

Practicing Democracy



Final Report

David Diamond, Artistic & Managing Director/Joker
Headlines Theatre
#313-350 East 2nd Ave.
Vancouver, BC Canada V5T 4R8
604-871-0508 (ph) 604-871-0209 (fax)
david@headlinestheatre.com
www.headlinestheatre.com

Some press and people quotes

"Headlines Theatre's **Practicing Democracy** makes for riveting theatre."
Paul Grant, CBC Radio, March 21/04

"**Practicing Democracy** provided its audiences and workshop participants with lived experience of democratic process linked to fierce, compassionate art practice, and that's the sort of experience that can be habit forming. Once again this courageous theatre company has expanded the boundaries of what we can expect from theatre and from our political masters. Headlines Theatre continues to be one of the nation's hidden cultural treasures."

Tom Sandborn, Columbia Journal, April/04

"...the benefits of using actors who really do know a thing or two about living in poverty become strikingly clear. These are simple truths, bluntly told, but grippingly poignant. While the reasons behind **Practicing Democracy** are deeply political, the project still manages to maintain a very high entertainment value."

Alexandra Gill, Globe and Mail, March 4/04

"Thank you, Headlines Theatre, for a thought provoking, engaging performance. This is theatre one does not walk away from but propels one to think about what I can do to help make our community inclusive and friendly."

Elsie Dean, audience member, from e-mail, March 22/04

"...what **Practicing Democracy** lacks in theatrical dazzle it more than makes up for in relevance and urgency. At a time when so many in our community live in danger, the act of coming together to try to create solutions and to offer those ideas to the people who have the power to legislate change may be the only safety net we have left."

Kathleen Oliver, Georgia Straight, March 11/04

Preface

I am in the habit of making journal entries as a project unfolds. These journals also form the basis of final reports. Their value, I believe, is that they exist in the present, much like the work itself, which emerges through the community process. Because of this practice, the reports have the ability to plot the ups and downs, the challenges and discoveries of a constantly evolving methodology. The journaling starts on page _____. **

Practicing Democracy performed (from March 3 - 21, 2004) to 72% houses in a 100 seat house. This was highly respectable, including one sad matinee of 8 audience members. 1,296 people saw the production live, with another estimated 5,000 viewers via the one SHAW Community TV telecast. These telecasts usually repeat twice after the live broadcast, but SHAW chose to limit the air to one time. We aren't certain why – it would have been very good (and extremely cost effective) programming.

We decided early on that admission for all performances would be by donation. This was important because of the subject matter – asking people to participate in a Legislative Theatre project on issues of chronic poverty meant making it possible for people living in chronic poverty to attend. The people running box office noticed that many times audience members put in \$20.00 bills, asking for no change. The other end of the spectrum was also the case, obviously; quarters, dimes, nickels, nothing. The average donation was \$6.23. This is important because it tells us that this project *played to an exceptionally diverse audience*. This is also born out by the diversity in perspectives in the kinds of interventions in the Forums, as you will see in the following report.

It might be an idea to flip to Carrie Gallant's Legal Report now¹, which will give you the suggestions for policy that went to Vancouver City Council on May 6, 2004. Reading that document first will put the journey of **Practicing Democracy** into a context defined by the public suggestions that were spurred on by the questions that the community workshop group asked through the creation of the play.

I have been asked by so many people about who on City Council came to see the play and who didn't, that I am going to detail it here:

Attended: Ann Roberts (Deputy Mayor), Fred Bass, David Cadman, Tim Louis, Ellen Woodsworth and Raymond Louie.

Did not attend: Mayor Campbell (was booked for opening, canceled due to family matters and then never rebooked), Peter Ladner, Jim Green, Tim Stevenson, Sam Sullivan (sent regrets).

There have been requests from audience members to continue to do Legislative Theatre at least once a year. If this was to happen (of course with the co-operation of a Legislative body) we would have to do it on a much smaller scale than

¹ The Legal Report is either in the package you have received if you are reading this on paper, or at www.headlinestheatre.com in the Past Work/Practicing Democracy section.

Practicing Democracy. I am very proud of this production on an artistic level. There is no way, however, to produce an event like this yearly and also continue to do other main stage work.

Some History

In 1997, Augusto Boal (founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed) became a Vereador (the equivalent of an MLA in BC) in the District of Rio de Janeiro. As part of his agreement to run for office, he took his entire theatre company into office with him, and together they developed *Legislative Theatre*. In this system, interactive Forum Theatre was used to enable groups around Rio to create plays on issues of importance to them. Through this community-based process, they had the opportunity to suggest laws that might be passed to improve their lives. Boal then took these laws to the Chamber and proposed them. In this way, 22 laws were passed over two years.

As Boal writes: “*Legislative Theatre* does not accept that the elector should be a mere spectator to the actions of the elected official, even when these actions are right: it wants the electors to give their opinions, to discuss the issues, to put forward counter-arguments, to share the responsibility for what their elected official does.”²

It had always struck me that what makes Legislative Theatre (LT) possible is the agreement and then active participation of a legislative body. Boal got elected; this made him part of the Legislature in Rio. Without this key element, the whole experiment would never have been possible. I am not an elected official, and have no intention of becoming one. How then to go about doing something like LT? There have been numerous projects in various parts of the world that have claimed to be Legislative Theatre, but they have suggested laws in a vacuum, that is without the participation of any legislative body. These are in my mind, very valuable Forum Theatre projects but not Legislative Theatre.³

Headlines itself, for instance, made an attempt in 1999 with the **Squeegee** project. The impulse, though, was late in the game and the Non-Partisan Association (NPA) dominated City Council of the time was not involved in the planning at all. We went to them once the play was in development, believing that, as part of the Civic Youth Strategy, they would want to engage in this community-based dialogue about criminalization of youth. We discovered that we were working with ‘the wrong youth’. The creators and cast were street kids, not ‘young liberals’. The 1999 City Council not only refused to read the legal report that was generated from the Forum Theatre events (available at: www.headlinestheatre.com in past work/1990-1999/squeegee), they refused to come and see the play. And so **Squeegee**, while a very successful Forum Theatre project, was not Legislative Theatre.

² *Legislative Theatre: Using Performance to Make Politics*. Augusto Boal. Translated by Adrian Jackson, Routledge, 1999

³ Michael Wrentschur and his group, InterACT just completed a Legislative Theatre project with homeless people in Graz, Austria on March 30, 2004.

Then in 2002 the Community of Progressive Electors (COPE) swept City Hall (all but two of the NPA were defeated) and numerous people familiar with and supportive of Headlines' work became City Councillors and members of both Parks Board and School Board. I got in touch with them and proposed **Practicing Democracy**.

I approached Councillors David Cadman and Ellen Woodsworth first, as I had the longest history with them. They were enthusiastic, but suggested that it needed to go through Councillor Jim Green as he had become the cultural front person on Council. Headlines' Staff and I booked a meeting with Jim. He, too was very enthusiastic, and agreed to take the proposal to Council for a vote. An undertaking like this would, of course, need Council's official approval and support.

As would normally be the case, Council asked City Staff to investigate the proposal and come back with a recommendation. This happened and it was very positive. When it came back to Council Chambers, Peter Ladner, one of the NPA Councillors, had not received the report from City Staff and wanted time to look it over. This necessitated holding the vote over to the next week.

And so, **Practicing Democracy** was approved unanimously by Vancouver City Council immediately following a Planning and Environment Committee meeting on Feb. 27, 2003 on the basis of the following memo from Burke Taylor, Head of Cultural Affairs and Social Planning for the City of Vancouver:

2. "Practicing Democracy" Project Presentations at Council (File 1253)
 At the Council meeting of February 25, 2003, Councillor Green submitted the following Notice of Motion which was recognized by the Chair. MOVED by Councillor Green, SECONDED by Councillor Louie THAT Council endorse the Headlines Theatre Company "Practicing Democracy" Project presentation as outlined in the memorandum from the Directors of the Office of Cultural Affairs and Social Planning, dated February 5, 2003.
 CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

On March 24 the confirmation letter from the Mayor arrived. Having added it to the numerous community organization letters already in place, we could start fundraising in earnest. Community networking had already begun. The letter is available on our web site in the Practicing Democracy section.

Jackie Crossland (Financial Administrator), Dylan Mazur (Administrator) and Jennifer Girard (Outreach Co-ordinator) handled the fundraising from mid-May to October while I was on sabbatical (taking time to write a book). This was a great luxury for me – something I would like to repeat. They worked from a proposal that I had written and adapted it and the budget as the pieces of the puzzle fell together. Here is an excerpt from the proposal:

- **Timelines**

City Council confirms participation	February 27, 2003
Creation of topics list	April 14
Public input into final topic choice	April 15 - 30
Fundraising/pre-production	May 1, 2003 – January, 2004
Community Workshop	February 1 - 6
Creation/rehearsal	February 10 - March 2
20 performance Community tour	March 3 - 21 - includes

Lawyer prepares the report March 22 - 28

Report goes to Vancouver City Council
and service providers

Early April, 2004

With the participation of Vancouver City Council we created a short list of potential topics for the project. This list contained subjects relevant to Council's agenda for March/April 2004. The topics were:

1. Results of welfare cuts
2. The relationship between youth and police
3. How can a ward system work?
4. Seniors and the City

Headlines held its own local poll through our Vancouver networks and the media. Through this polling, the public decided which topic on the list should be explored. Council having come up with the original list, relevance is guaranteed.

Results of welfare cuts		
96 first choice	48 second choice	total votes = 144
How can a ward system work?		
39 first choice	49 second choice	total votes = 88
The relationship between youth and police		
35 first choice	45 second choice	total votes = 80
Seniors and the City		
35 first choice	38 second choice	total votes = 73

- **Focus of the production**

Of course welfare is the jurisdiction of the Province of BC not the City of Vancouver, so the first question that comes up is, why focus on welfare cuts?

Because the practicalities of what will happen *due to* the welfare cuts will fall to municipalities and grassroots service providers all across the province. This is already manifesting in increases in homelessness, panhandling, shelter and food bank usage, issues inside schools for impoverished children, mental health issues, policing issues....the list goes on.

This project will face the reality that something that should not happen is happening and pose a difficult question: ***How can the City of Vancouver and local agencies deal with this reality in our homes and streets?***

Our mandate is to create theatre *with* people in community. Because of this the topics were purposefully a bit vague. It is essential to create a 'container' that we can work in (general subject matter) but not to define in too detailed a manner what is in the container. If the process implies that the community participants are going to create the actual content of the play, that has to be true. People living the issues of the welfare cuts will come together, and within the general subject matter, define what it really does mean. This ensures that the play really is created with the community and not solely from the 'executive artist's' perspective.

And so we do not and can not know the exact content of this play. We have a sense, however, that one of the sub-questions it is bound to ask is: ***As poverty increases, what responses can the City of Vancouver (and agencies) have that do not criminalize the poor?***

- **Why is Practicing Democracy important?**

Because democratic principles are collapsing all around us. We recently elected a School Board in Vancouver, for instance that, through Provincial Legislation, has very little power. We have also recently had a Civic referendum on the Olympics and were told in advance that regardless of the outcome, the Olympics would proceed. South of the border, the President of the United States was

'elected' through the power of the Supreme Court. Globally, the United Nations voted against war, and war happened anyway. For these and other complex reasons voter turn-out is at an all-time low.

Certainly, during this increasingly frightening time, new and creative models that attempt to involve the public in real dialogue, and that then lead to actual public input into legislation, are something we should actively pursue.

When I returned from sabbatical the bulk of the fundraising was done (yeah, Headlines!) and other challenges had appeared. One of the biggest ones was the practical ramification of *paying people* who were living the cuts to welfare. Any money we paid them would be deducted from their cheques. They also faced the possibility of losing their access to welfare because they had found (temporary) employment. The law firm of McGrady Baugh & Whyte took on researching this for us at no charge. Unfortunately, the option that presented itself within the parameters of the strict welfare guidelines set out by the Province of BC was fraud (not suggested as an option by the law firm). We were left with the ability to pay workshop participants their \$500 honorarium for the week long workshop in two payments over two months – which also made some sense as we would continue to draw on their expertise in March, past the workshop month of February. This would fit into a recipient's ability to earn up to \$300/month without losing welfare entirely. The cast, however, were a different matter. There was no way to do anything but pay them the \$550/week for seven weeks that we had budgeted, inform them of their legal obligations, and let them sort it out themselves with their Social Service workers. The dilemma being that under the new law, if they accept work, they can/will be cut off welfare and unable to get back on for two years. A very large sacrifice for employment that will not last more than two months.

We informed cast members of the situation as part of the moment of making the job offer. The problem did not apply to the two of them who were not on welfare. Another was on disability and so was also 'safe'. The other three dealt directly with their officers (or didn't) as the case may be.

Another dilemma presented itself around day care. Obviously a number of the workshop participants were going to be single parents. We had raised some money to subsidize daycare so they could participate and not have their payment eaten up, but then realized that Headlines could not hire a daycare worker, because of the ramifications to our insurance policy. The solution came from a single parent: to hand over the daycare subsidy to the single parents themselves and ask them to get together, find a daycare worker and sort it out between them.

Participant recruitment also had its complexity. We wanted a diversity of voices. The cuts to welfare have their effect on everyone, not only people on welfare; this is an issue that has ramifications throughout society. We went looking for people living in poverty on and off welfare, the homeless, advocates, welfare workers, people doing studies, youth, the elderly and, of course, as broad a diversity of culture and orientation as possible.

Jennifer put together a great little pamphlet for recruitment and it went all over Vancouver, handed directly into agencies and faxed and e-mailed into many, many organizations.

The project now has a cast of five.⁴ Anyone wanting to be a cast member had to do an improvization with me as part of their interview. In the improvization I looked for flexibility; the person's ability to play with me in an artificial situation. I wanted make casting decisions for the play *before the workshop* so that the workshop itself was not an audition.

During the interview I also wanted to make certain that the participants understood what would be asked of them during the workshop, what the time commitment was, sort out any other questions or logistical problems. Experience had also taught me that this was the time to really help them understand that the reason we are paying them is that it is a job and that being there every day all day is a requirement and that any use of drugs or alcohol will not be tolerated. Neither would coming to work incapable of working because of a party the night before. This lesson was learned during both *Out of the Silence* and *Squeegee* projects. Considering the subject matter it might sound harsh, but the working environment needs to be safe. Participants and cast were almost 100% very grateful for the boundaries being set from the very beginning.

Because there was so much ground to cover in an interview, they couldn't be 10 minutes long like a usual professional 'casting call' would be – which I used to hate when I was an actor anyway – its just disrespectful. So the interviews were each 30 minutes long. I couldn't do more than 10 a day, and had 3 days to devote to them. This meant 30 interviews. We had over 80 applications.

What to do? How does one decide to interview one applicant over another? Bringing them all together into a room to 'have a look at them' would not do me any good in this process – it would just be a false moment.

- We only accepted applications from people living in Vancouver. The project feeds into a process with Vancouver City Council.
- We set the deadline for application and made it rock solid. If an application came in 30 minutes past the deadline it was not accepted. This also seems harsh but we had to set criteria somehow.
- We asked that whenever possible, applications come to us on paper. They didn't need to be long or typed, but that the applicant provide us with *something*. Applications ranged from a few sentences in e-mail and handwritten notes to massive (30 page) packages with covering letters, photos and resumes.
- We also, when appropriate, accepted applications that were conversations over the phone.

A very wide range of people applied. Once the deadline was past, Jennifer, Dylan and I read all of the applications independently and made notes on them about what the applicant might bring to the process. We were looking for different voices

⁴ This was later increased to six.

and so the handwritten few lines was as valid as the multi-page typed resume and the notated phone conversation.

We eliminated the people who, from what they had sent us, seemed to be only looking for something that paid money (expressed no interest in the project) or were only looking for acting work (again, expressed no interest in the project). The ones that spoke of their own experiences (sometimes in subtle ways) got high marks. We got the pile down to about 60 this way.

We still had to cut half of them. I started putting them in piles based on what kind of voice they seemed to be. For instance, people who talked about how they had started stealing because they just couldn't get money for food went in one pile, while people in institutions doing research on welfare cuts went in another. Various cultural perspectives each got their own little piles (some piles of one). And so there may have been 20 piles.

Out of the piles I started selecting/cutting half of the applicants. It turned into a terrible, stressful activity; it was difficult to justify choices sometimes. For instance, people at a few agencies had obviously helped a number of clients there put in applications. They all had identical structures, identical to the others from that agency. This made it very hard to 'see' the actual person applying. In one case I called the agency – verified that what I thought had happened had...(this is an example of how trying to help someone should not mean doing the task for them) and gave the decision over to the person in the agency: 'I have narrowed it down to 2 people, and have no way of making this choice based on the similarity of information. You decide.' This was a good solution for me because it placed the responsibility back in the person's hands who had created the added layer of complexity.

It was now down to 35 applications and, really, I could have just thrown them up in the air at this point and cut the five that landed last. And so I increased the interviews by one a day, taking them to 11 a day for three days and gritted my teeth and eliminated two.

Everyone who applied got a phone call or e-mail, either booking an interview or thanking them for applying and encouraging them to come to the production.

During this time some alarming things also started to happen at the City Council level. I ran into one of the Councillors at an opening of a play. He asked me what Headlines was up to. I said we were in pre-production for **Practicing Democracy**. He gave me a blank look. As I explained what the project was, he got very excited and started telling me what a wonderful thing it was. I had watched this man raise his hand and vote in support of the project! If he didn't remember, was this also the case with other City Councillors?

I called the Mayor's office and made a connection with one of the Mayor's Executive Assistants (EA). I explained to him. He had the same reaction and said to me, 'this is very embarrassing – it sounds terrific and exactly what we should be doing – but this is the first I am hearing about it.' Sigh. Of course this is no fault of his. He and I agreed that we needed to work together to make sure that Council was brought

back up to speed. As I mentioned above, without the active buy-in of a legislative body it cannot be Legislative Theatre.

There is a great lesson here about organizing anything. ***Take nothing, absolutely nothing for granted.*** We had a letter, signed by the Mayor agreeing to the project and assumed that this meant City Hall would be on top of it. The problem with this assumption is that they endorse perhaps a dozen initiatives a week. The Councillors themselves may have a dozen conversations a day with people asking them to support something. It is an inhuman task to keep on top of all of that. It is Headlines' responsibility (the initiator's responsibility) to keep the ball in the air.

January 3, 2004

After getting notice of the Minister's announcement (see below) via e-mail from Raymond Koehler, I had a series of conversations with people at the Provincial Ministry of Human Resources, which led to sending the following fax:

Ms. Sarah Pendray
Assistant to the Minister
Ministry of Human Resources
Victoria, BC
250-356-7252

SENT BY FAX (please acknowledge receipt)

January 2, 2004

Dear Ms. Pendray:

I have been advised to communicate with you directly regarding the following opportunity for the Ministry:

Headlines and Vancouver City Council are embarking on an innovative initiative this coming March called **Practicing Democracy**.

It involves working with thirty Vancouverites who are experiencing the current issues surrounding welfare, creating an interactive play, performed by five of the thirty, and touring that production (20 performances) throughout Vancouver. A lawyer will attend all performances and gather the ideas that come from the audiences, collate them, analyze them, and then submit a paper to Vancouver City Council with recommendations for law about how the City can deal with the situation here and not criminalize poor people.

Vancouver City Council voted unanimously to engage in this process with us. Headlines raised the funds from outside sources (none from Council other than our normal operating grant). The budget is \$153,000.

I noticed today that Minister Coell has stated that he is willing to take another look at the changes to welfare due April 1st. It struck me immediately that the report coming from **Practicing Democracy** would be of great benefit to him.

My request, then, is for the Ministry to *officially acknowledge* that they will accept the same report we are submitting to the City of Vancouver, and simply read it, accepting it as part of whatever other input there may be. Of course, I am not asking for an assurance that anyone will do what it says, but simply to accept the way in which it was gathered and what it suggests as valid input. It will be a true voice of Vancouverites, gathered in a very innovative and creative way.

Headlines is a 23 year old professional theatre company that has become a world leader in this kind of community-based work. There are precedents for this kind of **Legislative Theatre** in other parts of the world. I don't want to burden you with too much paper, so if you want to know more about the project (or Headlines) please visit our web site at www.headlinestheatre.com. Click through the welcoming hands, and a lot of information on **Practicing Democracy** will be readily available.

I do know that we can just submit the report to the Minister – this was suggested by the first people I talked with at the Ministry. Considering the importance of the project and the public profile it is going to achieve, I feel strongly that a more formal, official format is warranted.

There will be a great deal of media around **Practicing Democracy**. We don't open until March 3 and papers, radio and TV are already starting to call. I think it would be a wonderful thing if people could see that the Province of BC is listening concerning this issue. Vancouver City Council is.

Could you please acknowledge receipt of this fax. I am back in my office as of June 5 at 604-871-0508, or can be reached via e-mail at: david@headlinestheatre.com.

Thank-you and all the best

David Diamond
Artistic and Managing Director

I don't have a great deal of faith at this moment that anything will come from this, but want to be able to say that we did invite their participation.

January 7, 2004

We had our first production meeting today and it went very well. **Harry Vanderschee** is Technical Director/Designer. We worked together on **Mamu** and **THIR\$TY**, (both non-interactive performance pieces that were theatre/dance collaborations) **Melissa Powell** is Stage Managing, she did **Don't Say a Word** with me. **Caitlin Pencarrick** is designing light, we have never worked together before. **Lincoln Clarkes** (slides) was there, as was Headlines' staff. We don't have a costume designer yet. It's a very good team. Harry will handle the production budget (and report to Dylan who is Production Managing) and, along with Caitlin and Melissa, hire crew and a lighting operator. The four of them are going to go look at all the performance venues together.

The discussion centered around creation process and whether or not to go with traditional projectors or digital video. Caitlin prefers the digital and I am open to that certainly, as long as we can afford it and it works on stage.

The designers have a dilemma in a project like this. We won't know what the play is until two weeks before we open, because it really does have to emerge from the group. Normally, they would have a script to work from long before rehearsals start. Strange how that traditional process has become so foreign to me. It seems so mechanical now – the script being a template that is frozen, to be interpreted by various artists working on this living thing from the outside in. I am reminded of the notion in theatre school that one “breathes life” into a script, implying that one must resuscitate something dead or dying. In a project like this, we bring a group of people together not knowing what the product is going to be and it emerges from the

living group, the living community. We have agreed on production meetings once a week, once the process starts.

January 12, 2004

We just finished doing 33 – 30 minute interviews in three days, looking for the workshop participants and cast. It's a very interesting group of people, ranging from people who have just (in the last 2 days) found shelter (and one who, although he told me he had shelter, I just found out is homeless) to university-based activists, to a woman who works in the Ministry of Human Resources, to people from End Legislated Poverty and the more radical Anti-Poverty Committee. We have raised enough money to provide some participants who are in the street with shelter for the duration of the project.

Of course it is hard to reach these people with any project. We are looking for a broad spectrum of voices in this case. We are not aimed directly, solely at the homeless community and this means, I think, that their participation requires even more courage than it would otherwise. We had a couple of “no-shows” for the interviews, both of them people who had confirmed from temporary shelters. I talked with a woman who came in for the interviews today on the phone, who has been homeless, and she agreed to talk with some people she knows are in the street. Not only is this a good opportunity for them – it pays \$500/week, but we will put them in safe accommodation for 3 days prior, during, and a week after their involvement in the project. Considering the subject matter, its vital that this voice be part of the group – ‘this voice’ of the currently homeless being different than the recently homeless.

Why do interviews? Because I want a spectrum of voices in the workshop for this main stage production. It is different than a community **THEATRE FOR LIVING** project where volunteers come together to make and perform a play in one week. I want people who are living the issues, yes, but also who have a strong desire to engage in this process and who bring various experiences into the mix. The only way to get this is to select them.

Also, six of them are going to be the cast. If a person was interested in being considered for the play, they had to do an improvization with me. In it, I was looking for their ability to play; to commit to something, and to be flexible.

The improvization scenario: the person and I are acquaintances. Not good friends, but we know each other. We are walking down the street. Jennifer, who is with me in the interviews, is a panhandler. I start complaining about her, she has been there for over a year. There are too many people in the street, I complain. The person interviewing will, in a general sense, go one of two ways (both are fine). Either they will agree with me (this almost never happened) and so we play that scene, or they will start defending her. In both cases I would escalate it and go to her and start harassing her; the scene would escalate.

So now, I would say to them, I want you to play the character I am playing – someone who dislikes panhandlers. This was very challenging for some. They would

play that scene with Jennifer and at some point I would interrupt and stand up for her, and be very aggressive with them, trying to see if they would engage with me.

It sounds heavy, but we had a good time with it – I think it was fun for people – certainly they were happy and very ‘loosened up’ after. I took a Polaroid photo of each of them so I could attach faces to the notes Jennifer and I took. I am attaching the form I used for the interview as an appendix to this report.

In the next few days, I have to make decisions about who the participants (maximum 29 – Lillian Carlson, a senior actor who is also living these issues in her own way and who I have already hired makes 30) and who the cast of 6 are. I want to cast the play before the workshop for two reasons:

- I don’t want the workshop to be an audition. This creates a very bad dynamic in the group.
- If the cast starts the workshop knowing they are the cast, they will absorb the material generated in the workshop in a way that is different than if they are a participant who does not know if they are going on to make the play.

Tomorrow afternoon I will see two or three more people. We have to start calling everyone on the 16th and signing contracts.

January 18, 2004

The casting is finished, except for the contract signing. Tomorrow we start making calls to the people who will be in the workshop only and not the cast. Some of these conversations will be hard – the decisions were very difficult, especially with two of the people, who I wish I could have cast but there are only six positions.

And so the cast is: Theresa Myles, Jorge Morales⁵, Emily Mayne, James Mickelson, Lillian Carlson and Sandra Pronteau.

We also got word from SHAW Cable (thanks to the great work that Dylan did) that we will be able to do a live, interactive broadcast of the play. Mike Keeping, who has directed all but one of our telecasts, will be scouting out the Japanese Hall (first week) and the Croatian Cultural Centre (second week) to see which venue best suits a broadcast. Part of the issue is we have to be able to find a ‘line of sight’ for the microwave signal to the SHAW dish on top of their building in Burnaby.

So now we need to collate the information regarding who needs help with daycare, who has special food needs re: the catering of hot lunches for the first week (35 people to feed every day), get contracts signed, cheques issued (some of the participants are going to need some money right away).

⁵ I have changed this cast member’s name, for reasons that will become obvious later in the report.

We are meeting with three people who are currently homeless on Monday and if they agree, we will get them into housing and be able to continue that for them for a week after the workshop finishes.

Part of the issue here regarding the homeless is that we have had to be working, I think, in timelines that are too far ahead for people who are planning hours ahead, trying to find food and shelter in the 'right now'. This isn't a project that is ongoing, happening like a drop in possibility – the structure of what we are doing demands a set start date, working intensely and then a set end date. This is one of the things that has made it hard for the homeless community to engage. Something is telling me that accessing those people at the last minute was always how it was going to work. Unfortunately, I had to cast the play now for the reasons stated above, and so this means that they will be in the workshop only. I do feel confident, though, that the homeless voice is in the cast.

The CBC radio show *The Current* called on Friday. This is the prime current events show on national radio. They were doing an item on political theatre in Canada and were wondering if I could do an interview – at 5:30 AM the next day!! It goes live on the east coast 9AM there, and then on tape at 9AM like a wave across the country. I was reluctant because of the time but said I would because of my respect for the program. We got to talking and I explained this project. The researcher was very, very excited and decided not to have me for the next morning, as that would preempt a better possibility: a 30 minute national feature on the project closer to the opening. This would be great if it happens.⁶

January 26, 2004

I went down for a few days with food poisoning. Yikes. Great to have staff who were able to keep it all moving forward. The workshop people all have their first cheques, the single parents who need daycare have their subsidies and how that will work has been arranged with their daycares, people are descending on the office to start the postering and postcard campaign.

We are also starting to see academics circling around the project, wanting to do studies on the participants. Its kind of scary, really. Jennifer is getting two or three e-mails a day from people. We said yes over a week ago to a request from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) who approached us first. We know them and we know what they are doing, and want to support them because they do really good work. They are seeking some people with whom to do a two year study on the welfare time limits. We negotiated a one-page document that we gave to the workshop participants and then they will decide whether or not they contact the CCPA. One of them, though, commented when she saw the paper that it was 'another study by intellectuals to benefit the middle class' and threw it back on the desk. She also made the comment that her community (Vancouver's Downtown Eastside) has been 'studied to death'.

⁶ It never did.

In an interview with a reporter from the Vancouver Sun I articulated something that will be important for me to remember throughout this process. He wanted to know why **Practicing Democracy** is important:

Because true democracy is a dialogue, and we are being subjected these days to so many Government monologues. People are deeply disillusioned with the democratic process, which has come to mean (maybe) casting a ballot – most people don't vote – and then being the recipient of policy from Government, whether that is Federal, Provincial or Municipal. This is not democracy. In a true democracy, the citizens engage in a dialogue with elected officials who are empowered to enact policy, but with the constant ebb and flow of real public input. The current City Council does seem truly interested in exploring various ways to enliven the democratic process and this project is one of those ways. We have an opportunity here and we should explore it fully.

January 27, 2004

We brought the cast together for the first time. I wanted them to meet each other before the first day of the workshop. We had a long talk about process, trying to help them understand that as cast members they have two roles in the workshop. One is to give as much as possible, the same as any other workshop participant. The other is to be a sponge, and to try to absorb as much as possible from the others in the workshop. I think it was good for them to meet each other, to see how diverse the group is.

One of the women came in with a black eye. She is living in transitional housing (just off the street) and, evidently, a woman asked her for money in the hallway, she didn't have any, they got into a screaming match, and the woman and a male friend beat her up. Dylan and I immediately investigated arrangements for her to move into the del-Mar Inn, where we are housing some workshop participants. We have secured a private room for her there until the end of March if she wants it. She isn't certain, moving might screw up her welfare. We will see.

January 28, 2004

I met a workshop participant at the office at 9am this morning. Dennis⁷ is homeless and has some mental health issues. We set him up in the del-Mar. It is clean and safe there, and George, the man who runs the place, seems very nice. We have put Dennis in there for the next two weeks. He is really happy.

We had a terrific production meeting today. The team had gone to see all the venues and there are some electricity issues, but they will be worked out by bringing an electrician in to access 220v power. We had a long discussion about how to hang the screen for slides. We are moving towards an uneven, billowy screen, something that will look like laundry – a tent or something organic and amorphous. Lincoln (photographer) agrees that this will also add an element to the slides that will be

⁷ While I am identifying the cast and crew by name all other workshop participants have had their names changed to protect their identity, making it possible to write frankly and also respect confidentiality.

very interesting and eliminate clean lines and rough edges from the set. This is an aesthetic choice coming from Harry (TD and set design) that I think could be very exciting. We may be using a spinnaker (a sail) for the screen material.

Because of the slides requirement Caitlin (lighting designer) is asking for backstage placement (on top of the screen) and lots of side light. We can accomplish this.

We have brought in another homeless person for the workshop. This is someone that Jennifer encountered weeks ago who we have been trying to find again, and after many messages and searching he called today, and is very excited to participate. He (Rick) is meeting me at the office in the morning, and I will take him over to the del-Mar. Also talked with the cast member who got assaulted tonight and she is taking us up on our offer and so she will also be at the office in the morning, and move over there, into a safer environment than the Princess Rooms where she is now.⁸

We had budgeted for three workshop people in housing for two weeks, and we have two, so I am going to take the left over money and extend the rooms for the two guys for one week each. Its pretty amazing to be able to do this.

Also had an extensive conversation with Jen Cressey (publicist) today, going over her publicity and media plan for the next month and beyond.⁹ There are a lot of little fires burning: newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, newsletters, etc. part of our conversation was about how to navigate the fine line between selling the play and getting people out to it and resisting the commoditization of the cast. A tricky business, this. Part of the solution is to make them very aware of what can happen in interviews, that reporters will often want to sensationalize the experiences in their lives. We are encouraging them to be honest, but at the same time protective about what they want to see in print or other media about them and what they don't. We can and will be with them in interviews, but we cannot do the interviews for them.

I have two more days in the office until we start the workshop.

January 29, 2004

The day started with meeting the cast member and Rick at the office and taking them over to the del-Mar. Upon arrival, George was very upset and suggested to me that 'maybe we didn't want people to stay there'. I had no idea what he was talking about. It turns out that he had just thrown Dennis out, for keeping his bicycle in his room. George had talked about the bicycle rule with both Dennis and me present upon move-in, and the rules about bikes are posted all over the lobby, the stairs, etc. They wreck the walls, people bring them in wet, they are very hard on the rooms. Dennis has a lock for the bike and the Vancouver Community College is right across the street, where lots of people leave their bikes – we had talked about this and he knew the regulations. When I asked him what he was doing he just looked at me

⁸ She stayed at the del-Mar until March 31, paid for by Headlines.

⁹ See her publicity report, attached, or on the web site.

and said 'rules are meant to be broken'. I have to say that most of my work is based on this very premise – but I think you pick your moments. This wasn't one of them.

I was very concerned that George wasn't going to let the cast member and Rick in – and so I got Dennis to promise to leave the bike across the street. George calmed down and we moved them in, but Rick wanted to rent for a month and it is against policy to do this in a rooming house – weekly rentals only (is this ironic, or what?).

Rick's plan involved getting a cheaper rate renting for a month than by the week – but George can't do it that way. The rooms are \$150/week. Rick was in a panic, so I got him four weeks instead of three. He is there until February 26, even though he is only working for us until the 6th. It's going to be interesting to see what happens with Dennis – I have questions about whether he will make it through the workshop. The del-Mar is very peaceful, quiet and feels safe. Dennis carries a kind of chaos with him, and I don't know how much I can run interference for him.¹⁰

February 1, 2004

Introductions

Balancing

Hypnosis

Stand blind/find the spot

Lead the blind

Blind magnets

Complete the image

Sculpting partners/build an image

Groups of 4

Circle

So, there are more glitches at the del-Mar. Dennis arrived for the first day of the workshop with news that his bicycle was stolen. Of course this is terrible. He had checked it out with Vancouver Community College security, and they had said it was OK – there weren't a lot of thefts – but in the morning it was gone. I am not sure what to do with that – I can't really buy him a new bike. Maybe we can spring for something used. I am not certain what to do.¹¹

And then Rick didn't show up this morning – we finally got a message from him at about noon saying that George wouldn't let him move all his stuff into the room. Rick had said it was 'a TV and a few things', but then later mentioned that he was a 'collector of things', and so I think maybe what he told George and what he showed up with were very different stories. (It turned out that he arrived with a truckload of stuff, including many bags of old clothes. George was concerned about pest infestations.)

He didn't show at the workshop all day and I got a message tonight that his stuff is in between places and he is trying to find storage. This was supposed to make it

¹⁰ We have a support person for the participants on staff and in the workshop during this period and I have already alerted her to the situation with Dennis.

¹¹ As it turned out, a few days later Dennis arrived with a 'new bike', and then another new bike about a week later and wanted us to store the first bike in the rehearsal hall.

easier for him, not more complicated. I called and left a message for him at the number he left, but that was three hours ago, and nothing has come back. One of my concerns is that he missed the whole day today and the group moved very far. If he isn't in tomorrow, he won't mesh with the group.

Ironic this housing problem. Of course Rick should have been honest about what he had and wanted to move. We are coming face to face with a core issue with people who are homeless. George, as a building owner, is not being unreasonable, but it is hard for Rick to fit into the structures that exist. Another part of the solution to this is for the City to relax what have become horrendous restrictions on rooming houses. There is no where for people to go. The del-Mar caters mostly to people from out of town. The Murray (where we put people in 1999 when we did **Squeegie** has restrictions now that mean move in / move out is only on the 1st of the month. The places that are affordable, like the Princess Rooms, are where people are getting beat up in the hallways. At the shelter where Rick was living, he talks about rolling over onto needles. Maybe this is something that makes it into the play, it is certainly affecting our work.

Having said that, we also had a very strong day today. I decided over the week-end on a central question for the investigation – something that will keep us grounded in things that the City may actually be able to do something about, rather than getting a focus on welfare reform, which is Provincial jurisdiction. I am asking workshop participants to offer moments when the cuts to welfare specifically and social services in general are ***creating danger in their lives***.

We started with the 30 participants (Rick makes 31) and also the design team, TV crew, lawyer, staff etc., so about 40 people. It was good for the cast, especially, to see everyone together.

The group found some of the games very challenging, especially the blind work. There are big trust issues for some of them. Then we got to image making. Some of them are already understanding the power of images and also the power of silence – others are having a really hard time with this. Some of the strong image moments today include:

An image where a mother is hitting her child. People all have their backs to them – they know they are there but have turned away. On activation the woman who made the image started yelling (in character) that she just wanted some peace, she wanted it to be easier, for someone to listen, for someone to give her a break and she burst into tears. Of course the room was very moved by this. And we had the chance to talk about “oppressed oppressors”. This woman is beating her child. And our hearts go out to both of them.

In another image a man is getting busted for drugs. The police officer arresting him did a short monologue, about how he knows that this man is going to be treated very badly in jail – he will be in great danger – but he is arresting him anyway and sending him there. He is also caught in a bad cycle.

We saw three of five groups today and will finish the other two tomorrow.

In the closing circle, many talked about how unusual it is to be somewhere where they feel accepted, and where what they have to say is valued. They have said that they often are told this is going to be the case, but it turns out to be false.

February 2, 2004

Discussion
Fill the empty space
Knots
Clap exchange
Effective hand
Glass bottle
Finish groups of 4
Magnetic image
Circle

The day started with energy and enthusiasm – but it was to turn into a very difficult day.

They loved knots, working in two groups and the symbolism of a group working together in silence to solve a problem. But then it was impossible, completely, utterly impossible for them to do clap exchange. We couldn't even get a basic rhythm around the circle – a complex rhythm was out of the realm of possibility.¹² After the fun and success of a lot of the games it was very interesting (and hard) for the group to come up against something it couldn't do. We will come back to it again tomorrow.

We took a break at this point, and about 5 minutes later Emily came into the room very upset, and told me that the police were outside beating up a young woman, who was yelling, fighting back, and saying she wanted a female officer. We went out together and about 5 others from the group were there. The scene was unfolding across the street.

After watching for a little while – two large male officers had a young native woman on the ground, one on her knee (at a pressure point) another at her throat – we crossed over and went there. The police told us to move away, that we weren't involved, and I told them that some of the group had witnessed the beating they had given the woman, and that meant we were already involved.

Janine (workshop participant) started talking to the woman, trying to calm her down. She was vomiting by this point and blood was coming out of her mouth. James was by now showing his first aid certificate and asking the police if, in the absence of any medical people, he could see if she was OK. A Sergeant arrived and waded into the situation, which had become public. There was evidently a warrant out for the woman's arrest. James was allowed to look at her, checking out her mouth and stopping the officers from choking her – they started telling us that she had spit on one of them. Emily responded that she had watched the whole thing and

¹² This happens sometimes and I have learned to interpret it as a sign of the difficulty that the members of the group is having really listening to each other.

that she had seen the woman bending down and talking with them while they were in their car and that she hadn't done anything aggressive that she could see, and that the two officers has just jumped on her.

Janine got the name of the young woman's lawyer and also asked her how tall she was (5'5") and here were two very large male officers holding her down in the mud. Janine managed to convince them that if they got off the woman's knee then she wouldn't be in so much pain anymore, and would stop struggling so much They did, and she did. Eventually it was negotiated to get her into a sitting position.

The police had evidently called an ambulance, but it took over 20 minutes to arrive. In the meantime, a paddy-wagon came and people protested putting her into it, saying that she did need a female officer – because everyone expected she would be searched. We stood and witnessed. The paddy-wagon left and finally, a female officer did arrive. She searched her.

I made the comment to the Sergeant that I felt the only reason this was now happening in a calm and legal way was because we were looking on and that this was obviously unacceptable. More and more police cars were arriving now, at one point there were 4 police cars (including one unmarked) and a paddy wagon and an ambulance -- all for this 5.5" young woman. Hmmm, did that have anything to do with us?

They put her in the paddy wagon, but not before we told her that we would call her lawyer and let him know that there were people who had witnessed the assault. A strong image in my mind is her getting into the back of the paddy-wagon and Janine saying "good luck...good luck....there are people who care about you...."

The police said they were going to come and explain their side of what happened, but they never did. They did, however, spend a long time talking with each other and the medics. Speculation on our end being that they were getting "what happened" straight amongst themselves.

Back we went into the hall, and spent a while processing, talking. And then it was time for lunch. This event, of course, *is part of what we are looking at in the workshop*. We felt good that we could respond as a group. It also meant that my schedule for the day was all shot to hell.

Just before lunch Rick arrived. His belongings are now spread out amongst some friends, and he went to George at the del-Mar and asked for the money we paid for his room for 4 weeks to be returned. The stories about what is happening are very diverse. He agrees that he loaded up a truck-full of stuff and was going to move it in there, and that he had told George, while I was there, that there was 'a TV and a few things'. He doesn't seem to understand that George can't handle all that stuff in the room – old coats, etc. – George will be afraid of bug infestations and things like that. These are legitimate concerns. Anyway Rick says George agreed to give the money back, but when Dana (the full-time support person for the workshop) talked to George, he told her that would be "like believing in Santa Clause". He did, though, also ask her to call him back to talk about it more.

Rick is worried that after the 26th, when he has to leave there, that he will have no where to go. We talked about how he would have 2 whole weeks to find a place, from a room that was safe, clean and secure, but I think having his stuff around him matters more than the room -- a legitimate thing from him, I just wish he would have said this before he agreed that moving into the del-Mar was what he wanted to do. If we get no money back from George, we don't have other money to give him. It isn't an endless supply of cash. Dana will continue to sort this out with him and George.

In the afternoon we did another blind game and then the first in a series of trust games: Glass Bottle is tipping off balance into the supportive arms of other people in the group. For many of the participants this was an enormous struggle, filled with emotion.

Then we finished the groups of 4 images. One was particularly strong: A group of people at a demonstration. I asked the group where the danger is in the image and they talked a lot about how being at anti-poverty demonstrations makes you a target. The danger is "off stage", so I asked others in the group to come and be that danger and many did, and suddenly we had an image that looked like people at war. On activation, interestingly, many wanted the same things: safety, security, each just saw what that meant and how to get it from very different perspectives – an acknowledgement that the opposing forces are not evil.

We only had enough time for the groups to make their images in Magnetic Image – we will have to look at all of them tomorrow. But in the circle, people were so happy with the exercise, with the group process, with being creative with others. Some of the images are very, very strong.

There is a great deal of emotion flying around. Dana and I talked about it today. We believe it is anger. People are giving themselves permission to get angry – some for the first time in a long time – maybe to express the anger, to not bottle it up. And so they are also navigating not taking that out on each other and themselves, but finding ways to just let it go; to let it come and let it go. Its only the end of the second day.

February 3, 2004

Fear/protector
Boxing
Clap exchange
The intestine
Speed gesture
Work magnetic images
Fox in the hole
Circle

Fear/protector is a game I really like. Each participant chooses someone to pretend to be afraid of, and another person to pretend is their protector. The task is to keep your protector in between you and the person you are afraid of. It gets people running around and also explores the hidden dynamics in society. In the midst of

the game there was Lillian, a frail elderly woman, who can't move very fast, with a storm of people running around her, trying to understand, confused, slowly turning in circles. There was the seed of a character there – one that we talked about later and Lillian agreed. This is an example of how the work is also the games. Its all theatre.

We tried clap exchange again and it was a little better than yesterday. We talked about how hard it is for them to all be in the same rhythm together, and in the game it becomes visceral. It is a very volatile group, and their ability, sometimes, to really hear each other without their own immediate needs overshadowing what another person is saying can be minimal. It is creating stress and tension in the room – in the same way, I imagine, that it creates stress and tension out in the world.

In the trust game today one of the participants made a gesture at one point of relief that she had been able to support a particularly heavy participant in a trust game. I didn't see this – it was a spontaneous and 'private' moment that was done in public. It wasn't, evidently, meant in rudeness, but was taken by another participant as an affront. She turned to the rest of the group and said that she wanted to do the exercise but couldn't now because she no longer trusted the people in the room. Of course this created a crisis in the room. It is such a complicated moment. The woman was very courageous in expressing this, she could have just remained silent. The essence of the work, though, encourages people to start expressing themselves. Having expressed it, others also then responded, some apologizing, and one, in a complex way, suggesting that we all had to "own" our parts of the moment. The initial expression of relief was not intended in any way as being disrespectful and was, in fact not about anyone except the person who was relieved. In the midst of the emotional moment, I think this comment was heard as a way to make the woman who spoke feel bad for speaking up – and, honestly, I don't think it was intended that way – but now we had a multi-layered problem that took over an hour to sort out.

People are quite raw. Raw from before we started this process, and, in the midst of the process feeling strong emotions. Dana is much busier than we imagined she would be. I sat with the woman who spoke up for most of the lunch break. We had a long talk and she decided to stay in the workshop. She is dealing with many, many things at home and is also throwing herself into the work. I am seeing her sway between great strength and great vulnerability.

After lunch we got to the first of the magnetic images and the group were all playing large symbols, not people. It took a while to figure this out and when I did, they all said that this is what they thought they should do, and so I asked the rest of the group and they had all done the same thing. This must be the result of me not giving the direction in the set-up for the exercise that they needed to be people, not things. I usually talk about this, how the actor cannot play 'capitalism', but can be a business person who supports the concepts of capitalism. Anyway, I sent them all back into group work to figure out who they are in their images and what their relationships to each other are. This was a good thing to do. Some strong work followed.

One image of 5 or 6 women and one man in a circle, each with their hands over another's mouth....various body shapes....and in animating it something great (and terrible) happened. Lillian is in the improvisation, a woman who needs help, and everyone else starts to argue about who is going to help her and how. In the midst of this, she gets fed up and leaves. It was a very true moment, I think.

Another in which a guy promises to get heroin for himself and his two friends, and does, but shoots it all before he gets back to them. They are so angry they rob him and take his shoes.

February 4, 2004

Leader of the orchestra
Glass cobra
Catch me
Finish magnetic image
NOT Rainbow of Desire
Discussion
The journey

A frustrating day. It started oddly with one of the participants complaining about there only being muffins and tea and coffee and juice in the morning – why weren't there other kinds of pastries? Like croissants? Other members of the group were pretty aghast at this, especially those that were in another theatre project done recently in the Downtown Eastside, who explained that in that project there was no pay, no bus fare, no day care subsidy, no accommodation for homeless people and that food was greasy sausage rolls every day for six weeks, and that Headlines was taking care of people in an amazing way. There is a very strong sense of entitlement from some members of the group. It, too, is a part of this complex issue.

The work started well with blind and trust work that the group liked and we finished the Magnetic Images: one very large image of a family in deep dysfunction – a father who is spending money on drugs, on his knees begging for forgiveness from his wife who has had enough and wants out, but 'loves him too much' – so she has started hooking – their children surround them in various levels of disarray, as do some social service people. The comment was made that this could be any dysfunctional family and that it wasn't apparent what it really had to do with the cuts to welfare.

The other image was two people – a couple in a co-dependant relationship – him a drug addict getting welfare, her a prostitute getting welfare, she loves him and is feeding his habit by selling her body.

It hasn't gone unnoticed by the group (or me) how many images of addicts and prostitutes have come up and some started complaining that clichés are being presented. I haven't asked the group to make images of drug addicts and prostitutes, though, only of the danger that the cuts bring into their lives. The room is speaking through the images.

I had prepared the group to do Rainbow of Desire after lunch. I wanted to do this to make an exploration of internal voices before making plays tomorrow. Many were keen to experience the exercise. Before we got started, two of the participants wanted to talk about how there are voices in the room not being heard – of course I made space for them to say what they wanted to say. I explained from my perspective that no one was stopping anyone from speaking, as far as I could see, and that there were many different ways in the process (through the images, discussion of the images, the final circle) that anyone could get a chance to say what they needed, if they wanted to. We couldn't, though, force people who might not want to express something to do so.

They said that people needed to say more about who they are, that we needed to hear people's stories more than we were.

I explained that we were not actually looking for individual's stories, we are here to serve the play creation and in the play we aren't going to be telling the story of any one or two people, but inventing something that tells an emotional core truth, which is why we are making this emotional investigation.

Other workshop participants also spoke to this and some of the cast, in particular, mentioned that they felt they were seeing people pretty clearly through games and exercises and the details of events were not as important, they thought, as the larger picture at this point.

It was apparent to me, though, that there was a need rising from one part of the room. I explained that certainly we could take the time to do this if they wanted, but that time was finite, and it was going to mean, I was certain, not doing the Rainbow of Desire. The room was now divided – well, maybe 70% for rainbow and 30% for talking (this is, of course, my own interpretation), but my sense was that the minority really needed this to happen.

So I agreed and said we were letting go of the Rainbow exercise, but that I didn't know how to facilitate what they wanted, really, other than a normal circle, and so I was stepping back and would listen, but I wanted someone else to facilitate it. No one would, though, and people just started telling about who they are, through a formal circle, which was fine.

Some people's stories were very interesting and some people went off on long tangents, other expressed how angry they were that a small group of people had derailed the theatre process. Of special interest (and raised by a participant) was that the people who wanted this to happen were the ones that were talking and laughing the most with each other while others were speaking, and also tried to silence one of the participants who they thought went on too long. A number of people in the room yelled at that point that if they wanted people to be able to tell their stories this way that they had to listen for as long as it took.

When it came my time to speak I said that I knew that there were some who were frustrated with me for agreeing to this, but that my judgment was that if we didn't satisfy this other need, that it was going to be very difficult to work. I also shared some of my life. The process took almost three hours.

I believe that it did serve the needs of some people in the room, but not necessarily the needs of the ones that were not talking, who still didn't have much to say. And I will say with certainty that it did not feed the process of creating the play after the workshop is over, which is why we are here. I still believe, though, that once it arose as a concern, it was essential to make space for it to happen, so that we could continue.

By now it was about 5PM and I wanted to finish the day going back to something theatrical, and so played a game called the Journey with the group, which I think they seemed to enjoy, and then released them 30 minutes early. We are going to make plays tomorrow and I hope that missing the experience of Rainbow of Desire, an investigation of internal voices, does not hurt the depth of the plays.

A number of the participants came to me after and said that I have 'the patience of a saint'. I am wondering, really, if I did the right thing. It is one of those moments when I hear Augusto Boal, founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed in my head, and I think he would have insisted on doing what he planned and told the people if they didn't like that, they didn't have to work with him. I have seen him do this years ago – people were stunned and spoke badly of him about it, but maybe it is one of those moments when one must be a theatre director above everything else. Really – I don't know right now.

Dana has left a message at the young woman's (the one who got beat up by the police) lawyer's office (this took a while to find) saying that there were witnesses to the beating and, with people's permission, giving him contact numbers.¹³

February 5, 2004

West side story
Blind busses
The fall
Image theatre
Song of the mermaid
View plays
Circle

This was a good day. I chose some morning games to get them moving and working together and then a challenging trust game that many of them did: falling off a table into each other's arms. Some of those that risked this were surprising, having been reluctant to do other trust games, and they had a very powerful time.

Then it felt important to re-enter the land of image-making after the discussion of yesterday and so I opened up the possibility for about an hour for individuals to use anyone from the group to sculpt an image of the struggles that they face because of the cuts to welfare. This was a change in language from the previous request, which

¹³ As a postscript to this, this woman got in touch with one of the participants and explained that the police ended up dropping the charges against her, after being informed by her lawyer that we had witnessed the beating and were willing to appear in court.

was to make images of the danger that the cuts create in their lives. The images became more active.

The morning was not without tension. Dennis, who is always very hyper anyway, forgot, it seems to take his medication. A number of us think this must be the case, although I don't have this from him directly. He just wouldn't / couldn't stop talking and confronting people, challenging whatever anyone said. There are times when his contributions are valuable, but the behaviour this morning really stepped over a line, not just with me but with many in the group – and at this point we just don't have time to deal with it. There is only so much that Dana can do, as well. I told him he just had to stop talking, that he had to give other people more space in every way – emotionally, physically, verbally. And you know, he agreed, and stopped for a short time, but it wasn't to last.

Song of the Mermaid (making groups based on sound) was great for many of them. We made four groups and one had 16 people so I split it into two. They were going to have too hard a time working with that many. Each group had 90 minutes to create a short play about the kind of struggle that brought them together, through the sound. The focus in the room was wonderful and while the plays are certainly rough, a couple of them are very strong.

I am going to work them in the morning and then do Forum in the afternoon, so I will detail them tomorrow.

In the closing circle one of the women who insisted on the discussion yesterday – and who was part of a very powerful play – said: “Practicing Democracy – it is really happening here – and its great.”

It has gotten even more strange at the del-Mar, though. This afternoon George was going to work out with Dylan how to deal with Rick moving out, when he finds a place. Although we were not going to get a refund, he had agreed to give us a credit on two weeks, so that in the summer we could put international **THEATRE FOR LIVING** trainees in there. Then I got a message through Dana that George didn't want us to tell Rick that there would be no refund because he is afraid of him. Rick did some time in prison and wears army fatigues, but I have never in my dealings with him felt that kind of a dangerous edge on him. By 5:30 I got a message that George wants him out by the week-end or he is going to call the police. Rick was with us in the workshop all day today, so this change in George can't have anything to do with something Rick did recently, and I am certain it isn't Dylan or Dana....so....what is going on?

Dana is now trying to find alternate accommodation for Rick and, although we have already spent a lot of money to get him housing that he isn't using, we may have to shell out more because otherwise he is going to end up in the street.

February 6, 2004

Rehearse plays
Forum theatre

Circle

To begin at the end, I arrived home to news that it appears that the BC Government has backed away from the two year time limit on welfare. I am not certain what this news really means yet but if taken at face value, it is tremendous for thousands of people and potentially problematic for us, as we are 3 weeks away from opening a production on this very thing. Something in me tells me that the news can not be taken at face value. Also, the lessons from the community this last few days are that the difficulties of welfare as it is in the present are horrendous in and of themselves, and require action from all levels of Government anyway.

One of the cast members (Jorge) didn't show up this morning. We were very worried about him and made lots of calls, trying to find him, but he doesn't have a home phone. At lunch some of the participants went to his apartment, and found him very drunk (still drunk from the night before). Yesterday was the first paycheck he had got in a long time. He and his friends got into a party. While I am relieved that he is OK, the behaviour is completely unacceptable. He was the centre of a play that he had made with one of the groups and his absence threw his group into disarray today. I will have to inform him that if anything like this happens again, he will be fired immediately. This was part of the agreement made with all workshop participants and cast members.

There were five plays made yesterday and so this morning I had 30 minutes to rehearse each play. I worked the plays that were in the best shape first, giving the others that needed more work time to incorporate the changes we had talked about yesterday when I saw them the first time. The groups were very focused and worked well on their own.

Of course some of these skits were more successful than others, but all reflect the participants' experiences of the issues. Sometimes what this means is we see a very strong sense of entitlement (for instance) in a play – something I think we will need to really talk through in the creation process. Can we expect the Government to take care of us again and again and again? This is complicated, of course, because it is exactly for the people who are incapable of taking care of themselves that a safety net exists, but there are some things this week, and in these plays, that also open up the question of learned dependence. The story we choose to tell has to be carefully constructed.

At lunch we discovered that someone had been stabbed and killed on the corner outside our hall. Of course this sent ripples through the group. The reality out on the street is so harsh.

We had 40 minutes to do Forum on each play in the afternoon. This was important to do for a number of reasons. I believe that making the plays and doing Forum helps provide some closure to the workshop group. I also knew that the Forum itself would be good research for the cast and myself – what kinds of situations, what kinds of questions, stimulate valuable interventions from the group (including some guests that came).

Play #1 Marcia and Dennis are married. They are on welfare, both unemployed. He has gotten into the horses, believing that “one good race” will solve his financial problems. The addiction is getting worse and worse and is eating their money. Marcia has paid overdue bills and now has no money for rent. It has happened too often and they are now getting evicted. He won't help, but insists she go to her mother for money – she always gives them money. Marcia doesn't want to, but after he gets violent, she decides there are no options.

Lillian (mother) is very elderly and has set money aside for a trip at the end of her life. Her nest egg has been being eaten away slowly by her daughter and son-in-law. Lillian refuses to hand money over this time, saying that she will not sacrifice any more to support Dennis's gambling. The play ends with Marcia begging her mother and Lillian telling her to grow up.

The story here is very simple and, of all the plays, has the least overt connection to the welfare issues. The level of performance in it, though was very high and this made it quite compelling. It was a good play with which to start the afternoon Forum.

Play #2 was more complex. Sandra is a mother on welfare. She has a Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) child (Janice). We see her trying to cope on her own, while Janice wants things that all little girls want. Sandra loses it and hits her. To try to make it up, she takes her out and buys her new sneakers.

A child protection worker is in a meeting with her director and they are discussing Sandra's file. There have been reports from Janice's school that she is not doing well and that she came in with a black eye. A decision is made to apprehend the child. The worker does not think this is a good idea – it will not solve the problem, Sandra needs more support. The director is adamant though, and insists that things happen by the book. The worker will do this or face discipline.

She goes to the house and apprehends Janice. Sandra, very upset, gets very drunk and hits the street, prostituting herself because she believes that if she has more money she can get her child back. On the corner, a John pulls up. It is the child apprehension director. They recognize each other but he says to her that ‘work is work and this is life’, and they can both have some fun together; he gets what he wants and so does Sandra. The play ends here.

The content of this play led to conversations about how some of the women in the workshop, who have also worked as prostitutes, have encountered johns who are Judges who have tried their court cases. The situation in the play, they say, is not far-fetched at all.

Play #3 Mary and Rick are married and have three kids. Mary's mother lives with them and cares for the kids. They are on welfare.

Rick is into drugs and has a violent streak. In the play we don't know much more about him, which is problematic, the character has to be more than a troubled jerk. He comes home wanting money from Mary but she doesn't have any. One of the

kids runs up and jumps on him to say hello but in his state he gets very angry and pushes her down. Mary gets angry and slugs him, he hits her back and leaves.

Mary, her mom and kids go to the welfare office. She wants emergency money. The worker sees her and her kids, and notices that both she and the little girl have black eyes. The grandmother (Theresa) says the little girl fell off a teeter-totter, but its obvious she is lying.

Inside the office, the worker asks about the black eyes and Mary admits it was her husband, but says it was an accident. She asks for money. She is told that she has come too many times and there isn't going to be any more money, she will have to access other services. So she asks for her cheque, it's the end of the month, and is told that she has been cut off. (This is anticipating the time limits.)

She can't believe there isn't a cheque for her and tells the worker to look again. The worker knows there is no cheque. The scene escalates, Mary getting more and more frustrated, until the worker threatens to call security. Mary leaves in a rage.

The worker calls child apprehension and they discuss the issue, we hear that the kids have been in danger many times. A decision is made to take them out of the house. In the meantime, Rick comes back home and is confronted with there being no more welfare. He blames Mary for not being able to provide and goes upstairs.

A worker goes to the house to apprehend the kids. Of course this creates a lot of yelling, during which we hear a gun shot. Rick has killed himself.

Play #4 Jorge, who didn't show up today was the central character of this play. Of course his absence threw the group into disarray. They had a very hard time finding someone in the group who would take on the central role. Finally Peter agreed to do it, and, all things considered, did an admirable job.

Peter is very depressed. He sits in the centre, contemplating a knife. He is surrounded by people who all want something from him. One by one they enter and:

- His wife berates him for not bringing home enough money. They can't pay the rent.
- A friend is having problems of her own and when he tries to share his with her she has no time for him.
- someone he owes money to threatens to beat him up unless he pays his debt.
- His son wants a new bike, which Peter has been promising him for months.
- A doctor tells him he is HIV+ (we have no idea where this has come from) and he should tell his wife.

The scene repeats faster, escalating, Peter feels more and more pressure, and prepares to slit his wrist.

Play #5 Cheryl is a single mother with a part-time job. She has two small children. The scene opens with a babysitter and the kids. Cheryl comes home and of course the babysitter wants to be paid, but she has no money. The babysitter takes what little food there is in the cupboard instead, because she is also broke and needs groceries. The landlord comes. She hasn't paid the rent. The landlord serves her with an eviction notice.

The kids are hungry and Cheryl can't provide. She is failing to parent them. She fears she is going to end up in the street and feels that she can handle that, but they cannot. She decides to call and give her kids up for a while. This is something she has done before. When the worker arrives to get them, the kids go into a panic and she changes her mind. She has already, though, told the worker that her kids are at risk.

It was really a lot to do Forum on all these five plays and by the fifth, the room was really exhausted. We went into a circle and many of the group talked about how they had had no real idea of what doing this workshop would mean. I had told them it would be hard work, but it was much harder than many of them imagined. Many said they had come out of it with unexpected life-skills and some talked about magic – the magic of group creation – of building trust in a very distrustful room, and then through that being able to make these plays together. It is important to understand that for some of the group, this is the first experience of anything like this in their lives.

I have come out of the workshop with a sense of something unexpected for myself, and I am wondering if it came from the week or if it came from the Forum event. I am wishing that during the process I had asked the group to make images of how people abuse the system. This would have been very valuable and also, I think, stimulated a very controversial but valuable conversation.

In my conversations with others regarding this project I have, of course, been encountering the argument that welfare laws have to get stricter because too many people abuse the system. Of course people abuse the welfare system. As I write this I also ask 'what does that really mean?' But whatever it means, is it a larger percentage of people than abuse the corporate tax-write-off system? I bet it isn't.

Still, in order for the play to ask the really hard questions, I think we have a possibility of including a character who is working the system – a character who the more mainstream culture would identify as 'the problem'. This ensures that we cannot be written off as presenting the "good oppressed" and the "bad oppressors". It will make the dialogue in the theatre every night more real, and it will force all of us to come up with solutions that take into account what crushing poverty does to people – people will find ways to survive – and that will include using their intelligence to get whatever they can for themselves.

February 9, 2004

The following notice went out to all media, community organizations and individuals in our network today:

Headlines Retains Focus on Practicing Democracy

Headlines would like to congratulate the Province of BC for the February 6, 2004 announcement of the 25th new and far-ranging exemption on the two year time limit to welfare. It is a sign that the Government has listened to the many thousands of organizations and individuals across the Province who voiced their urgent concern about the ramifications of the proposed policy.

The impetus for our upcoming production "Practicing Democracy" was a shared concern about years of cuts to the social safety net and what would happen in April as a result of the next phase of the Provincial plan.

The February 6 announcement is very positive news. It does not, however, reverse the devastation already being experienced by many individuals, and the organizations attempting to serve them, that the last few years of cuts to services have imposed on the population.

Understanding that the Province of BC will not:

1. Rethink previous cuts to benefits including the three week wait.
2. Reverse elimination of earnings exemptions to people without disabilities.
3. Reverse previous cuts of services to children and families.

The focus of the production will remain the struggles that people face in currently escalating chronic poverty and what policies the City of Vancouver can implement in response.

February 10, 2004

Our first day of creation without the larger group. We spent the morning around a table, debriefing the week. People found the workshop very intense, of course. We were very candid about what worked in the plays and what didn't – generally we agreed that complexity worked and 'good/bad' characters didn't. Emotional engagement worked, 'showing us' something without feeling it didn't. We were pretty much in agreement about this, which is a good thing considering where we are going.

I asked the group to talk about what issues arose for them that they felt were important. Some of these were:

- a family being defeated in the face of crisis.
- who is it that makes a stand? Is it only people in poverty?
- What it means for someone to know where the heating ducts in underground parking are; to have that knowledge means you have been cold to the bone and may never warm up.
- How people become disconnected.
- How people are sometimes 'forced' to abuse welfare.
- Getting the shit kicked out of you.
- Realizing that the place you thought was safe to sleep, isn't.
- What it means to be hungry all the time.

- How we dehumanize each other and forget that the person in the dumpster could be our sister, mother, uncle.

All of the cast, except Lillian, have experienced homelessness in some form, some deeper than others, of course. Some of the conversation about the issues was very emotional, and I talked about how part of our task is to create the kind of emotional response in the audience that we experienced around the table.

I asked them, on this first day, knowing it might change, who they see themselves as in the play.

Jorge: a bad guy. A drug dealer, a wife beater, someone who has ambition but no way, no skills to act on it – he takes his frustration out on others.

Sandra a former resident of the Downtown Eastside who used to be involved in illegal activities and now wants to be law abiding, but gets pulled into something bad.

Theresa someone who has fallen on hard times, “succumbed to weakness” were her words and “fallen in with birds of prey”.

James someone sitting back and observing.

Lillian a woman caught up in the system; frail, sick, dependant on people – and because of this could find herself in the street.

Emily a “bleeding heart” who has her hands tied. Someone who, because she doesn’t understand the reality of people’s lives, ends up dumping on them.

This is a starting point, of course. In the afternoon we got onto our feet and used an extended version of Complete the Image to start work. I asked them to consider the entire room our working area, and to start by one person placing themselves in the room in a shape that was the emotion of their struggle with years of cuts to social services. Then another would add themselves, another, and another.

In this way they made some strong group images that led to improvizations. One in particular in between Lillian and Theresa – they both see a pear on the street. Theresa, being more nimble, gets to it first and starts to eat it greedily. Lillian is hungry and wants it. Theresa grudgingly takes a bite, spits it into her hand and gives it to Lillian who eats it. Theresa feels so bad, depriving this old woman, that she gives her the pear. Lillian doesn’t want it now, she doesn’t want Theresa’s pity – and now both of them are miserable. Their hunger made it impossible to share it. This was a lovely moment between these two women.

In another improvization Emily became a woman who is still a child, hiding in a closet.

In another – James has set up home in a dumpster. He is happy there, he has broken through dealing with all the rules, he has no master, he is living in “the urban bush”. Jorge is his friend, who is still holding onto the shelter system. The

struggle is between the two homeless men – Jorge not wanting to go so far outside the system, because he knows he will never reintegrate. James just doesn't care anymore. Who is better off? This led to a long discussion about our own discomfort with it being OK for people to live in dumpsters – but the group also believes – and I cannot argue, that the James character may have more dignity than the Jorge character.

Another between Theresa and Sandra: They are walking, walking, walking and they can't stop because there is no where safe to be and it is cold and raining and if they lie down outside they will freeze. And so they walk and poke at each other emotionally, physically, psychologically in a symbiotic, co-dependant purgatory, keeping each other awake.

And then one between Emily and Lillian. Lillian sits and complains and complains about her legs hurting, her feet, being hungry, and Emily is walking back and forth behind her, her sandals flapping on the floor, and I don't know why, but I asked Emily to start humming a tune, this became quite surreal until Lillian invented that Emily has come to take her for a beer and this cheers them both up, they have something to do and they get up and go. In discussion it occurred to me that what we witnessed was this old lady alone, very alone, Emily is in her head and she is going mad and then, an image clicks into place, along with some of the discussion from throughout the day:

Is it possible that the structure of the play is Lillian – alone (maybe upstage right – is there a dumpster below stage left?) slowly going mad with no one, disconnected from society. A whole other play involving the other characters evolves, without her really knowing until she leaves the apartment, into the chaos of the world, where, because of her state, and the way she cannot help but react to it, she is brutalized?

Postscript: March 26, 2004 -- it is amazing, in retrospect, how much of this first day, which followed the six day group process, became the play we made.

February 11, 2004

Its hard slogging, but we are making some headway, I think. Part of the dilemma and the potential richness is that the group is very diverse. How do these people fit into the same story?

One possibility in an improvization today happened between Jorge and James. Jorge is in church, he is a religious man who is also incapable of getting on his feet. James has the answer to Jorge's life problems and insists on helping him, even if it means forcing Jorge into exploitive employment. Somehow James has power over him. As I write this I have no idea how it hangs together, this is just part of the reality of the process at this early stage.

It also became possible, through other improvization work, that Emily is Lillian's daughter, and, not unlike the small play Lillian was in during the workshop, Emily needs her financial support. We are playing with the possibility that Emily has a child or is pregnant, and her inability to take care of herself is emptying her elderly mother's bank account. Emily has few options at this point. She cannot end up in

the street, she could steal, she could be a prostitute – none of these options acceptable. The pressure is on Lillian to save her daughter, yet again, and in doing so sacrifice her nest egg. They fight. Emily leaves and, in a distraught state Lillian goes out after her, into the chaos that is outside. It is here where she gets attacked.

We also discussed today how the play is going to have to include the relationship the police have to people in poverty, which, from most of the stories I hear and others in the group experience, is extremely negative. This would mean that Jorge and someone else appear as police officers at some point.

We seem to be discovering a story from the end, working backwards. This may not be inappropriate in this project – identifying the crisis (the brutalizing of an old woman) and discovering the other characters in the event and moving them back in time from the crisis.

Who James, Theresa and Sandra are remain a bit of a mystery, but we are only just done the second day.

A great part of the day was doing a photo shoot with David Cooper and the cast at City Hall. We did some shots outside, from a very low perspective, looking up at the cast and behind them the towering building that people will recognize. Cast members are very animated in these either celebrating a victory or yelling at the camera. We will need to have a close look at these to see if any of them work.

PHOTO HERE

Easier to understand, and some of them are wonderful, are the shots we took in the City Council Chamber. We got permission to do this weeks ago through the Geoff Meggs in the Mayor's Office. During our conversation with him I talked about how the only reason to shoot in the Council Chamber was to get something irreverent. Hard to know what exactly this would be, but I mentioned the possibility of people fighting to get into the Mayor's chair, or someone lying on the Mayor's desk, something in that realm. He said this would be fine. We agreed that Paul Heraty from the Communications Office would be there with us for the entire shoot, and he was.

And so, David placed the cast around the area that the Councillors and Mayor sit with Emily standing on the Mayor's desk and Sandra standing on a table in the foreground. The best shots are of the cast dancing. They look joyous inside the Chamber and their arms are all blurry, waving – these photos have a lot of energy and movement in them. I think that the afternoon will give us some great publicity shots that speak volumes of ordinary people having a voice.

February 12, 2004

We have a very, very rough outline of what could be a powerful play. Of course there are holes at this point, ideas will come and go.

It starts with screen images, lots of them, of Lillian, a very elderly woman, being beaten up badly.

Then Sandra and Theresa (at the moment people are using their own names, as the characters define, they will take on character names) are walking around the audience. It is night, raining, they are cold and wet and they can't stop walking. There is no where safe for Theresa to go. The safe shelters are all full, other places that she could sleep are places she will get robbed, beaten up, raped. Sandra lives with her husband in a dumpster. It is safe there. Theresa won't go there, it is a boundary she will not cross. Theresa decides that she will go to Jorge, a friend with whom she can trade sex for a relatively safe place to sleep. Sandra is against this, because she doesn't like Jorge, but for Theresa, it is the lesser of two evils. She is afraid that if she enters the dumpster world, she will never come out. Off the two women go. We watch Sandra open and climb into the dumpster.

We get a peek into Lillian's world: a small apartment with a comfy chair, a small TV, a small table with medication etc. This is very short, Lillian muttering to herself. Everything is a problem.

It is morning and Jorge sends Theresa out to get him money for drugs. She owes him. He doesn't care how she gets it, she can hook, steal, get free clothes and sell them, it doesn't matter. She wants to go pan-handle but he complains that it is too slow and haphazard. They argue and, for the moment, she wins.

While panhandling, Theresa encounters Emily. Emily is Lillian's grand daughter. She used to be an MHR worker but got laid off because of the cuts and is now on welfare. She is someone who has helped Theresa out many times. Theresa expects her to be able to help again, but Emily has her own problems to deal with and wants to know why, after all she has done for her, is Theresa still panhandling? Emily refuses to help her.

We get another glimpse into Lillian's world, an old woman, alone, slowly disintegrating, going mad. This scene is interrupted by the dumpster (under Lillian's window) flying open and Sandra and James in mid-argument. They have a complex relationship. James has passed through a boundary. He is living in the 'urban bush', he has cut himself away from welfare, shelters, money, he lives in an underground economy and has freedom and dignity. He is dependant on no one and nothing. Sandra loves him but hates dumpster life. She is making big sacrifices to be with him. They argue and Sandra goes off. She has hidden food that James knows nothing about, and she is hungry. She goes to her stash.

Theresa watches her and goes after her. She wants some of Sandra's food (we settled on a plum) and, as we saw in an improvization a few days ago, Sandra gives her a little, from her own mouth, as a way to protect her food. This creates an argument about sharing between them. James wants to know what is going on and finds the stash. This is a very big betrayal, this secrecy and food-hoarding. Jorge comes in, attracted by the increasing noise and gets involved. James and Jorge don't get along at all, and its not long before they are facing off against each other. Theresa takes the opportunity of the three being focused on each other to steal the stash and goes off, inhaling whatever is in the bag.

Theresa knows she has to get money for Jorge or there will be trouble, so she hits the street. We see cars circling and then, two police officers (likely Jorge and James) walk up to her. They greet her by name and ask her what is in the bag. She gets mad at their aggressiveness when they want to search the bag. Immediately she is in hand cuffs, is roughed up, they go through her bag and take what little money she has earned. They leave.

Emily enters her grandmother's apartment. She needs Lillian to help her. She is pregnant and knows she can't have the baby where she is currently able to live on welfare and wants to move in with Lillian. Lillian, although she loves her grand daughter, will not allow this under any circumstances. She has given her money and help all her life and she has a tiny nest-egg, that, along with her pension, is barely enough to get by on, the apartment is tiny, she doesn't have the energy – the two women must love each but be in a completely fucked up situation. Emily leaves distraught.

Jorge finds Theresa in the street. She has no money. He gets very hostile with her. Again, this attracts either Sandra or James (it gets sketchy here). Lillian is riddled with guilt and remorse over her exchange with Emily and ventures out of her apartment into the chaos of the street, smack into Theresa, Jorge, etc. Lillian is confused, disoriented, etc...but looks like she might have a couple of bucks on her. Theresa asks her for money, Lillian not only doesn't have any but lashes out at Theresa for asking. Theresa hits her and, so it starts, the brutal beating of Lillian by Theresa, Jorge and maybe one other.

We worked very hard over the last three days, and this feels like a solid enough place from which to start putting scenes on their feet. I am certain that as we do that, we will find holes to fill, scenes that seem like good ideas that are not, but getting to this place feels very good for everyone.

At noon, Harry, Caitlin, Melissa, Dylan and I had a very productive (and dense) production meeting, in which we discussed many things including lighting equipment, sound, slides, the screen, stage painting, truck rental, set-up time, crew hours, needing more money for technical things (which I think we can do – a bit). The production side is coming together very nicely at this point, its great to have the caliber of people we do on board.

James had his room on Hastings broken into yesterday while we were working. They took everything. Even his dirty laundry. He and I talked today and we are moving him into the del-Mar, where Theresa is.

February 13, 2004

We transferred the scene list today from my notes to a sheet on the wall and talked through each scene together again. Then we broke for lunch. After lunch we were all nervous. We all felt it together – starting a new phase. We started from the beginning, standing each scene on its feet. This involves me taking the cast members in that scene and usually doing an extensive character interview with each of them. Where have they just come from? How long have they known each other? How did they meet? Question after question based on the answers they are

giving me. In this way they start to build an understanding of who they are in relation to themselves and to each other. And then we start to experiment on our feet, finding the conflict in each scene, the desires, the moments of tenderness, of fear, etc. Right now we are working in very broad strokes.

The cast got very excited as we worked and it became obvious that we can do this, and that they really do know these people they are playing and the situations they are in. They have been astonished at how easy it is to find the details of the story. I reminded them that this is the result, at this point, of nine days of very hard work **and, of course** the lives they are living.

As would be expected, the difficulty is going to be in repeating the lovely things that happen spontaneously in improvizations. Some of the cast have retention problems. I knew this going into the process. Here we are now. I know that their bodies will remember, though, and the key is to do it physically with them over and over and over again. This is very emotionally taxing, of course, but here we are – this is what we came together to do – create a play that touches people’s emotions as well as their intellects. The only way to go there is to go there. They were very brave today, often in tears.

The women walking scene is pretty straightforward and the two women have all the knowledge to make it real. This involves all the places Theresa can’t go because it’s too late, or she got kicked out too many times. The challenges for us are environmental, creating the cold and the rain.

Lillian, a seasoned performer, is already trying to fill in all the cracks, and part of my job is to slow her down, so it doesn’t get overly complex. Our first glimpse of her, alone in the apartment needs also to give us an insight into positive moments there – the sun has come out, the air is fresh. Then she hears (imagines) a knock on the door and is afraid. She has moved into this small place in a much poorer neighbourhood than she is used to, from a house that she and her husband rented for years. After he died her pension just wasn’t enough to sustain here there – she is barely making it financially.

Jorge and Theresa work well together. For their interview, how they met and what they mean to each other, I hauled out a mat and had them lie on it together. Challenging for both of them, but they agree – the relationship is a sexual one, and they answered hard questions with good answers. The scene takes place in the hallway just outside Jorge’s door. It starts with her thanking him for letting her stay and him acknowledging that the sex got too rough – he got carried away. This is always the case, but she can’t say that to him – she makes a joke of it and tries to leave. He reminds her that she will be back by noon with money, yes, she agrees, she will try, but she can’t promise. He insists, she owes him – he spins her around, praises her body and tells her she can sell her ass, it’s easy, all the girls do it. She responds that they are girls and she isn’t anymore. She freezes when she gets into the car, she’s been beat up too many times, the guys see her fear and throw her out – they don’t want her. Jorge doesn’t care. If she isn’t back by noon with enough money for a fix, he is going to get very sick. He grabs her arm and impresses on her that she will come through for him, the same way he came through for her last night.

Theresa won't go to the corner, though, and decides to panhandle. I used the rest of the cast for a while walking around so she had real people to work with and we will continue to do this and eventually remove them – her asking phantoms for money, until Emily enters. Emily used to work for the Women's Centre but got laid off because of the cuts. Her EI ran out two weeks ago and she is three months pregnant from a one-night stand with someone who “sang her pants off”. He vanished as soon as she told him the news. She is deciding whether or not to have the baby, but feels she needs to have it. She has been looking at the job boards, but there is nothing and is now on her way home.

Theresa sees Emily and kind of throws herself on her, so happy to see someone who she knows will help her, because she was a client of hers at the Centre. It takes Emily a while to realize who it is – Theresa has obviously had a rough time. Emily asks Theresa why she is panning, what happened to the housing they found for her? Theresa got evicted, it turns out – was taking in homeless people – Emily deals with this really badly and berates her for not being able to keep her shit together.

Theresa asks her for money, expecting to get some but Emily has none to give and this turns into a tug of war, Theresa grabbing Emily's arm and begging her, because she is in trouble if she doesn't get Jorge some money, and she has no place to sleep tonight. Emily is freaking out, she has her own troubles and yells at Theresa, pushing her away and leaves. Theresa follows her for a bit, gives up, and sits (somewhere, I don't know where yet) on the stage.

Lillian's world comes to life again. Its time for her pills. There are at least half a dozen prescriptions on the table and she can't remember which is which, can't get some of them open – is obviously taking the wrong ones. This is interrupted by yelling starting in the closed dumpster.

Where the hell were you for two days?!? I went to a friend's!!! Don't yell at me!!! The dumpster top flips open and out come James and Sandra. Lillian yells down at them to be quiet and it goes back and forth a bit – shut up you old bag, mind your own business – Oh God.....Yes!! I am God!!! Yells James.

Where were you? asks James, you can't just disappear like that! And Sandra, in a much softer tone, says, I am here, honey, I am right here. We see these two people, who love each other, standing in a dumpster in a back alley.

They continue the scene, Sandra trying to convince him to give up the dumpster and come with her back into a shelter or something, but he won't. It will kill him, he says, all the rules and having to jump through hoops like that. She tells him he is going to die in the dumpster and she doesn't want to die there with him, she doesn't know how much longer she can live like this and he tries to reassure her that he isn't going to die, but he knows he is lying. People last about a year, two maximum. They either get out or they die.

Sandra can't cope and tells him she is going for a walk. She climbs out of the dumpster, goes up the central stairs of the stage (at this point she becomes invisible

to him) and over to stage left. It is here, at extreme stage right, that she has her food stash. She keeps it because she can't rely on James for food.

This is where we stopped today. We talked before we left and the cast are excited – very excited. They are understanding the working method. Jorge said something interesting: that after the workshop finished and for the first two days of time around the table, he was really worried. He didn't like what we were doing or what seemed to be happening. He thought he had made a big mistake doing the play. But yesterday and today he says he is seeing it really clearly and is so happy, that he is awake at night and really looking forward to the next day. Theresa says she feels the same. Others, I know, are also finding the emotional work very wearing.

February 14, 2004

What a frustrating and sad day. We got very little done, considering I thought we could finish getting the whole play on its feet today.

Theresa had a second dental appointment today – her dentist came in special to see her – and I OK'd it for the morning. Her teeth are really important, of course. I forgot, though, until we got there and she wasn't in rehearsal that she wasn't coming in today. This meant that the scenes we needed to do we couldn't do, because they involved her. We could skip forward, though, and do the big scene between Lillian (now called Nan) and Emily (now called Elaine). We did this and, knowing it was going to take a couple of hours and then we would have lunch, I told those who might want to go home that they could and they should be back after lunch, which would mean 1PM.

The work on the scene was very detailed and, although it was grueling sometimes, its very emotional at the end, we did good work on it.

After lunch, Theresa had arrived, ready to work after a double root canal (!!) but Jorge didn't show up. This is his second time. Emily and Melissa (Stage Manager) went to his place to see what was up and encountered a man at the front desk who took them to the room, but Jorge wouldn't talk to them. Instead he passed a note to them (by opening the door a crack) that he had already written that simply said "I am sorry". They asked him if he was coming back and he said he didn't know. We all went into a funk. How can we trust that he isn't going to keep doing this?

I called the number we have for him and got the same man and we talked, and I tried to explain what the situation is, but he, and I understand why, said that he isn't Jorge's father, nor is he his agent, and, what do I expect him to do? The women had left a note saying he should call me as soon as possible and the man had crossed a boundary by opening up Jorge's door to give him the note – its impossible to put it under. Jorge had told him he didn't want to talk to anyone.

None of us can figure out what is going on. James, who knows Jorge well, says this is very unusual behaviour, and Jorge talked just yesterday about how excited he is about the play. The bottom line is, though, that every cast member has said the same thing: how do we trust that he is going to show up? We can't. I have to fire him, as I said I would the first time this happened, except I have a feeling he is

already telling us he has quit through his behaviour. I have left a message for him to call me.

What do we do? I looked for a while at just writing him out, and making the reason Theresa needs money into her own drug habit needing to be supported, but it turns it into a play about an addict. This moves the heart of the play somewhere else. It means that Theresa beats Nan because she needs drugs, not because of all the other pressures that have unfolded. We need the character.

Who can take it over, then? No one in the workshop comes to mind. My gut tells me that hiring an actor is going to open us up for a lot of criticism, considering the genesis of the project. And then I remembered Daniel Pelletier. Daniel came into the workshop after the interviews. He has been homeless – the Vancouver Sun newspaper did a story on him. He didn't come into my consciousness immediately because, signing up late, he wasn't part of my decisions around who the cast would be. When he signed up, the play was already cast. I have put an urgent call through to him and am hoping he is going to call back and can step in.

So, we continued, and blocked out the scene where James (now called Trade) finds Sandra's (now called Angel) stash of food. We found a wonderful end to this scene, in which Angel has betrayed him so badly, when he is sharing everything with her. He realizes that Angel can't pass through the boundary that he has passed through. She can't enter the urban bush. He says to her, admits to her and himself, that he isn't taking care of her well enough. He turns and walks back to the dumpster, climbs in and closes the lid. Its ruined between them and will never be the same. It's the last time we see him in the play. Angel, furious at Theresa (now called Karla) for finding the stash and leading to her being exposed, also knows it is over. She stares at the dumpster and says, that fucking bitch. And walks the other way.

The end of the day was fast approaching and so I had the cast run what we have. I think it is important for them to start piecing the sequence together. Some of it was quite good, and some of it was very, very ragged. On the one hand, this is to be expected at this stage. On the other, a couple of them are having severe problems retaining information. When we come back to a scene after being away for it for a few hours, or a day, its almost like starting over again from the beginning.

These two scenes and a stumble through are all we got done today. We are officially behind schedule now.

February 16, 2004

It took about 24 hours of messages to get Daniel on the phone. It turns out that there is a lot going on for him, personal stuff, and although he wanted to do it, we both agreed it would make both his life and the project more complicated because of possible schedule problems from his end.

My dilemma is that it is Forum Theatre, and the cast must, absolutely must have life experience to draw on in order to be able to improvize with audience members who are seeking solutions within the story. Who, then? Patrick Keating.

Pat and I have been friends for many years. He has the life experience necessary (in his past) and is also a talented and flexible enough actor to be able to step into the crazy process we are engaged in, taking over from the cast member who started originating the role.

I discussed this matter at length with Patrick the evening of February 15. He was very enthusiastic, but I asked him to think about it overnight, and sent him all the writing I have done since the workshop began, including the scenario, to give him a sense of what he would be stepping into.

He has now confirmed that he wants to do it. He is, however, a member of Canadian Actors' Equity Association, the same as Lillian. Dylan called PACT (Professional Association of Canadian Theatres) at 9:10 this morning and they think there should not be a problem, because in our initial request to Equity regarding Lillian we said that there could be two Equity members. By noon Dylan had sorted this out with Equity and everything is a go.

There may be issues from the community regarding replacing Jorge with a professional actor, but I don't feel at this point that I have any choice. Other than Daniel, there were two other men in the workshop who could have done this, but both of them made it very clear during the process that they didn't want to be on stage. The others were either onstage and very, very quiet, or in a very intense, high level, yelling mode. It is a matter of safety for the rest of the cast – we need to get back to work on this very complex play, with someone who can work with the flexibility necessary to step into something that has already been created. The rehearsal process needs to stabilize, and quickly.¹⁴

2:13 PM I got a call from Dennis saying word on the street is that Jorge is out of the play so he must have the part now. I told him that wasn't the case, and he is outraged. He has informed me that he is now 'the head of the Olympic Committee and I better not get on the bad side of him, and that he will be at the rehearsal hall first thing in the morning to deal with it.' I have put a call though to Ann at First United Church, who was Dennis' entry into the process to see if she can help with this.

Also just had a long chat with Susan, the social worker at Jorge's building. She has had a short chat with Jorge, but says he doesn't want to talk. I have put another message out to him through her that if he wants to talk with me, he is very welcome, any time, but that I am also going to respect his boundaries and not come to his place looking for him. Susan will be keeping an eye on him. She is very surprised by this, as he was so excited and positive about everything that was happening about the play whenever she saw him.

4:00 PM had a chat with Ann at First United Church. I explained the situation. Knowing Dennis and the mental health issues he faces, she does understand why, in the intensity of the current situation, I have had to cast from outside the group to

¹⁴ It turned out that I was wrong about the reaction of the workshop participants, except for Dennis, as explained in the next paragraph. As people dropped into rehearsals or appeared at performances throughout the run, I sat down with people and explained, and they were all very supportive of the decision.

replace Jorge. She figures its important to be very firm with Dennis, and lay out definite boundaries. Other than that, she will talk with him, but hasn't seen him in a few days.

February 17, 2004

A good and also a scary day. The cast were very relieved that we had a new cast member. I asked Pat to arrive at 10:00 so the cast and I could talk for half an hour beforehand. I explained to them all what had happened over the week-end and how I had arrived at a professional actor, who he is and a bit of his background. They were sad it wasn't Daniel from the workshop, but also understood the decision. When Pat arrived we spent some time doing in depth introductions – each person talking about their background and what brought them into the project. Then we played Glass Bottle together, the first trust game from the second day of the community process.

Both the talk and the game were good things to do. While there is no way to have Pat become an instant part of the group, these activities gave us an opportunity to reach back into an early part of the process and include this newcomer. There was a kind of ritual to it, and the theatre contains a lot of ritual.

Then we did a run of what we have. I wanted to see what they had retained from last week. I played the character in the scene that Jorge had created. The whole thing was, of course, very, very rough and surfacy. That is to be expected at this stage.

Time to get to work. The first item was to put Pat into the “you owe me” scene between him and Karla. Of course it is going to be different than how it played with Jorge – who was a large man. Pat is about my size, 5'7” and about 140 pounds. We talked and worked and he was great. He has started to find this very charming man who speaks to the little girl in Karla. The threat is no longer overtly physical, although it is already apparent that this new character could harm her, if he so desired. He is full of compliments and tells her how special and beautiful she is. When she tells him that the men in the cars don't want her because her fear of being beaten up again makes her freeze, and they can see it in her and throw her out of the car, his response is to support her and tell her not to let them do that to her – she is better than that – she can't let those assholes get to her. It is very manipulative. The end result is the same – he sends her out to sell her ass, in order to get him money for his next fix. In return, she gets to have a “safe” place to sleep at night.

Lincoln Clarkes and I had a good slide image meeting over lunch. We went through the scenario together and he has gone away with a list of things to shoot – wet, nighttime back alley, an SRO hallway, images of panning, many things. I am also going to start to comb through what he has already shot, because there are images there that will fit into what we are doing very well.

After lunch Marina Szijarto had a costume chat with all the actors and me and also did measurements. Her deadline has moved forward almost a week because of the video shoot we are going to do on Saturday, the beating of Nan.

We have also now worked through the scenes to the end of the play:

Karla hasn't made enough money panning and so she does hit the street corner. I have asked her to make eye contact with audience members in the front row. We heard today that hookers in the area are working for as little as \$10.00 now. And so I am asking Karla to do that. Want a date? Want to go for a ride? Ten bucks. As she can't get any action, she will decrease what she is asking. Five dollars, what can you do with five bucks? Its heartbreaking.

Two police officers arrive (James and Pat). Pat has been on the force for 20 years, James for two. They call her by name and ask her what she is doing. They want to know if she has fixed before she hit the street and she tells them the truth, that she isn't using. They don't believe her and start to search her bag. This is a violation of her rights. She is put in an arm-lock by James while Pat dumps the contents of her bag on the ground. She has \$15.00 in the bag, which he takes. They tell her to get off the street, to go home. She wants her money back. Pat tells her it's a "stupid tax" and they leave. What we have to find yet in this scene is how James goes along with this, but feels very uncomfortable about what his superior is doing. This will be an important element of the scene.

Karla remains on stage, sitting on the stage right stairs. The scene between Emily (now called Elaine) and Lillian (Nan) that we found earlier in the process happens here. Elaine goes to visit her grandmother and is surprised to find her in rough shape. She realizes Nan hasn't eaten for a while and asks her about it – Nan tells her she had to buy her pills, meaning she had to decide between her medication and food. Elaine has come to her because she is barely hanging on, her Employment Insurance is about to run out and she doesn't know what she is going to do. She hasn't told anyone she is pregnant. She can't bring herself to tell Nan, but, being her grandmother, Nan knows. She says to her, 'you've gained a little weight, haven't you?' And Elaine is silent. Nan puts it together. 'You're pregnant. You're pregnant, aren't you. Aren't you.' And the dam bursts for Elaine.

Up until this point we have seen her be the woman who holds it all together, she used to work at the Women's Centre, helping women in situations just like she is in now. But she doesn't know what to do. She starts to cry and asks Nan to take her in – she is sure she'll find a job and Nan can look after the baby and they can take care of each other, but Nan has spent her life taking care of Elaine's mother and then Elaine and she has a tiny bit of money and is barely getting by and the place is so small and she can't, she just can't. Elaine begs her, the same way Karla begged Elaine for some change in the street, she grabs at her grandmother who yells at her to stop pawing her. She refuses. Elaine flees from the apartment in tears.

Pat (now called Marty) has been looking for Karla. She is late with the money. He finds her and she tells him that she had the money but the Cops took it. Had the money? This is unacceptable to Marty, he is starting to get sick. Angel has also been looking for Karla, who she feels betrayed her by exposing the food stash and Angel's deception of Trade. A fight is starting on the street outside Nan's apartment.

Nan is so upset about what has happened with her grand daughter that she ventures out looking for her, straight into the fight. Karla sees the old woman and tries at first to con her. She asks her what she wants – does she need groceries? She will go get them for her, she just needs some money. Nan has no idea who Karla or the others are, or what is happening. Karla is moving very fast now. She asks Nan for a smoke. She starts to go though the pockets of Nan’s robe – you have any smokes? Any money? You must have some money on you.

Nan is yelling at her to leave her alone. Marty is saying to Karla ‘just get her money’. Angel is checking Nan’s socks for anything hidden. They are swarming her. Trade opens the dumpster lid and watches. Nan has no money on her. She tries to protect herself and raises her cane at Karla. Karla grabs the cane in the midst of all the yelling and strikes the woman hard on the head once, (we are seeing slide images now of the digital video shoot of beating Nan), twice, maybe three times. This live image freezes and the slide images and video take over, giving us a fragmented view of the brutal beating.

At the end of the day we ran the play. It is so very, very rough right now. I had my first little panic, but have to remind myself where in the process we are and how disruptive the last few days have been. We are actually in great shape.

Its time now to go back to the beginning and, having found the story, dig under the surface and set each scene, being careful to also connect each one back to being created from the results of the cuts to social services. Not in expository ways, in human, living life ways.

Dennis didn’t appear, by the way.

February 18, 2004

We did a lot of very detailed work on about half the scenes today. What I tried to do was treat each scene as if it was a little community play, and work them, literally, in 5 or 10 second segments. Set a bit, run it, move on, set that bit, run it all, move on. Painstaking work.

The first thing we did was work beating Nan. The actor playing Nan is very unsteady on her feet and the actor playing Karla has difficulty with physical precision. We will work this moment every day from now on, so that when we get into performance it is brutal but safe.

The retention issue with some of the cast is starting to worry me. We will work a scene, it will be beautiful, and then 2 hours later a lot of the work we did is gone; gone as if we never did the work at all. There is very lovely layering work we can do on the scenes but we have to be able to do the scenes the same way each time first.

We did take some steps forward today. We found a new first scene for Trade. We see him appear to be dumpster diving. We are unaware at this point it is his home. He takes garbage out of it, puts it in a garbage can against the wall, and then walks along the front row, getting people to lift their legs. He has hidden something and can’t remember where it is...a toque...is this yours? He asks the audience member,

takes the toque and goes to the dumpster and climbs in. As he is doing all this he is mumbling a speech that Gordon Campbell made today to a business group: “we are #1 in job creation; we are #1 in consumer confidence; we are #1 in business confidence; we are #1 in foreign investment; we are #1 in housing starts,” and closes the lid.

The key to the scene with the two women on the stairs was to get them to slow down and calm down. Silence is good. Even though they fight sometimes, they are trying to take care of each other. When it works, it is beautiful – when they are really listening. Its very delicate.

We worked the life in the dumpster a lot. The same issue with this scene, the two actors need to listen to each other and calm it down. Yes, they are in a dumpster, but they can be two intelligent people who care about each other, who find themselves in a crazy situation.

Karla does the scene with the cars, hooking, beautifully – it is because she has figured out how to just talk to the potential Johns in the car. The shakedown with the police has got more complex, with some dissention from the younger Cop. We still have to find the humanity of the senior cop who is driving the search.

We also had a production meeting today but for some reason (don't know why yet) Harry (Technical Director) didn't make it. Dylan, Caitlin, Marina and I had fruitful conversations about costumes and light. I need to spend some time tonight looking at slides, so we can start getting them to Caitlin. We increased the size of Nan's apartment. It was impossible for two people to maneuver in the space we had.

Later in the evening – calming down a bit from the intensity of rehearsal and I am thinking I might be pushing some of the cast too hard. My reaction to the retention problem is to push and this may be making matters worse. I need to get a handle on it.

I looked at slides tonight – it is time for Lincoln to see a run of what we have. He is the person most intimate with his own work, and I am too close to the material right now, inside creation mode, to be the sole chooser of images. It would be better for him, with an outside eye, to match images to what we are doing – for us to have a dialogue (including Caitlin) about what the images may be, so that it all doesn't come from me. This seems like a more creative option than the direction we seem to be headed, which is me choosing the all the slides.

February 19, 2004

We took steps forward again today in some places. Karla is starting to stabilize. Its very touching to see how hard she is working, and some of it is starting to make sense to her. When she is “on” it is lovely.

Melissa gave Angel and Trade (as requested) print-outs of their scenes. Not scripts, just an essence of what the scene is. They memorized them. This is terribly frustrating, because they were told explicitly that this isn't why they were getting them. We have to go back to their scenes tomorrow and re-invent the spontaneity of

the scenes. It is the only way they are going to be able to function, if they get the scenes into their hearts and bodies.

The run we did at the end of the day today, though, hung together for the first time – I mean by this that one scene did flow into another, some moments were ‘alive’ and there is sometimes chemistry between the actors.

I talked with them today about how we need to get the play stable before we can start to layer more understanding about the characters in – more history, etc., which we will need for the Forum.

The final scene is starting to work. It’s terrible in a good way, how Marty, Karla and Angel become like rats. They swarm Nan, thinking she has some money and, after a lot, a lot of work with Karla on the actual cane swinging, it is starting to look effective. I commented on the ugliness of it all today, and two of the cast said that this was tame – that they have participated in smashing a person’s face into the cement when robbing them. One of them also said that the portrayal is going to anger people, because they don’t like to be told that this is how things are. But they are. Good, we all said. Good. It is the role of work like this to ‘disturb’, it seems to me – this is where the learning is.

February 20, 2004

Each actor has their own performance/creation issues and part of my job, of course, is to try to find ways to help them find their way to tell the truth on stage. A technique that has been working is to place a scene in a different location, in order to find the intimacy of it. I put Elaine and Karla on a bus instead of the street, and in this more intimate place they found the scene. Today I put Trade and Angel on a park bench instead of in the dumpster and the same thing happened, although their ability to retain what we did proved to be less. We need to work their scenes every day right now.

Marina did a two day turn-around with costumes for most of the cast and did a great job, in the midst of the challenges of fuzzy separation between what some of the actors want to wear and what their characters would choose. She navigated this with delicacy and we made good choices.

Set pieces are starting to arrive, as well, (which is great) and I think the combination of set and costumes and discussion of slides is making the cast think we have less time than we actually do. We have more than a week of eight hour days left before we open, and we are doing runs! Its not that we don’t have work to do, but we are in pretty good shape in many ways.

February 21, 2004

Trade and I did some good work together this morning. We clarified the character’s history, which has helped the actor a lot. It was very fuzzy. Trade is Tsimshian, from around Prince Rupert. He was working in the fishery, which, of course, collapsed due to multinational over-fishing at the mouth of the river. He made his way to Rupert looking for work, but there was none. So he checked out Nanaimo

and Victoria but couldn't find anything, and made his way to Vancouver where he hooked into welfare for about nine months. Welfare drove this guy from the North nuts. He couldn't fit into the regimented schedules and demands of it all and gave up on it. He didn't lose his welfare. He turned his back on what he felt was an abusive system. He used the shelters for a while, but then entered what we are calling the urban bush. He has no desire to go home, because he has changed in the city. This is who he is now. He thinks he is fine. Of course he doesn't know that he is going mad. We figure he will be dead in 8 to 12 months.

We did good work on the first scene today. It is uncanny, actually how the lines from the Premier's recent speech on budget day fit into the action of the first scene, in the very order they were spoken. He is yelling at someone....(himself)....up above the audience – on the window ledge:

We're #1! We're #1 in job creation! As he is cleaning out the dumpster.

We're #1 in small business confidence! As he is moving the garbage to a garbage can in the lane, packing it in nice and neat.

We're #1 in consumer confidence! As he asks an audience member if the toque he found under the seat is his, and takes it home.

We're #1 in foreign investment! Just before he leaves the audience member, who has allowed him to have the toque.

He climbs into the dumpster – we're #1! We're #1 in housing starts! As he closes the lid.

Trade's sense of knowing himself has helped the dumpster scene stabilize as well – a lot of the work on it today was to help Angel remember the various shifts in topic – the units – of the journey of the scene. They are playing this very nicely together now, if only they can hold onto it. We worked their scene after discovering the food stash as well, and made headway, but have more work to do.

The work with Trade also clarified his costume – well – told us what it is not. Marina, James and I had gone down a path that isn't right for him – it looked kind of street-kid – military, a 'street uniform' in a way. This knowing that he has come from the North, of who he is, is softening the conception of what he is wearing. We are going to start over on his costume. It didn't need to be ready for the shoot today because he doesn't appear in the beating video.

Then it was time for the video shoot, which was very exciting and fun, and of course took longer than I imagined. The reason for this, though, is that people were absolutely great working on it. The make-up person that Mike brought was spectacular – it was painstaking work to create the wounds, in sequence. The cast were also great, doing tiny bits of it again and again, while we shot from different angles. Caitlin, (Lighting Designer) who is going to edit the slides and Mike, who was shooting and I coming up with ideas for how to get what would be most effective. Dylan pulled all the production needs together. Makes me want to do a movie. This will pass.

I was struck in the midst of it how things grow. The genesis of this was a tiny idea about visuals under the beating and today there were about a dozen people on the street corner very focused on making it happen. It was one of those moments when

the privilege of being able to create comes into focus. We also shot a promo (me talking, first in the hall and then [much more fun] walking in the back lane) for the live telecast.

February 22, 2004

I am writing this on the 23rd, knowing I had a day off today and having taken the opportunity to do absolutely nothing last night.

We did great work on the “we’re #1” scene, the dumpster and the food scenes in the morning, really finding the heart of the food scene. It lies in Trade’s anger at being betrayed by Angel. The simple action that unlocked the scene was asking him to take the precious plum from her and throw it away. We are going to have to put a large sheet of plastic on the wall in every venue. By lunchtime these three scenes seemed really solid.

More of Nan’s room furniture arrived. Its looking really good.

After lunch we worked the Elaine/ Karla pan-handling scene, just cleaned up the end and then spent a lot of time on the Elaine / Nan scene where Nan refuses to help her grand daughter. The scene is giving us problems. It used to work so beautifully early on – Elaine was able to let the scene hurt her and this created an emotional reality that drove her exit from the apartment. She is having trouble doing that now. The actor’s dilemma: how to forget what is happening so every time is the first time.

I made some cuts in the scene – a 30 second section where the characters were ‘treading water’ so to speak – this was an overdue action on my part and it increased the intensity, but what needs to happen is the actor’s re-investment in the material she created. This is something I can only try to help happen; I can’t do it for her.

At 3pm we did a run, not having done one for a few days. Lincoln and Caitlin were there so we could talk about slides later. All the painstaking work we did on ‘#1’ was gone, as was a lot of the dumpster and the great work on the food scene. I am not sure what to do about this. How do I help the actors with retention?

Trade and I talked and I am going to tape the #1 segment – something I would kill a director for doing if I was an actor – because he thinks he can learn it as music. This is the only section of the play where a character isn’t speaking their own words. This is how I am rationalizing it. With the scenes – I don’t know what to do right now.

The piece is hanging together more – we have come a long way in the last week – and still have almost a week to go. I say almost because in a few days more and more equipment is going to start to arrive and the focus of our work is going to shift away from the heart of the drama to incorporating light, slides, etc. We are also going to have to start moving into rehearsing Forum. This is going to be a shock for some of the cast.

I am seeing the play and process more clearly, of course. The starting point was provincial policy. How do these policies create danger in people's lives? The play, though, doesn't (and was never going to) contain policy. The hard work has been to get down into the sub-layers of how years of cuts have stripped away people's ability to care for each other, stripped away trust and self-esteem, fractured families, fractured individuals. Desperate people do desperate things.

I am happy that there are no scenes in welfare offices in this play, or Non-Government Organization offices, for that matter. The story we are telling is very human. The task in the Forum will be to elicit a response to the human story from audiences that can encompass new policy on a civic level, that imagines creating safety in the dangerous world of the play – a world that is a true image of reality. The journey has been from policy to human outcome and, now we hope back to policy.

Caitlin and Lincoln were bubbling together while I gave the cast notes after the run and then the two of them, Melissa and I had a great 90 minute creative meeting about the slides. This was a real joy for me. We are on the same page, thinking that the slides can create a sense of place, doing that in transitional ways, zooming in and out of locations, using texture sometimes as a background or extreme close-up of parts of items that people will recognize. Caitlin is also very excited about the results of the video shoot the day before. We have selected about 30 of the slides that Lincoln has already shot and he has a list of other things to shoot.

The cast is tired, as am I. I was wondering about giving them two days off instead of the one that was scheduled, but I am concerned about the retention issue. Melissa had a good suggestion – they are called back on Tuesday at 2PM. We will do a run and then work some scenes until 5:30.

February 24, 2004

The dumpster arrived today – great to have it, but its huge. I was imagining a much smaller unit like the one Melissa and I saw near the hall, with a slanted front – lower in the front than the back, and rubber tops. Communication broke down somehow about this between the rehearsal hall and production. Harry and I had a chat about it and it seems to be what we have now. Some of it can sit off stage left, but he is going to have to replace the heavy metal tops, which Angel will never be able to lift, and which lock at a 45 degree angle, with rubber ones that will open all the way. It will also have to be built up inside so there is a platform for them to stand on inside it – otherwise Angel will be invisible.

I looked at the dressing rooms today. They will need tables, which are easy to get. The rooms are very cold. We will have to bring heaters in and also mirrors.

The run was rough as was to be expected, after a day and a half away. Some sequences in scenes were mixed up and some of the work from last week (the #1 scene, the end of the food scene – Angel and Trade) was pretty much gone again. Other bits, like the first glimpse of Nan and some of the dumpster scene, and the Marty/Karla scene, eating the plum, the first half of Nan and Emily played well. Karla is really starting to shine – there is work to do but she is obviously learning to

focus and is working really, really hard at understanding what it means to be ‘in the moment’ on the stage.

During notes I had an argument with a cast member, after asking her, again, not to try to have input into scenes she is not in. This is important because the actors can’t take direction from more than one person. In some instances we are working on things that we have discussed privately, or when other cast members have not been present. The workshop and initial creation process were very collaborative but now that we are deep into scene work, it has to be between me and the actor, otherwise the actor gets very confusing messages. This led to a private conversation over a break which led to her storming out for a while. We have since had a long talk on the phone which ended with an acknowledgement that we are under a lot of stress for various reasons and have to be patient on many fronts.

After seeing the run Lincoln had mentioned that he isn’t running into people who are living in dumpsters that are in use and he thought this was problematic in the piece. I wanted to verify that indeed the cast knew people or were aware of people who were doing this. The answer from cast members was that yes, people are doing this and they remove garbage that people put into the dumpster and empty their stuff out when they know that the garbage trucks are coming and then put it back after the truck is gone. Also about checking on the \$10.00 price for sex on the street – yes, it is the price of one hit of crack cocaine.

There was a telephone conversation tonight that is extremely troubling news. I called James (Trade) to let him know about his call-time in the morning and he told me that he has just been diagnosed with early stages of lung cancer. We are now having a cast meeting in the morning about the situation so I feel it is OK to write about this here. His doctor wants him to start chemotherapy on the 8th of March, which is the middle of the run.

The first coherent thing I said to James, after getting my thoughts back in some kind of order, was that he needed to take care of himself and that while of course the play was important, it isn’t more important than dealing with this diagnosis. He wants to continue in the play. One reason to do this is it will give him a focus and I understand that. What I don’t know, and I don’t think he does either, is what the treatments will do to him.

The 8th is the first of two days off while we move the show to the second venue, but I think it is very likely that on the 10th he is going to be very, very weak. I am trying to understand what to do. I don’t feel I can or should force him to quit – he has articulated a strong need to continue, but what do we do if he just can’t continue?

An option would be to pull in an understudy, but I am certain we don’t have the time to rehearse him and someone else. Anyway, who would it be? It could be a woman – the character in the dumpster does not need to be a man. Again, similar to the situation with hiring Pat, life experience would be essential and I don’t believe there is anyone with the experience of dumpster life the way James has. If we replace him, we will need to keep him on as a consultant. Money for another salary becomes an issue. We are at the end of the budget. We are going to have a cast

meeting in the morning to discuss what to do. This might help explain some of the retention problems we have been encountering.

February 26, 2004

Everyone agreed in the meeting with James that, although his health is of the utmost importance, we also need a way to support what he wants, and he wants to continue in the play. We are going to take it day by day and give him lots of rest breaks.

Once again we deconstructed and reconstructed the dumpster and the food betrayal scenes with Trade and Angel. Very detailed work. I told them during this work period that if we didn't find a way to remember the food betrayal scene, I was going to have to cut it, because we are running out of time and I am not going to let them be on stage either not knowing what they are supposed to be doing or reading from a script. This was not done in a harsh way – it was as supportive as possible under the circumstances.

I have never experienced this before – this inability to retain a scene, in any of the many situations in which I have worked. Something that became apparent today is that for Trade, part of the problem is the anger. He is very uncomfortable with the character getting angry and this is somehow blowing his circuits, so to speak. We ran it as calmly as possible, still acknowledging that the scene they have made together is about betrayal and him turning his back on her as a result. Fascinating, that when I told him to let go of the anger, it didn't seem to get in his way anymore when he got angry. I don't understand this, but it is what happened. We worked the scenes over and over again, trying to cement the sequences for them and when we finished they were playing them beautifully.

We also found the end of the Nan / Elaine scene this morning, thanks to an observation of Lincoln's. The end of the scene was turning into high melodrama. We know that Elaine has to leave at the end of it, otherwise Nan can't suffer the beating. Nan has had a desire to banish her from the apartment and it just hasn't been working.

Lincoln made the observation that the play is about people not being able to help each other anymore. Of course – this is the result of years and years of cuts to social services. People who would help each other no longer can because they have nothing – worse, they are in emotional, psychological deficit and start to steal and betray and fracture relationships, just to survive. These are people who have no employment, no resources, no way out anymore. They are up against the wall.

In the same way that Elaine tells Karla she cannot help her, Nan has to tell Elaine that she cannot help her. Not because she doesn't want to, but because she has nothing left to give. This means the scene ends on a less hysterical note, which is very good.

We did two runs this afternoon. The first one was very good, except both the dumpster and the food betrayal scenes were gone – again. But they shone in the second run. Melissa and I are talking about a strategy to get the actors to run the

scenes every day before a performance. We have one more day of detailed work, and then lights, sound, etc. start to arrive.

February 27, 2004

Its very nice to write that we had two good runs today and made a start into Forum Theatre.

We have a new dumpster, and its great to have – makes a huge difference to the dumpster scenes and also to the sense of the stage. Angel and Trade were very happy, although we discovered it is very hot inside, and so we are reblocking some of the lid opening and closings, and have drilled holes in the top for more ventilation.

The scenes are all hanging together nicely. Our second run of the day was in costume – moving the cast slowly into all the technical aspects.

I am a bit worried about Trade. We talked today about toning down the character's physicality. Trade is supposed to have a sore leg, and I think this will be good for the actor, who was jumping in and out of the dumpster today, and then huffing and puffing terribly by the end of the play – to the point I thought he might fall down. We have also taken some layers of his costume away, so he will be cooler. What happens as his chemotherapy increases? I talked with him about it again today, and he is insisting on continuing.

It was very good to take the cast into some Forum – just us – before the invited Forum tomorrow with the workshop group. Interventions are going to be very human (by this I mean non-systemic) – a response to this very human play. Part of my job will be to take us to the larger picture all the time. How does this human action translate into Civic policy possibilities?

Karla had a wonderful moment in the Forum. The improvization was about getting her to call the Women's Centre, which may have access to some emergency service. She did, and the woman there was trying to help her, but Karla got very emotional on the phone. She didn't want to go to another shelter. She wants a home. A place of her own, that is safe and secure – not someplace she has to leave in the morning, and where her stuff is going to get stolen, and where there are lots of drugs. A home – a real home – and although the woman was trying to help her, Karla was yelling on the phone. It was gut-wrenching in its realism – and the reason my instincts were to hire Theresa in the first place. She brings this to the stage, and it is priceless. It is the energy of honesty that will create change in this project.

March 3, 2004

I had to stop writing for a few days as we entered technical rehearsals. There was just too much going on. In the last few days we have navigated many difficulties but it is a great team of people who have worked their asses off to get to the preview performance we had tonight. Many of us have been doing 12 – 14 – 16 hour days.

The show looks great. We have spent days integrating what has turned into a beautiful set, about 40 light cues, about 60 slides, some sound into the very heavy story we are telling in the 23 minute play. The visuals add a great layer to the production – fun to be able to play this way. The cast have also turned a corner and are performing the show solidly. Some of this is having been strengthened, I think, by the inevitable way that the play fell apart for a couple of days once all the technical aspects started to arrive and then had to be worked back together again.

There have been good interviews – should be a long story coming in the Globe and Mail (the journalist saw a Forum rehearsal and was very impressed) and in the West Ender, CTV news came today and aired a small item on the 11:30 news tonight (that, unfortunately gave no contact information and called all the actors “not actors”, whatever that means, but....hey...it was TV news). There was a small and, I think, badly written article in the Georgia Straight. Too bad about that – the journalist did about 6 hours of interviews. The Columbia Journal was there tonight to review and raved to me about it immediately after, I am doing Rafe Mair in the morning (big talk radio).

Knowing a good review is coming in the Columbia Journal – a tiny “lefty” paper – and after the response of the Globe, who is doing a feature, not a review – makes me just really pissed off that we can’t get the papers that people read in Vancouver to review this work. It was the same last year for **Don’t Say a Word**. Not the Vancouver Sun, not the Georgia Straight, not the Vancouver Courier. Its just insulting at this point and, yes, I am taking it personally, and no, its not that Jen – the publicist isn’t doing a great job. We just can’t break through the “its not theatre” barrier. Its not that some of the actors are not professional, the Community Play “Heart of the City” got both previews and reviews in both the Straight and the Sun and there were no professional actors at all. Funny – the audience at the preview tonight thought it was some kind of obviously good theatre – they ovated. What do I do? Launch a campaign about being blacked out of the Arts coverage from the stage at night?

Yes, so we did a preview tonight. 38 people. We have 100 seats. A good number for the first public forum – not too much pressure. The program arrived on time (yeah!) and looks terrific and the resource tables – one guy said to me before the show that he “hadn’t seen this much activist material since the ‘60’s.” I asked him if that was good or bad, and he said it was great!

There were lots of things to discover in the Forum. This is going to be difficult Forum, but in a very good way. There are no easy answers in this play and I think the level of desperation in the play (which is a reflection of reality in the community) creates stress in the audience, because many people really don’t know what to do.

There were some long silences tonight. I am old enough, and been doing this work long enough, to not be afraid of them. I think it will be possible to use them in this piece, because they are indicators of lack of options – and if I can turn that back around to the audience – reflect it back as questions – or make the silence itself the answer; our answer to “what can we do?” is silence, and so nothing changes. Isn’t the silence in the theatre the same as the silence outside the theatre?

task isn't to solve the problem. I am asking people to "try to create safety" in the dangerous world we have created. There are no easy answers, in fact most interventions fail on some level. I don't think this matters. Success or failure is no longer really the point. It is the exploration, the things we learn along the way that have become important.

There is a great deal of silence in this Forum – both last night and tonight and I think it will be like this. Often that kind of silence has been scary for me, but it is not now. We have entered a different realm – people are really thinking, feeling. I know this because now they have come and told me, that the experience is so powerful, and even people who do anti-poverty work have come and said, 'I thought I understood poverty issues and realized tonight that I don't' – that it is far more complex than they knew.

Tonight was very important for me. It was the second performance and the second time, when I got to the stage after the first performance of the play, that many people in the audience were crying. For the first time tonight I knew that we had pulled this project off. Four or five days ago it seemed like it might not happen – things I haven't written about – almost losing a second cast member in the strains of getting it created and, well, life unfolding. I was riddled with doubt, making it impossible to write. When I say pulled it off, I mean created a piece of art that is performed in truth, not artifice.

The Deputy Mayor came to me after the show. She was quite emotional. She told me that she didn't really ever know what it was that Headlines did until tonight. Many people told me this tonight – people from the theatre community who were there. She mentioned that on Tuesday she is going to talk about tonight in the Council Chamber, during the City Council meeting, because Council and Staff have to understand what is really possible with the project.

Friday, March 5, 2004

Attendance: 27

Second night. Traditionally the theatre's hardest night. The show was slow, I was off, the house was small. The whole thing lacked energy. Also the television crew set up today and started their rehearsal for the broadcast tomorrow – I am sure this also affected all of us.

Still there were some nice interventions and ideas that came out of the house. One in particular, to set up a parallel network of associations like the "Business Improvement Association" except a neighbourhood-based one, with small amounts of money, so that people could have a place and a structured way to gather and to check up on each other, particularly the elderly.

Saturday, March 6, 2004

Attendance: 8 for Matinee
94 for Evening

This was a very good day, even though we cancelled a Forum (matinee) – a blessing in disguise, really.

Eight people showed up for the 2pm matinee – one reason for this is that there was a large march this afternoon, but I also think this is an odd project for week-end matinees – something we didn't consider when we made the schedule.

Because of the small number I went out to talk with them before we started – I didn't want them to get trapped into a Forum event. Sure enough, only 4 of the 8 knew they were at an interactive event. I tried to explain to them what would happen and asked if they wanted to do it with us. They had no real way to know, so we decided to show them the play and talk again afterwards.

It was a very good run, and served as a final rehearsal for the broadcast. When I came back to the audience and explained Forum again, only the 4 who knew Forum figured they wanted to do it. This is way too much pressure on 4 people, I think, and they agreed. Instead we had a 30 minute discussion about the issues which was quite valuable and then they left, with the possibility of getting their donation (admission) back or a voucher to come to another show.

The telecast was almost full. A somewhat different crowd than we have had, interestingly. Saturday night, perhaps – a more middle class crowd in some ways. The run was great and, having just seen a part of the tape of the evening, the play looks spectacular and the cast did a wonderful job.

The great thing for me was getting to the end of the event within 4 seconds of our air cut-off time! This was miraculous, really. There were a real mix of interventions tonight, some very powerful and some from a very uninformed place. I am starting to think that in the 3rd week, when we are on the west side, the project is going to turn much more educational than it is in the Downtown East Side.

We are getting very powerful and emotional interventions on the scene with the police. A young man tonight was very, very strong, got so angry inside the improvisation. It is a sign of how many people experience this kind of abuse at the hands of the police, I think. Each night when I ask how many people in the room know that the scene is true, at least 50% put up their hands. If nothing other than police reform comes out of this project, that will have been a very good thing.

One downside to tonight – because of the pressure I felt to get to the end of the play in the two hours of air-time, I think the overall Forum was a bit superficial. We had less time to talk and this, coupled with some very wishful interventions, led to a less analytical evening. For instance, right near the end we had one in which Nan just says to Elaine – OK, you can move in – we will make space and do it somehow. There was a “magic” to this intervention that didn't take into account her circumstance at all, and I didn't have the time, the clock was really ticking at this point, to deal with that.

Of course the “time thing” is a decision. Michael Keeping (the TV Director) and I agree that its important that the broadcast be a self-contained package. That we try as hard as possible to get to the end of the play. The decision about this could be different. We could say that it doesn't matter if the broadcast just stops during the event. I find the idea of this very strange, though, for the viewers at home, not just for the live event but for the subsequent re-broadcasts, which will have to fit into

theft, he will just steal it from somewhere else to get it to us. I don't know what else to do. I know Dennis has mental health issues, but robbing our box office can't be accepted. I hope he shows up with the money tomorrow, because I don't want to have to follow through.

I sent another invitation to the Mayor and Council yesterday. None of them have come yet other than the deputy mayor on opening night and, all things considered, I do believe it is very important that they attend. They will get the report, certainly, but experiencing the live event will put it into a context that will not come only from receiving paper. My e-mail generated an e-mail from a City Clerk saying she had forwarded the e-mail to the Mayor and Council, as well as the City Manager and the Director of Cultural Affairs.

We are paying more to the Croatian Cultural Centre in rent, by far, than to any of the other halls. When the crew started loading in today, the hall manager, Joe, informed them that, because we had more light than imagined, (There are about 50 lights) he is going to charge us an extra \$1,200 for access to electricity! What??

To put this in some perspective, I figure that if we ran all the lights we have on full for 24 hours straight, it would be absolutely impossible for it to cost more than \$50.00 in electricity. For the purposes of this calculation, I am going to double that to \$100.00, in order to be extremely generous.

We are never running the lights on maximum, and at any given time I doubt that there are more than 10 lights on. I am also going to double that, and calculate at 20 lights on at a time, again, to be very generous.

20 lights = 33% of our lights. $\$100 * 33\% = \$33.00/\text{day}$ (for 24 hours of 20 lights on full). $\$33 * 6 \text{ days in the hall} = \198.00 .

We are not, though, running the lights 24 hours a day. Each performance is 2 hours long and the rest of the time the lights are off.

We are, in fact, running the lights for seven 2 hour long performances + focus time (4 hours) + one rehearsal (2 hours) = $8 * 2 \text{ hours} + 4 \text{ hours} = 20 \text{ hours}$, which = less than one day in total.

One full day at this calculation is $\$198/6 = \33.00 . So, for what could not possibly cost more than \$33.00, the hall wants us to pay \$1,200. A profit of 3,636%.

A profit to the hall of 500% certainly must be more than sufficient, which would be: $\$33 * 500\% = \165.00 .

Dylan has been trying to deal with this. We are at a stalemate with Joe at the moment, and have agreed the three of us will talk again tomorrow. I have sent the above calculations to Dylan and asked him to fax them to Joe.

In the midst of this dressing rooms appear to be a problem at the hall. There were supposed to be rooms that we could use for this, and I am having a hard time right now figuring out why they didn't materialize. The cast need to have somewhere

private to be that has access to washrooms that are not open to the public and also, for this cast in particular, access to the outside, so they can smoke, or some of them are going to go nuts.

(Postscript): Harry managed to use dividers in what would be the bar area (a sink is there), behind where our sound booth is located to make two small dressing room areas, and there is lots of room in our backstage, with doors that access the outside, for the smokers. Private access to public washrooms (the only ones in the building) was worked out by opening a locked door near the backstage area.

Somewhere in all this we are going to get back to the play we made tomorrow. Numerous good friends, who have a habit of being honest with me in good and bad, have commented on how strong this production is, in terms of the Forum and the complexity of the play itself, and the production value and, in particular, the strength of performance from the cast. In the midst of all the administrative and production difficulty, its important to hold onto that.

March 10, 2004

Attendance: 69

I walked into the hall at about 2pm to find “home” there. The set works well in the new space and the production team did a great job. Some jiggling to do with set and light, finding space for the dressing rooms, but all in all it went very smoothly.

We did a run in the afternoon to move the cast into the new space and I did acting and tech notes. There is a fine line with this play between the cast being authentic with the moments and performing them. When they kick into performance mode, of course, it doesn't work as well. Doing a run in the new space was a good way to get back to the core of the play before we had an audience again.

The show went well tonight, although there was a great deal of noise coming both from the kitchen and the lobby. We have talked with the powers that be and are hoping this is going to calm down.

Dylan managed to get the electrical charge reduced by 50% to \$600. Now a profit of 1,818% for the hall. Still completely outrageous but better than it was. We need to be there for the next week, but plan to complain officially to their Board of Directors when our time there is over.

Dennis did not show with the money he stole – and really, I am not certain what to do. As Jackie Crossland, Headlines' Financial Administrator says – what is to be gained by charging him? Part of me also feels, though, that it can't just be ignored. What is to stop him from doing it again? It puts staff and audience in a potentially unsafe situation.

There was one great intervention last night – actually there were a few very good ones – from a man who suggested a program where homeless people, who develop skills of survival in homelessness, could earn money using the knowledge they have in survival. This is a program that he is working on, evidently, in various parts of the world but that has not come to Canada yet.

diversity of experience in the room. Some people who have really lived the issues in the play and some for whom the levels of desperation in the street are a real eye-opener.

We left messages on Vancouver City Councillors' voice-mails today, telling them that audience members are asking who from Vancouver City Council has seen the show so far, half way through the run, and we would like to be able to tell them that more of them than Ann Roberts, the Deputy Mayor have come. Their absence is very troubling.

The play and Forum seem to have hit a stride. The last two nights have ended with very enthusiastic standing ovations.

March 13, 2004	Attendance:	55 at Matinee 125 at Evening
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Two shows today – attendance at the matinee was very respectable considering it was a beautiful, sunny afternoon, and then we had to pull out more seats for the evening, our capacity is 100; there were people standing.

The afternoon show was quite odd in ways; a very young and mostly middle class crowd. One young man made a suggestion that people just spend the night in jail and this led to a discussion about how unsafe jail is. He had a very different perception.

We are seeing the numbers of informed people in the audience decrease as we move west in the city – where 60 – 70% of the group would be aware of police brutality now it is being 30 – 50%, the same with the dumpster issue, fighting over food, etc.

This is generally NOT, though translating into more superficial interventions (of course there are always some of these). The evening Forum was tremendous with very considered actions on the stage and in discussion. The energy on stage for the evening was tremendous. For the first time in this run we were lining interveners up on the stage, two and three per scene, people yelling “stop” in the middle of other’s ideas. When this happens I ask them to wait until the idea is complete. In this instance, I chose to put the discussion on hold, make it through the series of interventions, and then process them all at the same time, being able to compare the results of various approaches. This proved to be very dynamic.

A pattern is emerging in a number of areas: Housing – the need for shelters that are truly safe, in which people don’t get robbed, beaten up, etc. Also discussion of the fact that there are so many empty buildings in Vancouver and potential legislation on limits to how long a building can be empty. Redoing the proposal for the Woodward Building Development comes up, so that there is far more affordable housing in it than planned at the moment.

Food – arrangements could be made between the City and large grocery chains to gather the perfectly good fresh food that they throw away and distribute it to kitchens or to individuals. The same with restaurants at the end of the night – the prepared food that is thrown away while people are going hungry seems

irresponsible. Of course health issues would need to be addressed, but this is a detail to work out. Employment could be created to handle distribution. Individual home-owners' fruit trees could be a source of food, if the home-owners agreed – the fruit mostly hits the ground and rots. Evidently there is an organization in town that has been coordinating this very thing, but their funding has just been cut.

The police are a big concern – better training, real punishment when police break the law, independent monitoring of the police, citizen chaperones to watchdog the police. There appears to be a common knowledge out in the community that the police culture is out of control in Vancouver (these have been my words, yes, but the knowledge is reflected by the comments of many audience members) – the trust no longer exists with the Police Force, and the City has a responsibility to make this unsafe situation safe again. You might want to check out the following URL for an insight into police brutality issues in Vancouver, or look at the “Through a Clear lens” project, on Headlines’ web site in the past work section, year 2000.¹⁷

<http://resist.ca/story/2004/3/7/105212/4931>

www.headlinestheatre.com

We have one more performance at the Croatian Cultural Centre and then we move further west, into our last week. Still no attendance by any City Councillors other than the Deputy Mayor on opening night.

March 14, 2004

Attendance:

69

What a different night it was – it was like molasses! The audience number was about half of the previous night, and the event went on for 20 minutes longer. It just was so slow – although there were also some valuable interventions and conversations.

Councillor Fred Bass came tonight, which was a good thing. At the end of the performance someone stood up (not him) and suggested to the audience that they all call the Mayor and make sure he gets out to the play.

The kinds of suggestions we are getting fit into previous evenings – there are no surprises there. What seems worth writing about is some of the suggestions that are impossible – things like: ‘the City should force landlords to give people on welfare free rent, and then once they find a job, rent for no more than \$150/month’. Or, ‘the City should guarantee that everyone has valid medical coverage.’

It is so hard sometimes to get people to understand that things like this are absolutely outside the ability of the City to do. The landlord/tenancy regulations are under Provincial jurisdiction. Health Canada is Federal. But also, how could an unsubsidized owner of a building survive (do upkeep, maintenance, pay the mortgage, do renovations) charging \$150/month rent? Of course there are landlords who commit ‘robbery’ with exorbitant rents, but do people have no understanding of economics at all? Or perhaps this is the manifestation of frustration and desire.

¹⁷ April 27, 2004 CBC Radio also ran a long feature on corruption in the Toronto Police Force and the call for an independent citizens watchdog body (with teeth). The conversation was specifically about Toronto, but there were many general comments about how control over Police Forces across Canada has deteriorated and that Police abuse has become a serious problem.

The production team is moving the show Monday and Tuesday. It will be interesting to see how the Forums change in this new hall, deep on the more affluent West Side.

March 17, 2004

Attendance: 73

The set looks great in this smaller hall – even though we had to lose the corrugated metal masking. The backstage area is deeper than the Croatian Hall and so the slides are almost the full screen as designed, and the actors fit into them in a better way – the slides become environment, not a ‘slide show’ behind the actors. More than any of the other spaces, this one ‘feels’ like a theatre.

The demographic of the audience changed dramatically tonight. It was certainly the oldest audience we have had, the most ‘monied’ and also the least diverse racially – by that I mean almost entirely Caucasian. Not entirely, but close. This is very unusual at any Headlines’ performance.

The Forum tonight went until 10:40 – ten minutes longer than last Sunday, the longest Forum we had had yet. This wasn’t because there were so many interventions – it was because there were so few, and the audience really wanted to talk. Of course the level of understanding and exploration is far, far deeper through physical interventions and I started insisting. This led to long silences.

One of the most interesting moments tonight came in the food scene. A man came onto the stage and started talking about a service, in which street people are driving carts full of recycled food from restaurants around, and feeding people. He says it is real, and a number of the people in the audience knew about it! NONE of the cast members had ever heard of it, and it never came up in the workshop. It turns out it is happening kind of ‘underground’ in the West End and Downtown, but for some reason, none of the residents we are dealing with in East Vancouver (the poorer part of town) or the Downtown Eastside (the very poor part of town) have heard anything about it. Obviously a communication problem here. This arose as something the City could really do – is get in and help make this work all across the City.

City Councillors Ellen Woodsworth and Tim Louis came to the show tonight. This is four out of ten who have attended now. Tim had to leave before we were done – we did go quite late, but Ellen was very moved by the evening and suggested that when we present the report to the City, the cast all be present. Then, when I got home and checked e-mail I found that:

Dylan did a good thing today. He talked with Ann Roberts (Deputy Mayor) and the following e-mail was generated:

I spoke with Councillor Anne Roberts today regarding the Legislative report to come from Practicing Democracy. She has spoken to several City staff regarding where the report should go and what passage it should take. She has recommended the following:

- 1.) The report should be tabled before the Planning and Environment Committee, where Council passed the original motion, and where all Councillors sit.

2.) Contact Sid Bowles, the City Clerk, to book time with to present the report to the committee. (Judy Rogers, the City Manager, has informed the City Clerk of this potential request)

NOTE: the Planning and Environment Committee meets every other Thursday. In April, they meet the 8th and the 22nd. Anne said that Council and Staff need to have time to receive the report, photocopy and distribute, and review it. Anne has also suggested that, given the media presence, it might be nice to have the cast do a scene or two for the committee. Obviously, this is impossible, (as some of them will be out of town by then, we would have to re-rehearse) however, it might be nice to have one or two of the cast appear to give a statement on the project...?

Here is the procedure:

- 1.) Submit report to City Clerk
- 2.) Councillors and Staff review report
- 3.) Present report to P&E Committee
- 4.) Councillors select item(s) of interest/merit from the report for further study by City Staff
- 5.) Staff make recommendations to the committee
- 6.) The committee makes recommendations to be voted on at general Council meeting
- 7.) Council passes or doesn't pass recommendations

NOTE: Anne said the time between Staff review of recommendations and a subsequent report back to the committee can be 2 weeks to a month.

And so we have a path for submission and some estimated timelines for response. This is great.

March 18, 2004

Attendance:

60 at Matinee

88 at Evening

Attendance has definitely picked up. This is great. It looks like it will be full for the final 3 shows. And we have certainly hit a stride with it – the play and Forums are going very well. The energy in the room is terrific, people seem to be coming now from all across the Lower Mainland.

Councillors David Cadman and Raymond Louie came to the evening performance and we had a chat after. They were very impressed with the event. Judy Rogers, the City Manager was also there, one of the 10 people from planning that Kevin Millsip (on School Board and also Headlines' Board) brought. David and Raymond are going to do their best to get the Mayor and Councillors Stevenson, Sullivan, Green and Ladner out before we close. We agree that seeing a live event is very important to people's understanding of the context of the report. We DO now have six who have seen it – by that I mean six Council votes out of eleven.

It turns out that the project was passed unanimously in a **Council** meeting, not the Planning and Environment meeting that we have been thinking it was -- although that is how it appeared – and I was there! Here's what happened: Because the P and E meeting is all of Council, if there are items that are held over from previous Council meetings, like this was, Council **reconvenes** in the P and E meeting, after all the other business.

David and Raymond feel strongly that the report should be presented inside Council Chambers, not in a committee meeting, and that it should take about 30 minutes to do, along with a visual presentation (slide images).

We would have a digital version of the play from the SHAW broadcast. We could grab images this way and use them to illustrate the scenes that specific report items come from. In terms of the report, we will need to be able to say how many people saw the play, and then rough percentages of how many people raised their hands when I asked the "who knows that this is happening" question. Also of course how many times a certain kind of policy suggestion came up throughout the run. The staff, cast, workshop group, interested individuals, would be in the gallery -- as many people as we could bring. It would be like packing a special show.

I don't think this is something Augusto had to deal with, being an elected official himself he was part of the Legislature. The question for us is how we make certain the report is honored in the way it should be.

David, Raymond and I agreed that once we have the report, and a date set for the presentation, we should get together and be specific regarding other details. We would also have lots of copies on hand to give to whoever wants one, including all the media.

Like the play itself, this is turning into a larger production than we thought.

March 19, 2004

Attendance: 89

What an interesting night – many surprises. We went into the evening with 80 reservations and were preparing for a crush at the door. There have, generally, been over 30 walk-ins at each show. We thought we would be turning people away, having a limit of 100 seats. We ended up with an audience of 89 – absolutely respectable. Its interesting to speculate, though, what happened. There were a lot of reservations that didn't show, maybe more typical of a week-end night?

One intervention, in particular, stands out for me. A woman replaced Elaine in the panning scene. This woman was obviously monied. She was wearing clothes that I am certain cost more than I earn in two weeks. I mention this because it has relevance to what happened on stage, and in some of the discussion throughout the evening.

She wanted to take Karla for coffee and 'talk about her options' – to do, from her own perspective, 'development work', not charity. I understand and applaud this sentiment. Karla, though, has an immediate need. She needs \$20 in order to have a place to sleep tonight – even if it is at Marty's. She reacted in a very hostile, but not inappropriate manner to this woman, who, from her place of obvious privilege, appeared to be very condescending. Karla's very forceful reaction, that grew into yelling and swearing at her as the improvization proceeded, really shocked the woman. She mentioned that she was sorry she had come onto the stage.

I told her and the audience that what had happened was of great value, and, in deconstructing the moment, was able to analyze how this good impulse from a well-

meaning person was perceived to be disrespectful and demeaning by Karla. Isn't this part of the dilemma? Isn't this the issue we are also dealing with regarding how some social service agencies operate? Doesn't the solution reside in services created and run by people living in poverty?

Then, at home, something else occurred to me: if a woman who was dressed like "us", in jeans and a t-shirt, had done the same intervention, what would Karla's response have been? Would it have been so hostile? I haven't had a chance to ask Karla this yet – but I have a feeling it would not have been. And so, what is the difference?

I think the answer to this is in a discussion later in the evening – from another woman (someone I know) who is also not ever worried about small sums of money. She started saying from the audience that money was not the issue – it was how we treat each other. There were some who agreed, some who disagreed. It strikes me, though, that this statement, in and of itself, is a statement that comes from a position of great privilege.

If I am out, and want a coffee, I get one. The \$2.00 or so that it costs now is not something I think twice about. I think I am representative of the bulk of the population. This perspective makes it very difficult to understand Karla's situation – her frustration, her anger, her desperation. We live in a society where the issue IS money, because money buys food, it buys shelter, it buys clothing; in a sense, I am understanding in new ways, it buys a certain kind of self-esteem, of credibility, certainly of functionality.

It comes back again to what happens when, after years and years of cuts to the social safety net, people who could normally help each other, can't anymore, because they are barely hanging on themselves. The 'long-range planning' option is a great idea, but current, practical realities have to be dealt with first.

March 20, 2004

Attendance: 115

We went into overflow with the audience last night. Some sitting on the floor in front, in the centre aisle, standing against the walls. I don't know yet if Front of House turned people away. I have stopped entry into the theatre once my introduction is over. In this much smaller space, opening the doors floods the theatre with light and is very disruptive.

Last night was our second to last performance. The play is strong – I need to talk with the cast today, though, about the Forum. Its hard in a long run of Forum Theatre. A few of them were 'stuck' last night – not really listening to the people on the stage. This translated into a lot of blocking in improvizations and also unbelievable answers in the discussions after interventions.

For instance – in the scene with the Police – a woman replaced Karla and dealt with the police very well – forcefully, but respectfully. This opened up the possibility for Joe (the younger Cop) to express his discomfort at the Sergeant's actions. He remained silent, however. When I asked him about this after the intervention, he started telling me how what the Sergeant was doing was wrong. Yes, I know you

think that, I said, so why were you silent? Because it wasn't right, he said. I tried again to get him to answer my question....yes....but this Karla gave you the chance to say something and you said nothing. Why? Because I didn't feel like it, what his response, even though we can see clearly in the scene that he does feel like it. I turned to the audience at this point and asked them why they thought he might remain silent, and they gave answers like intimidation, rank, etc.

In another instance, a man inserted himself as a bystander at the beating. As the scene happens outside, in public, I will allow the creation of a new character in this moment. The appearance of someone in a situation like this is not what Boal calls "magic". He tried to stop the beating. In discussion, an audience member wanted to know if Karla had ever mugged anyone before, and so I asked Karla and Angel this question. They both said no. I know that in the creation of the scene we talked about this, and they both talked about how people get swarmed and once the swarming starts it is hard to stop, and that they had done this themselves. I find the possibility that this is the first time either character has mugged someone to be completely impossible. More likely it is the actors not wanting people to think badly of them – but we are being very clear throughout the evening that they are in character and I am always talking to characters.

My choice is to try not to undermine the actors in front of the audience, but inconsistencies like this erode the credibility of the event. Its important that the cast remain true to the characters we have built. It is essential, I think, to continue to hold a high standard for the Forum. We are tired, but we mustn't get blasé. Nevertheless, the standing ovation was long and heartfelt from the audience.

Postscript: The next day I talked with cast members about this and they agreed that their characters certainly would have been involved in muggings before this one. I believe my feeling is correct, that they were 'protecting themselves' in front of the audience. I reminded them that I am saying to the audience many times that they are playing characters, not themselves, and asked them to be more honest regarding the actions and histories of their characters.

I awoke this morning to the CBC radio news. Paul Grant did a very nice item on Practicing Democracy – using sound from the SHAW Broadcast. He ended the item with this: 'It remains to be seen what will happen with the creation of policy' (not exact words), but "Headlines Theatre's Practicing Democracy makes for riveting theatre." This is important to me because all of the mainstream newspapers (other than the Georgia Straight) have, once again, refused to review the play because it is Forum Theatre.

March 21, 2004

Attendance:

158

What a great closing night. By noon we had 100 reservations (we have 100 seats) and were taking a waiting list. Box office put a sold out message on the answering machine, knowing there would also be walk-ins.

We ended up opening the balcony, where our sound/light booth is and informing people going up there that sightlines were terrible for the first two scenes (on the

floor and stairs) and that they would be invisible to me during the Forum, so there would be no participation possible from them. They didn't care. They wanted in. We had people standing, lined up against the walls, and sitting in front of the front row, and in the centre aisle. Attendance at this last performance was 158, and box office finally put a sign on the door and locked the door and stopped answering knocks, because they were just going to get into arguments with people we could not fit into the theatre.

There is no possibility to hold over a project like this. I figure, very roughly, that with salaries, theatre and equipment rental, each performance costs about \$2 - 2,500. We are performing for donations that are bringing in about \$600 @ 100 people. This is heavily subsidized.

Of course the energy in the room was wonderful. The play went very well and, for the first time, a standing ovation after the first performance of the play! As happens every night, when I got onto the stage, people in the audience were crying. The performance has a strong effect.

Then we settled into the Forum. Interventions started quickly and were lively throughout the evening. Something happened for the first time, though, that I want to write about: After the third intervention I stopped and asked the audience to rethink how it was approaching the play. For some reason tonight, all three first people came onto the stage to *show something* – to illustrate a point, and not to engage in the struggles of the characters and try to create safety in the situation on the stage. What was this on this last night?

I have a sense that as we have been getting closer to the end, and also the success of the project has been growing into larger and larger houses, we have also been drawing a very different kind of crowd. It would have been great to do some kind of demographic research on where the audiences came from, but it didn't occur to me and would have been very complex to do anyway.

As I explained the difference of the invitation I was actually making – the difference between “showing us something” and “engaging in the struggle of the character to achieve a different outcome”, I could see light bulbs going off on many faces in the crowd. This changed the nature of the interventions immediately.

When we got to the scenes with the food, the dumpster and the police, many of these people were shocked, terribly shocked to understand the depth of the problem. One person said from the seats that he was certain that if people really knew what the cuts to welfare meant, what the Provincial Government has done across the Province would be completely unacceptable. Its that people don't know, he said. Why doesn't the media really deal with the issues the way this play is doing?

Interestingly, in my own focus of trying to keep us in a realm of getting interventions that the City can do something about, I have lost site, in a way, of the educating we are doing about the results of Provincial Government policy – especially this last week on the affluent West Side – in the Premier's riding, the Premier's Constituency. I am certain many of the people who have come to the show

this last week would have voted for him in the last election. This project has been operating on many levels.

There were no interventions that stand out from other interventions in this night. The discussion continued about various ways to provide shelter, food, home support, and ways to get control of the police. All of it more input for Carrie.

A very long standing ovation at the end of the night that was for this performance and also, it felt like, for the entire project. I am in a kind of shock at the moment. The crew is at the hall tearing the set and stage and lights down. Back into the trucks it goes (yes, this one needs two), and then back to rental agencies and what we own into storage. We have a party for the cast, staff, crew, workshop participants and Headlines' Board tonight. Then need the final push to get the report done and in to Council, and the final reports to funders.

March 30, 2004

The phones have been ringing and e-mails arriving with congratulations and appreciations many times a day since we closed. The party was well attended. During it I had a long talk with Theresa, who is one of the people we have had in housing for the last two months. At that time she had one week left there, and was looking for a place to move to. James is going to be flown to Ohio by the US Military (he is a war vet) to begin his treatment. Sandra has been cast in another show already.

We are still trying to sort out with City Council how to present the report, which Carrie is still working on – she has a lot of information to get through. She has done a good thing, which is to research the initiatives that Vancouver City Council is currently engaged in – some of them have also been suggested during **Practicing Democracy**. This gives us the opportunity to use the report to deepen a suggestion, because of the caveats put on suggestions by audience members during the shows.

For instance, suggesting more shelters is fine, but that suggestion including that the shelters serve smaller numbers of people (no warehousing) and some be for women only, and they be open 24/7, and that people be able to stay more than overnight, and that some be for people who are not on drugs, all these caveats make the shelters safe and useable places, instead of the dangerous places they are at the moment.

This kind of thing applies across the board, but I will leave it for the Legal Report.

April 22, 2004

We (Dylan, Dafne (new Outreach), Jen (PR) Carrie and I) had a very good meeting yesterday with Councillors Cadman and Louie to discuss the report to Council, which has been confirmed for May 6 at 2PM in the Council Chambers. The report is tremendous but very long. It contains over 50 recommendations. This is both wonderful and problematic. Wonderful because of the breadth of input from the public in response to the play. Problematic because there are so many the report is overwhelming. We have 30 minutes to present to Council. Of course the entire

report will be submitted, but in the interests of clarity during the presentation, we have decided to choose 6 or 8 recommendations on which to focus. In order to accomplish this, I have asked Dafne to approach the agencies we worked with on the report, give it to them, and ask them for suggestions. I will gather these together and make decisions from this input.

I also, though, have some concerns/thoughts about how big the project got. I wish that the report was much more focused. Carrie did a great job. She was faced with a mountain of information. In a Legislative Theatre project, I am thinking that the play should not, perhaps, be as big as **Practicing Democracy** was. A smaller project – a shorter, less produced play that looked at fewer elements of poverty – would lead to more focused recommendations to the governing body.

The Gallery in the Council Chamber has about 100 seats. We now start inviting the people who worked on the project, the media, and all those who expressed interest during performances in being at the presentation. We, of course gathered contact information for them at performances.

April 27, 2004

We have sent the Councilors who didn't see the play DVD's of the broadcast and asked them to view it before the meeting. The report really does exist within the context of a live project. We have also now submitted the paper report to City Hall for distribution and have loaded it onto our web site. E-mails and faxes are going out informing people of the report being available and when and where the presentation will be. Come one, come all.

May 6, 2004

The Presentation that Carrie Gallant and I did to Vancouver City Council, complete with photos of the production, is available at www.headlinestheatre.com in the **Practicing Democracy** section. It went very, very well. About 60 people came. We spoke for 30 minutes and put forward some of the over 90 recommendations from the full report, and submitted the full report on paper.

After the presentation numerous Councilors spoke about the power of the live Forum events and also of the presentation in Council. They were struck by how much emotional resonance the presentation had, being, as it is, the voice of the people who both were workshop participants, cast and audience interveners.

Councilor Green asked questions about the fire hazard situation in rooming houses. There is supposed to be a law in place requiring sprinklers, but in this discussion a loophole in the law appeared that indicates that sprinklers are not necessary if there are two exits or depending on the height of the building. He asked City Staff for an immediate investigation into the matter.

Then a motion was passed unanimously that asked City Staff to start to process the over 90 recommendations in the report and not to wait until the list had been finished, but to bring recommendations back to Council as they are rising up. The motion also instructs City Staff to inform Headlines Theatre whenever this

happens, so that we can keep our networks informed. This will happen in bits and pieces over the next 12 months.

Here is the Motion:

THAT the report Practicing Democracy – A Legislative Theatre Project”, dated April 21, 2004, be referred to the City Manager for follow up; and

FURTHER THAT Headlines Theatre be informed when staff reports reflect recommendations from the report Practicing Democracy – A Legislative Theatre Project”, dated April 21, 2004; and

FURTHER THAT a separate report be prepared by staff relating specifically to fire and safety issues for SROs city-wide; and

FURTHER THAT a brief accounting of all the recommendations and their status within the City be prepared and submitted to Council; and

FURTHER THAT reports be brought back to Council as they occur and a full accounting be completed within one year.

So.....we'll be in touch if you are on our newsletter list. If you are not and want to be, send e-mail to Dafne at: outreach@headlinestheatre.com. Send her all your info, mailing address, etc., and ask to be put on the list.

Appendix 1

Interview sheet

Name _____ phone _____

Workshop _____ Dates (Feb. 1 - 6) _____

Play _____ Dates (Feb 10 - Mar 21) _____

Need housing _____ need transportation _____

Vegetarian _____ Food allergies or 'no zones' _____

Need childcare _____ (available for workshop week only)

Explain civic focus. Response?

Why do you want to do this?

Acting is not “acting”, Acting is “being”. Response?

Other points to cover:

- 8 hours a day, full attendance.
- Workshop participants at del-Mar for 10 days (starts 2 days before, ends 4 days after)
- Cast members at Del-Mar Jan. 30 until March 31.
- Zero tolerance to drugs/alcohol in work.
- Payment options (workshop 2 cheques (\$250 day 1 - \$250 day 6 OR next month)
(cast - \$550 week, no split possible)
- calls will be made Friday Jan 16 and Monday Jan 19.
- will need to come here to sign contract

Improvisation notes

Other related skills