to be in a theatre. They got very focused.

Started the evening with Catherine asking if anyone needed translation in Cantonese. We were prepared to do that but the answer was no, even though the audience was at least 60% Chinese.

Did complete the image with the audience and, like magic, with absolutely no coaching, an image of deep violence emerged. Violence as a joke. Very scary. The room, realizing this, and that it had emerged without effort from them, was very silent.

This led into the images. I had pre-chosen three of the images from the workshop from the Polaroids and we used them to start the evening. This worked very well. We just showed the first one. Did animation on the second and third. A four or five year old boy came on stage to participate in one of the very violent images. He took a stance of fighting and after an internal monologue, said 'let me out of here' as his character's sentence. The room gasped. This little boy knew exactly what he was doing. Sad, and great for the audience to witness.

Then we offered the room two stories for Cops:

#1. A Chinese girl has two friends. One Caucasian (and very popular) and one from Thailand. The white girl asks the Chinese girl if she 'hates' the girl from Thailand. The answer is no. The white girl then asks the Chinese girl if she is upset about the first question. The Chinese girl wants to say yes, but says no.....fearing that she will lose her friend, and her access into the popular 'in crowd'.

#2. A Taiwanese boy is leader of his group. One of the members (his best friend) has been beaten up and wants revenge. The storyteller is expected to organize a revenge fight -- with baseball bats. He wants to. He doesn't want to. He feels a great deal of pressure to do this.

The room chose story #2 by a slim margin.

The Cops in the Head exercise went so well, engagement was very deep and some tremendous things happened. One of the Cops offered was a voice whose central sentence was 'Fuck the Church'. In context this was about how Christian values are important in the Chinese community here and the voice was telling the storyteller to ignore those values and beat the crap out of the people who beat up his friend. An Asian man took the stage as this voice. And he yelled 'fuck the church' over and over and over again and played this voice with such passion, such insight, that no one could put a dent in him.....and many tried.....at one point there was a line-up on the stage! What was particularly fascinating was that I started to see connections between the Colonialism of the Church in First Nations communities and in the Chinese community. Very different story but colonialism nonetheless. This man's 'fuck the church' was

too passionate to be a joke. It was like a cork had come off a bottle and the audience howled with laughter (recognition? the unspeakable being spoken?) each time.

Catherine (organizer) yelled stop at one point and wanted to try an intervention with a Cop who was saying, 'Oh, come on.....its no big deal (the fight)....just fun'. Instead of arguing with this Cop she started to play basketball with him. They ran all across the stage, laughing and joking. It was a beautiful intervention and an example of how fighting with the Cops is sometimes exactly what they want -- many of these cops want the storyteller to fight -- fighting makes them more powerful -- there must be some other way.

After the event was over about half a dozen quite elderly Asian men and women came to me and expressed their thanks. I was particularly moved by this as I believe there were numerous moments in the evening that had the potential to be quite controversial, but people really used the event and I think it will be good for SUCCESS that it happened.

In the final circle each and every one of the participants spoke, if only briefly. This is a tremendous breakthrough. I think some small fires were lit. Catherine talked with the youth about continuing, and we agreed that once our (Headlines') new office is functioning, we will meet there (we have a TV and VCR) so the kids can see the tape of the event.

March 26, 1998

Got news today that BC Multiculturalism was so impressed with The Gagged Voice that they want to finance another one later in the year.

Theatre for Living Report The Gagged Voice #2, Coquitlam

Organizers: Angelo Lam, Catherine Ho Sponsor: S.U.C.C.E.S.S. on their 25th Anniversary Focus: Diversity and Youth violence Facilitator: David Diamond Dates: April 24 - 26 Participants: 6 Others present: Todd Thompson Forum(s): at the Evergreen Cultural Centre, Coquitlam

Didn't get a chance to do any writing during the workshop so all of it is going to happen now.

Arrived the first day to four workshop participants. Not enough to work with. SUCCESS is having recruitment problems and we have to find a way to sort these out. Angelo and Catherine agree that the problem is the 'top down' manner in which the organization functions. They do not have a 'youth wing', but they do a lot of work with youth. This happens through contacting parents and principals. This route creates a bottleneck. We discussed how they could have asked the participants in the first workshop to help them recruit for the second workshop. In this way they would have been able to build on the first workshop and develop some youth leaders inside the SUCCESS structure.

So, on the first day we did about an hour of games, introducing the concepts of the work, and asked the four participants to try to find others. One of them could not come back the next day. Some did talk with friends and on day two we had six. I decided to proceed.

They were a wonderful group and worked very, very hard. We did two days work in one day, and had very strong images by the end of the day.

The third day was also 'performance' day. We met at the beautiful Evergreen Theatre at 1PM and set the work we would do on the Images, and then I explained about Cops in the Head and asked for stories, and got two. We did Cops on one of the stories so that the participants could understand the structure of the evening event.

About 45 people came. Not bad but not great, either. Angelo and Catherine had handed the organization work over to the Burnaby Office of SUCCESS, but there was really no one whose project it was -- no one 'in charge' there. There had been an article in the Coquitlam paper, some postcards had gone out.....

Engagement, though, was very high. We activated two images -- both very violent and then did Cops. Here is the story we focused into:

A girl (15) is having rumours spread about her by another girl in the school. The rumours grow and grow until she starts losing her friends. The school-kids, aware of what is going on, are expecting a physical fight between the two girls. Our story-teller has gone to her counselor to ask advice. The counselor, without permission, goes to the Principal. The principal brings the girl (our story-teller) into his office and wants her to apologize, buying into the rumours that are being spread. The girl is afraid that if she does apologize, it is going to get even worse. If she doesn't, she is in trouble with the Principal, who isn't interested in what is really going on, but just wants the whole thing to go away.

There was some discussion about how violent situations (like the Rina Verk murder in Victoria) don't come from 'nowhere'.....they start with scenarios like this one where kids in a school get 'targeted' and then things grow and grow.

The Cops that were developed on the stage included the girls' mother, who said "don't get in trouble", her friend, who said "don't apologize", and the rumour spreading girl, who as a tactic, begged for forgiveness. There were many layers uncovered. Of strongest interest in the room, it seemed to me was the relationship between the girl and her parent -- who continued to interpret the fact that she was in the principal's office as a sign that she was causing trouble. Many of the parents agreed that they do this and that if they paid closer attention, the kind of situation that was building for the girl might be averted -- or at least they could provide real support to their child.

Theatre for Living Report The Gagged Voice #3, Prince George

Organizers: Angelo Lam, Catherine Ho, Emma Lagerstrom Sponsor: S.U.C.C.E.S.S. and the College of New Caledonia (CNC) Focus: Racism and Violence Facilitator: David Diamond Dates: May 23-25 Participants: 11 Forum(s): at CNC Lecture Theatre 80 people in a 100 seat venue

May 23, 1998

Point and turn Balancing Hypnosis Lead the Blind Blind Cars Blind Magnets Glass Bottle Energy Clap Groups of 4 Circle

Emma organized a workshop about eight months ago on diversity issues, so she knows what the work is. The BC Arts Festival is on in Prince George this week-end. I didn't clue into this until yesterday when I arrived. If we had a full-time publicist, whose job it was to keep track of opportunities like this, we might have been able to help Emma marry this workshop onto the end of the Festival. As it is there are all these community theatre events around town ending Sunday and we have a performance Monday and there are no connections, even though we are working in the same building.

Catherine is using this workshop to try her hand at Joking some games. This is good -- a good way for her to spread her wings. She did well today with Balancing and Lead the Blind.

It is a nice group. Very diverse. Eleven is a good number but Emma is disappointed. She thought she had 25 or 30 and in the last few days has had about a 50% drop out rate.

We got a lot of work done today, though, and by the end of the day there were some very strong images. Part of the pleasure is that most of the participants know why they are there and really want to do the

workshop. One young man is an Environmental Planner and someone (he can't remember who) who did a workshop with Headlines suggested he do this workshop to study the way it is facilitated.

There are also four First Nations teenagers from the Vanderhoof area. I am not certain if they really want to be here. They seem to have been 'brought' into the workshop.

The moment that stands out for me today, though, comes from an Image from the First Nations Youth. One is on the ground and the other two are kicking the shit out of him. In activation a participant who arrived in Canada from the Philippines three months ago placed himself in between the oppressors and the oppressed, trying to stop the beating. Many people in the room thought this was 'magic' which led to a conversation about the isolation in Canadian Society where nothing that happens with your neighbour is any of your business, and how that allows a lot of terrible things to keep happening. The Filipino participant brought a foreign perspective into the Image that was extremely useful, as it held a mirror up to what is 'normal' behaviour here.

May 24, 1998

Clap Exchange 2 Knots Effective Hand West Side Story The Journey Intestine Exchange Oppressors (Racists) Magnetic Image Rainbow of Desire Circle

This was an extremely long and hard day. Hard from the very beginning. We seem to be in a lose/lose situation with the Youth from Vanderhoof. As far as I can understand a question was put to about 40 youth regarding the workshop. Places were offered for four. These four said they wanted to come. But, to what and to where? They got no information about the workshop. The sheet we sent with the contract was not given to participants as requested. I believe after talking with them today that they just wanted to get out of where they were and come to the City.

Every game or exercise we did today stopped because they were not participating, except the Intestine. They are one third of the group and are in the workshop but completely passive. So, in knots they just stood there, in effective hand they wandered around the outskirts of the room, not looking for a partner, in west side story they wouldn't offer a sound or gesture, in Magnetic Image two wouldn't go to a shape, in Rainbow all of them clued out completely.....you get the idea. This isn't because they don't understand. They don't want to be there. Their input into the day was wanting longer breaks and wondering when we were going to finish.

I had a private chat with them mid-day about this. They all insisted they wanted to be there. In the afternoon nothing changed, though. So we talked about it again. They were more honest this time. "Where else is there to be?" one asked. "I just wanted to check it out" another commented. Trouble is, they are not at home. If they were they could drop out. We can't release them to wander around Prince George alone. They have a Guardian with them who is telling them they should finish what they start. I disagreed with her in front of them, insisting that they needed to make up their own minds about this but I know that she has much more power than me and that they cannot say they don't want to and so they are there not wanting to be there. In the end they said what they know they are supposed to say -- that they will be back tomorrow to participate. It isn't fair to them, to the group who are getting impatient with them, (they are getting excluded now because participants don't want a partner who they know is just going to stand there and do nothing) and to me who has to keep trying to convince them to do what we are doing.

This is a product of adults going to other adults and then sending four youth from another town into this workshop because they believe it will be good for them. The youth didn't know what they were coming to and the decision to come was not informed enough to really be theirs.

In conversation with Angelo, Catherine and Emma after the session today it turned out that the welcome letter that explains the process to participants that we send with the contract was not used at all. I am thinking that the letter itself needs to be a mini-contract that each participant signs and brings to the

workshop, indicating that s/he has read it and is attending of their own free will. Maybe it should be made clear to sponsors that participants will not be allowed into the workshop without reading the letter and signing it. I don't know what else to do -- this is happening too much.

There were also some strong Images today, in particular a 'pyramid of desire' that was about patriarchy and possibilities of ending it with or without violence and a 'scream for help' in which the oppressed and the oppressor seem interchangeable depending on one's perspective. How do we see each other?

We did a partial Rainbow of Desire that got stuck. I have set some time aside tomorrow to work concepts before the public event.

May 25, 1998

Well. Got to the workshop and the four First Nations guys from yesterday were there, but had told Marilyn, their Guardian, that they didn't want to end up on stage in front of people. She came and told me and asked me to talk to them, so they could tell me themselves. I went to do this, saying I heard they wanted to talk with me, but they said that wasn't true. Marilyn protested saying that they couldn't just rely on her to talk with me. Silence for a long time. Finally, one of them mentioned that he had to see his mother and that was why he couldn't be in a play. What about the others, I asked. Silence.

So I told them that Marilyn had told me and that if they didn't want to stay they didn't need to, but that I needed to know, because I had worked things out using two images that they were in and if they were leaving I had to make other arrangements. Silence.

One of them seemed quite pleased that I would use their image (getting beat up). He wanted to stay. Another asked if they stayed, would they have to go into the room and work now. I said, of course. They wanted to go swimming. I was pretty much at the end of it by now, so I said that whatever they did, stay or not stay was fine with me but if they stayed they had to work and if they wanted to go swimming that meant they were dropping out and that I had to know right now because everyone else was waiting to start work. Marilyn started telling them that the Band had paid a lot of money for them to come here for the workshop -- not to fool around and go swimming in Prince George. I stressed that the decision had to be theirs -- that I didn't want them there unless they wanted to be there because if they stayed they were going to have to work their asses off. They decided to leave. Marilyn found someone else to take care of them, as she wanted to remain in the workshop.

Distant Energy Clap Fear/Protector the Fall Rehearsal Choose a Leader Electric Current Public Event

I explained what had happened. We played some games and a trust game to focus. They loved the Fall.

We went to the photos and decided to recast the Images, also using the Image that the First Nations Youth had offered because it was important. Rennan (from the Philippines) is now the person getting kicked by two white guys. This Image is also relevant to his experience, that is, he has the ability to 'own' it.

We rehearsed the three stories, casting them and running them. I worked for twenty minutes or so with each group. I also asked the characters as appropriate to think of and offer Cops or Fears and Desires in preparation for tonight.

#1 Marilyn's story -- She is in a Co-op restaurant. Her cousin, who is an alcoholic, comes in and wants money from her to buy booze. She won't give him any. As he leaves, he circles another table before heading for the door. The Manager accosts him and starts to throw him out. Marilyn gets into a confrontation with the Manager about it being a Co-op and her cousin being a member and having the right to be there.

#2 Tessa's story -- Tessa's boyfriend is drinking at a party at his place. Tessa is trying to calm the party down. The boyfriend gets belligerent. Tessa, having had enough, threatens to leave him. He attacks her physically.

#3 Sarah's Story -- also at a party she witnesses a large man verbally attacking her friend. She is angry and frightened at the same time. She wants to intervene but can't.

About 80 people came. This was larger than expected. A very high turnout from the Chinese community. Also, it turns out, lots of dignitaries -- the Executive Director of United Way, also of Immigrant Services, the Chief of the Sekani - Carrier Tribal Council, the Dean of the College, the Executive Director of the Friendship Centre.....I made a point of acknowledging that what we were about to do had just been banned in Indonesia in the last week, and that all of us ran the risk of being arrested for what we were about to do if we were there. This impressed them, I know.

We activated the Images and the participation was GREAT. Very friendly crowd. Interesting moment when Rennan, on the ground and being kicked, thanked the people around him for offering their help. A discussion followed about how when someone or a group is oppressed over a very long time, the oppression becomes normal.

The room chose story #3, which was surprising to me. I figured they would go with #1 or #2. Don't know why.

Lots of wonderful interventions in the Cops in the Head exercise that followed. Something that rose up was that the police in Prince George don't really investigate when they get to a 'problem' with Youth and so there is a reluctance to involve them. They arrest the guilty and innocent indiscriminately. This makes it very difficult to involve them in issues of Youth violence. Something for the community to work on together.

Also that because youth violence is in the news a lot there seems to be a sense that it is a 'youth problem' when in fact it is also an adult problem. We can't just blame the Youth for it -- it belongs to us all.

Emma tells me that many people came to her after the event and mentioned that this kind of thing should happen again in Prince George. An invitation might also be coming to go to Vanderhoof.

Theatre for Living Report The Gagged Voice #4, Merritt

Organizers: Angelo Lam, Catherine Ho, Howard Baker Sponsor: S.U.C.C.E.S.S. and the Merritt Secondary School Focus: Racism and Violence Facilitator: David Diamond Dates: November 4 - 6 1998 Participants: 20 Venue(s): Merritt Secondary School Drama Room Attendance: 142

November 4, 1998

Point and turn Balancing Hypnosis Find the Spot Lead the Blind Blind Magnets Glass Bottle Energy Clap Complete the Image Groups of 4 Circle

This is the fourth and final in the 'Gagged Voice' series of workshops. How this one came about is that Multiculturalism BC liked the project so much that they went to SUCCESS and offered to fund one more. Howard Baker was here in Merritt, and had sponsored a POWER PLAY a couple of years ago and was keen to do another project. It was a great match.

Howard seems to have done a good job of organizing. The group is very diverse and committed. No coaxing necessary.

We also have four people from Canada World Youth (CWY) in the workshop. Three from Canada and one from Indonesia. This is bringing a maturity and also a political consciousness into the work that might not otherwise be there.

I was impressed today with the depth of the images so far. We got half way through the Groups of 4 exercise. Already, though there are images of deeply violent racism. Many coming from First Nations participants.

Lost two participants part way through. One young man had to go to Kamloops all of a sudden, part way through the day. I explained that in a 2 1/2 day process this was going to make it impossible for him to step back in. I think he was relieved. The other, also a young man, had detention in the middle of the session. This coincided with our lunch break -- but he never came back. Don't know what happened there.

There are no counselors in this workshop. I don't feel that this is a big problem. There are counselors available.....a woman showed up at around 4PM. We are working 1 - 6. It just felt all wrong for her to enter and 'observe' all of a sudden, which would have been her role. We were in the middle of our first trust game. I explained the problem to her and she understood -- also explained that she would have just been there for that afternoon and another man would arrive at 4PM tomorrow. I would rather just deal with anything that comes up myself, and access the resident school counselors if necessary, than deal with the 'traffic' inherent in this arrangement. It would have been very disruptive.

In the final circle almost everyone spoke. Interesting that two of the CWY participants mentioned that they do circles after their work, too, and it usually takes up to seven months for people to start talking! They were amazed at the depth of sharing that happened on this, our first day.

November 5, 1998

Occupy the Space Fear/Protector Clap Exchange Boxing Effective Hand Intestine finish Groups of 4 Electric Current Magnetic Image Fox in the Hole Circle

Big day. Good work.

The participant with detention came back. He was trouble for most of the day -- just always goofing around with a friend. Finally, at lunch break I talked to them about respecting the group. They got very angry. They came back, though, and settled in -- and ended up doing very focused work, and talking at the end of the day about how great it was to be able to express their emotions and not get laughed at.

The group really liked clap exchange, and wanted to keep doing it more and more. The sense, I think, of unity was very important to them. Almost a third of them wouldn't do the Intestine (trust game). This is an unusually high percentage -- perhaps a sign that we are moving very fast.....

The emotional depth of the images increased today. Lots of despair and hopelessness. This led into a discussion of suicide, and how prevalent it is in youth culture. Also a lot of turning away in the images.....people aware of injustices, but not wanting to get involved -- mostly because of fear of being targeted themselves.

In the end, though, the group seemed to find the experience of sharing their images, and the depth of discussion that came from the images very empowering. When we finished the day there was a lightness in the room. A release of some kind. Perhaps coming out of a sense of solidarity. Many of them talked about how surprising it is to find that they have so much in common -- fears, desires.

Tomorrow we will do Cops in the Head and also choose and rehearse images for the performance.

November 6, 1998

Leader of the Orchestra the Fall Image rehearsal Cops in the Head Cops rehearsal Gagged Voice event

So, this ended up being a great night. Lots of people came, and a great diversity of people, too. 142 is a big turnout for a community this size. Howard was amazed at the diversity. The local First Nations community came, the Indo-Canadian and Muslim communities came, lots of youth came. Great.

The group loved the Fall this afternoon and most did it. We made the transition from workshop into theatre directing well. I chose four images from the Polaroids I had taken throughout the workshop, and we set these as images we would offer to the audience.

Two overtly racist images, a symbolic image of someone being beaten while others look on, and an image of brutality with guns and death, offered by the Indonesian participant, that also translated into a Canadian context for many in the workshop, particularly the First Nations participants.

Three people offered stories for Cops in the Head and we did the exercise on one of the stories: a story of racism. I also asked the three story-tellers to prepare shapes of their cops. After the dinner break I looked at the Cops, wanting to make certain that there was no confusion in what we offered the audience.

Angelo and Catherine and Janet came (from SUCCESS). It was great to see them, and wonderful that they were able to witness the results of the final workshop.

People didn't really know that they had come to an interactive event, but participation was GREAT. When I started to activate the first Image, and asked people to come and stand with a character who they had been in their lives, about 30 people ran up onto the stage! It was like this all night.

It was very surprising for all of us which story they picked: the scariest. A young woman is alone with her 'uncle'. A friend of the family who is in his 60s. They are saying good-bye. He moves to kiss her full on the lips, in a very un-uncle-like manner. She has conflicting voices inside her: 'Respect your elders', 'Don't be a prude', 'its only a kiss -- no big deal', 'be provocative -- Just Do It', and others.

Participation in the Cops exercise was very high. Now, I am a believer that an event like this 'meets' the community. Certainly tonight was very successful. It was also very cerebral. I am wondering why. We were on a stage, in a formalized setting. Merritt is not used to using this kind of language. Theatre here tends to be talk oriented.....the most successful interventions were the ones (this was pointed out by audience members afterwards) that were really emotionally based. Heartfelt. None of them, though, were very physical.

I had an interesting exploration this evening. A young man came up to 'do battle' with the Cop that said, 'be provocative'. Part of his response, finally, was to walk off the stage and go back to his seat -- to his friends. The Cop followed. So did I, with a mike on a long cord. We had been working for almost two hours, and the audience was very activated. I suggested to his friends (around him) that they were now part of the scene. I asked them to freeze in the moment when he came back, and asked them for sentences as characters. This made them uncomfortable -- they hadn't come to me, I had come to them, and they all mumbled things like "I don't know what to say", "what's going on?" etc. I was seeing something, though, so I asked the guy what had just happened. I went back to my chair, he said....to where? I asked.....to my friends. I could see he understood. He had gone to a place of solidarity. Of support. I asked the audience, then, acknowledging that we are in a theatrical and symbolic place, is it possible for us to go to a place of solidarity INSIDE ourselves? A dozen or so hands shot up, mentioning things like personal strength, meditation, strong family, self love.

The important thing for me here was following the instinct through. The first idea, asking the friends in the

audience to speak, didn't work. That was OK. It was part of the pursuit of an idea that I couldn't yet articulate. It took the failure of the first idea to crystallize what I was seeing -- and then it became a valuable part of the discussion.

I believe there was great learning in the evening -- lots of laughter, lots of thought, reflection, insights, applause.....in the final circle the participants were stunned at the depth of involvement by their community -- their friends and family. Many of them spoke of the changes they had been through in the last three days, of how they felt different, of how important it was to have been listened to, of how they loved being able to FEEL things and for that to be OK.

A young girl from Kamloops came to me after, and asked if there was some way to organize something like this in Kamloops. She is going to talk with her drama teacher. Also, Nico, the participant from Indonesia, is eager to stay connected. Difficult to image, but he wants something like this to happen there. I told him about Shin Lee, working (sometimes) out of Korea....Nico is going to come through Vancouver and I will get him contact info.

I have hope that something will continue here in Merritt, somehow. Many of them are from the same school, and they have Howard, who teaches drama and has the power to follow-up. Time will tell.