

Corporations in our Heads

Artistic Director/Joker

Final Report



Graphic: Dafne Blanco

Vancouver/BC/Alberta Tour
October 10 to December 8, 2013

© David Diamond
c/o Theatre for Living
323-350 East 2nd Ave.
Vancouver BC V5T 4R8
604-871-0508 (ph) 604-871-0209 (fax)
david@theatreforliving.com
www.theatreforliving.com

Operating Funders:

Canada Council
for the Arts



Conseil des Arts
du Canada



CITY OF
VANCOUVER

We thank the
Province of British Columbia

BRITISH COLUMBIA
ARTS COUNCIL
An agency of the Province of British Columbia

Media Sponsors:

straight



A little background	3
The initial experiment	4
Outreach and Publicity	5
The tour booking process and Outreach.....	5
Publicity and Marketing	5
Successes	5
Challenges and lessons to learn	6
What did audiences take away?	8
Attendance Figures	9
The events	10
A “rehearsal”	10
Audience introduction to the event	11
Vancouver #1	16
Vancouver #2	18
Nanaimo	19
Duncan	21
Victoria #1	23
Victoria #2	24
Tofino	26
Campbell River	27
Courtenay	29
Prince Rupert	32
Hazelton	34
Vanderhoof	36
Prince George	39
Edmonton	41
Banff	43
Calgary #1	44
Calgary #2	46
Lethbridge	49
Castlegar	51
Nelson	53
Penticton.....	55
Lumby.....	57
Kamloops #1	59
Kamloops #2	62
Abbotsford	65
Squamish	67
Langley	70
Vancouver #3	72
Vancouver #4	75
Vancouver #5	77
Vancouver #6	79
Vancouver #7	81

A little background

A wonderful 15 minute video compilation of the final two *Corporations in our Heads* events, shot and edited by Dima Alansari, is available [here](#).

The impulse for this project began in 2000 when we did [Corporate U](#) (http://www.theatreforliving.com/past_work/corporate_u.htm), a Forum Theatre project on issues of globalization. During those interactive Forum Theatre events I experimented with the idea of “branding” the voices inside our consciousness that come from corporations and that give us advice that is bad for us as people and that are also bad for the planet.

The interest in this area deepened in 2007/08 when we did [2° of Fear and Desire](#) (http://www.theatreforliving.com/past_work/2Degrees08/index.htm), (events that also had no play, no actors and no script) that asked what it is that stops us from taking action on global warming. The investigations often led to realizations about how corporate messaging was countering the urgency for action on issues of climate change.

My work over many years has led me to want to get beyond symptoms – the fact that things are happening – and into root causes. Violence, for instance, is a symptom that has deeply embedded root causes. Isn't our addiction to consuming and our denial of urgency also a symptom of some deeply rooted dysfunction?

I am not someone who believes that all corporations are evil. *Theatre for Living* is, after all, incorporated and technically a corporation. It is important to remember that corporations are *inhabited* by people, mostly very well-meaning people. It is *also* important to understand that contrary to United States legislation, *corporations are not people – they are legal structures*. In far too many instances the mandates of these legal structures are to make as much financial profit for their shareholders as possible, it appears, regardless of the consequences. This, combined with corporations being given “rights” equal to and sometimes superseding the rights of people, makes for a very unhealthy combination.

In his seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*¹, Paulo Freire writes that winning a revolution is the ‘easy task’, and that the difficult task is not becoming the very thing we were fighting against having won a revolution. We see this courageous failure happen over and over again throughout history. Why?

I will suggest that one reason is that we trick ourselves into believing that we are prisoners of the structures we inhabit and so, in our activism, we work to change the oppressive structures. Nature teaches us, though, that it is patterns of behaviour that create structure. Not the other way around.

¹First published in Portuguese in 1968, and then translated by Myra Ramos into English and published in 1970 by Continuum Books.

And so, when we work to change the structures and neglect the patterns of behaviour that created the structures, we are doomed to recreate the same structures all over again. I know many people doing wonderful work on structural change. Of course this is necessary. A healthy ecology has space inside it for different ways of working and for diverse approaches to accomplishing complex goals. I am not so interested anymore in theatre about the structures around us. Theatre is an art form that best helps us understand human behaviour. As it is human behaviour that both creates and supports the structures we inhabit, my theatre has moved more and more into the realm of investigating human behaviour. Theatre isn't good at everything, and no one (myself included) needs to try to 'do everything'. And so, *Corporations in our Heads* has investigated human behaviour and our relationships with corporate messaging.

The impulse for *Corporations in our Heads* is not one that assumes we can end corporate messaging. General Motors, Apple, Microsoft, Revlon, LuluLemon, Monsanto, Kinder Morgan, Enbridge (and thousands more) are going to continue to communicate with us. In the world in which we live there is less and less escape. We cannot just turn it all off. We can, however, change our relationship to the messaging. How do we break through all the noise that encourages us to be both passive and a consumer, all at the same time? A consumer not just of products, but of each other, ourselves and the planet.

Change our relationship to the messaging and we start to change our patterns of behaviour. Change our patterns of behaviour and sustain that change...and we create a different world.

The initial experiment

In 2012 we ran a 4-event experiment of *Corporations in our Heads*. I needed to know if the idea was valuable and if I could make it work. We booked a very small space at W2 at Simon Fraser University (downtown) and were very open with people that this was new and that we were doing the events for me, not for them. Feedback from people was quite positive, but of the four events, I felt that only one went well. The other three got very confusing.

As I reflected on this it started to become apparent that the problem was that I was sticking too closely to the structure of Augusto Boal's *Cops in the Head* – the technique from which this has grown. In *Cops* the protagonist (the storyteller) remains at the centre of the exercise. It serves that person. S/he makes all the decisions about the shapes of the voices, who they represent, etc. My thoughts about *Corporations* was that they have invaded our *collective* psyche – different than focusing on any one individual's. In order to accomplish what I was imagining, I had to 'explode' the exercise and put the decisions more in the hands of the audience/workshop participants. In this way the protagonist's story becomes a gift that s/he gives away to us; it is really no longer about the protagonist.

A video, of the experiment, shot and edited by Dima Alansari, is available at:

<http://youtu.be/JEBvOJeqSVg>

With this concept brewing, we (Theatre for Living staff and I) decided to book a Vancouver/BC/Alberta tour.

Outreach and Publicity

Outreach and Publicity have a lot of overlap but they are not the same, requiring quite different approaches. An Outreach Coordinator builds relationships with people who really want to use the theatre work either in their own lives or to fulfill the mandates of their organizations. A Publicist “sells” the project to media and, in our case, helps tour sponsors do the same in their own communities.

The tour booking process and Outreach

Liza Lindgren, Outreach Coordinator, booked the tour. I set her up with some initial contacts by emailing Theatre for Living training alumni in BC and Alberta to alert them to the project. These people formed a lattice from which the core of the tour could be hung. Liza, though, contacted many, many other people outside that network and pulled together collaborations of people and organizations focusing on various interconnecting issues. Liza’s Outreach Report is available at: http://theatreforliving.com/past_work/corporations2013/final_reports/CioH_OC_Final_Report.pdf

In the end we had 32 events in 23 communities. 2 for the Vancouver “kick-off”; 20 in BC; 5 in Alberta; and then another 5 back in Vancouver.

Publicity and Marketing

Mallory Gallant was the Publicist, in charge of poster and flyer distribution, all contact with media, ads purchase, etc. Her final report is available at: http://theatreforliving.com/past_work/corporations2013/final_reports/CioH_Publicity_Final_Report.pdf

Successes

- We had a very wonderful graphic signature, designed by Dafne Blanco (past Outreach Co-ordinator, now Production Manager/Web Master). People commented on the art work all across BC and Alberta;
- Of course the sheer number of events is impressive. This was both a topic that caught people’s interest and, for those familiar with the *Theatre for Living* work, an exciting innovation;
- The technical aspects were smooth – this is not always easy. One factor being there was no play, the set (3 screens and 3 chairs) was very flexible, we could do the events in a wide diversity of spaces;
- Audiences LOVED the events, finding *Corporations in our Heads* to be both at the very heart of theatre and also perspective altering, life transforming. This should, I

will suggest, be the goal of all art. Audience quotes are woven through this document.

- I came out of the tour with a new theatre technique that can be offered to communities. Requests have already come to do public *Corporations in our Heads* events when I am in The Netherlands and Austria this coming February, 2014.

Challenges and lessons to learn

I believe I underestimated how innovative and risky this undertaking was and assumed attendance would be higher and that 100 people a night would be 'normal'. It was far less than this. We averaged 49 people per event ranging from a high of 110 to a low of 21. Attendance figures are detailed later in this report.

I think there were many contributing factors:

- I made a bad decision early on regarding whether or not we should "sell" me. In a normal production we have a cast. Previous plays have been created and performed by "mental health patients and care-givers", or "people who have known addiction", or homelessness. While we are careful to not exploit cast members for their difficult life experiences, we are able, in a commercial sense, to "sell" the authenticity of the production via the creators and cast. *Corporations in our Heads* had no cast; there was just me. I've always been uncomfortable being the focus of the work – the focus is the community with which we are working. And so, because of my discomfort, I made it clear we were "not selling David Diamond". This meant we had nothing to sell. We were able to articulate clearly what the event was not – "No play. No actors. No script." But not what it was: "watch a skilled theatre director pull a rabbit out of a hat"....(or something.) this really came into focus for me when one of our sponsors in Calgary (which as you can see on the box office sheet went quite well) said to me when I asked him how we could have helped more said, "David, your modesty got in our way".
- As I've mentioned, the graphic was terrific. But the material was not. We made errors with poster and brochure design:
 - o The poster itself was too big. Sponsors needed to be able to overprint and, because the poster was not a standard size, this was very difficult and sometimes impossible;
 - o The area on the poster for sponsor information was in a column on the right. An elegant choice, but it would have been far better to do it the way we have in the past, which is a blank area on the bottom. Utilitarian, but it works.
 - o It was very important that the brochure contain the whole tour, including where, when, and a contact number for each community. This is, of course, a lot of information. Feedback was that people picking up the brochure to find a specific

- event in their community glazed over when they opened it up. We needed a blank area on the front or back so sponsors could insert their own specific information.
- The posters, brochures, bus shelters had no audience quotes. Now, we had never done this project before so we also had no quotes about this project when we went to print. We could have used, however, quotes about ‘the work’ from previous projects.
- An issue arose with all of the paid ads and bus shelters that comes from a new sensibility that everyone is ‘wired’ now. The ads and bus shelters read, “performing in various venues” and gave our website. This meant a potential audience member had to see the ad, go to a computer, log onto our website, click on the project, find the itinerary....we made it far too difficult. This approach will not happen again. There is no point paying for advertising that does not give the viewer all the information they need.
 - we charged a \$750 per event guarantee *on tour*² in an attempt to keep it very affordable. Sometimes this was fine. Sometimes this meant that there was not enough at stake for organizers. It pains me to write this because I want to live in a world in which money is not a ‘ruler’ by which we measure value, but the experience is such that this is a lesson to learn. The guarantee was too low. It manifested in three ways:
 - if the organizers had received a grant from somewhere that did not need repayment at all, the tendency (not the rule) seems to have been not to worry too much about attendance;
 - in those instances where we agreed, because of financial hardship, to do the event for less than the already low guarantee, or in a couple of instances, for no guarantee, the tendency (not the rule) was that attendance suffered.
 - Sponsors often did not charge a ticket price, making the event a ‘donation only’ event. It appears that this translated into an idea for people that the theatre event must not be very good, as it didn’t have a high ticket price. We noticed that when the advertising was even “suggested donation \$10 – no one turned away” attendance was higher – again, the tendency, not the rule.
 - We’ve also heard from many organizers that people were very intrigued by the event, but also afraid of it. “No play. No actors. No script.” This translated into the possibility of them being dragged onto the stage against their will. This is entirely against my ethic, but people had no way to know that. We also heard that people sometimes imagined *Corporations in our Heads* was going to be an evening of corporate bashing, which was not the case.

² In Vancouver there were no event guarantees. Theatre for Living was the producer and we were responsible for all publicity and outreach.

- In a conversation with one of the sponsors in Abbotsford she said something I haven't heard before regarding this project: That people are afraid, to the point of being in denial of facing that their/our minds have been colonized. People just do not want to look at it. It is fine to talk about colonization of other people, but not of our own minds. People wanted the project to be "Corporations in ***Their*** Heads", not "***Our*** Heads". I think that regarding this project and the difficulty around getting people to attend, there may be truth in this. This aversion to the issue is also a great reason to have done the project.

What did audiences take away?

I asked audiences what concrete things they could take away from events each night. Of course the answers changed all the time, but here are some of the most common:

- Fear of failure stops me from experimenting with ways to change my life, and so I don't try. This event has shown me not to be afraid of failing, that we are all living a big experiment;
- The idea that the messages from corporations are actually inside us as individuals and also in our collective psyche is in and of itself a powerful realization;
- The concept of connecting the corporate messaging to individual and real relationships in our lives as a way to access, understand and deal with them is very powerful and useful. (This came up at almost every event).
- Admitting that I am struggling with corporate messaging is not flaky – it isn't a sign on weakness; there is power in being vulnerable with each other;
- The idea that corporations are now targeting our hearts – trying to be our friends, not just sell us items is a really important realization;
- Focusing on making the human relationships in my life healthy helps me deal with my own struggles with corporate messaging;
- The idea that we need community around us in order to resist – it is harder to resist on one's own;
- The concept that patterns of behaviour create structure is very powerful;
- The concept of Green-washing is new and helps me see corporate messaging with clearer eyes;
- The concrete necessity of dealing more head on with corporate messages that are being targeted at our children, and not being afraid of that conversation;
- Many mentioned realizing the need to stop 'sitting back' – it is necessary to become more of an activist;
- The idea that when I feel overwhelmed by the messaging, I can pause, breathe and then make a healthier decision;
- Not to be so self-critical, knowing others are also engaged in this ongoing struggle;
- The idea that other people who I judge may be doing the things they are doing because of their own struggles with corporate messaging is very powerful.

In the end, this was a very wonderful thing to have done and as I mentioned above, a new and valuable theatre technique now exists and the perspective altering feedback from people is very gratifying. Doing events with no play, no actors, no script has worked for us previously in Vancouver – [Us and Them – the Inquiry](#) (http://www.theatreforliving.com/past_work/us_and_them/index.htm) and [2° of Fear and Desire](#) (http://www.theatreforliving.com/past_work/2Degrees08/index.htm). With targeted marketing and outreach I can see doing that again in Vancouver. I don't think we would tour this kind of event again – touring needs an actual play for people to feel comfortable buying a ticket.

Attendance Figures

Date	Community	Venue	Capacity	Attendance	% of House
10-Oct	Vancouver	Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House	80	46	58%
11-Oct	Vancouver	Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House	80	79	99%
16-Oct	Nanaimo	Malaspina Theatre	100	82	82%
17-Oct	Duncan	VIU Cowichan	70	32	46%
18-Oct	Victoria #1	David Lam Auditorium	120	102	85%
19-Oct	Victoria #2	Metropolitan Church	100	74	74%
22-Oct	Tofino	Clayoquot Community Theatre	70	36	51%
24-Oct	Campbell Riv.	C. R. N. Island College Theatre	100	44	44%
25-Oct	Courtenay	NIC Theatre	100	75	75%
29-Oct	Prince Rupert	Tom Rooney Playhouse	canceled	0	0%
30-Oct	Hazelton	Hazelton Secondary School	100	110	110%
1-Nov	Vanderhoof	Nechako Senior's Friendship Centre	70	40	57%
2-Nov	Prince George	Canfor Lecture Theatre	100	34	34%
5-Nov	Edmonton	U of Alberta, English Dept. Drama Studio	80	60	75%
8-Nov	Banff	The Club @ Banff Centre	canceled	0	0%
9-Nov	Calgary #1	Cliff Bungalow Arts Centre	60	30	50%
10-Nov	Calgary #2	Scandinavian Centre	80	93	116%
12-Nov	Lethbridge	CASA	70	67	96%
14-Nov	Castlegar	MIR Centre	40	26	65%
15-Nov	Nelson	Nelson Leigon	60	40	67%
19-Nov	Penticton	Shatford Centre	60	21	35%
20-Nov	Lumby	White Valley Community Centre	50	25	50%
22-Nov	Kamloops #1	The Yacht Club	80	43	54%
23-Nov	Kamloops #2	The Yacht Club	80	55	69%
26-Nov	Abbotsford	University of Fraser Valley	75	40	53%
28-Nov	Squamish	MPR Room, Quest University	50	28	56%
29-Nov	Langley	Langley United Church	60	30	50%
4-Dec	Vancouver	Gordon Neighbourhood House	40	28	70%
5-Dec	Vancouver	Gallery Gachet	70	50	71%
6-Dec	Vancouver	Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre	60	45	75%
7-Dec	Vancouver	Terasen Lecture Hall, SFU	70	44	63%
8-Dec	Vancouver	Café du Soleil	88	96	109%

Averages		71	49	64%
Totals			1,575	
	BC/Alberta	63	1187	53%
	Vancouver	70	388	78%

Training workshops

These are scheduled for March 15 and 16 of 2014 and these reports are being written in January, so the trainings will not have happened yet. We opened up the opportunity for central organizers and other interested and 'connected' individuals who are familiar with the technique. The trainings will happen in Vancouver at a highly subsidized rate. The idea being that people can take the *Corporations in our Heads* concept back into their communities and use it.

The Finances

Corporations in our Heads had a total budget from the beginning of tour booking all the way through to report creation of just under \$124,000. Six people on full-time salary, the travel costs, accommodation, food, design, publicity and office costs over approximately a 6 month period. Theatre for Living has operating funds from all three levels of Government and also from the Catherine Donnelly Foundation and BC Gaming. We did not need other project funding.

The events

A "rehearsal"

On September 25, 2013 about 20 people gathered to help us with a "rehearsal". There were some things I wanted to understand more clearly about the process before launching and the only way to do that was to do it with people. One of the things I wanted to experiment with was my own thought/realization that what makes the messages from corporations "stick" to us is that we connect the messages up to the voices of people we know who have influence in our lives. When I floated this idea with the audience they agreed – some of them realizing this (as I had) for the first time. The evening went very well with a terrific response.

The story we focused into was beautiful in its simplicity. A woman is at her clothes closet, preparing to go on a hike with her boyfriend, some other friends and her ex-boyfriend and his new girlfriend. It would make sense for her to wear some old hiking clothes – but the voices in her closet want her to dress in Lululemon.

On the surface the story seems kind of artificial. (This is one of the things I really like about the story.) But when we start to open it up, we enter the territory of body image, beauty, aging, etc.

Insights for me: People are much more comfortable talking about and focusing on how they think *other people* are affected by corporate messaging. The power of the event is that it is

personal. I will need to keep refocusing the investigation and the dialogue into how we experience the issue – insisting on this really deepened the experience in the room this night.

My instinct that what makes the messages from corporations “stick” to us is that we connect the messages up to the voices of people we know who have influence in our lives, was very good. This really clarified how people from the audience could engage in the voices. I say this all the time in trainings: ‘the actor cannot play “the system”; cannot play “capitalism”. The actor can play the bank manager or relative who supports the concepts of capitalism. This also applies to being able to make *Corporations in our Heads* function in a theatrical sense.

There was an important sequence of events here. Directions need to be clear. Audiences will go on a journey with you if they have clear direction.

- We got the story;
- We put the story on the stage;
- We got three “voices/messages” physicalized on the stage;
- We turned these into characters via internal monologues and sentences;
- The Protagonist also gave each character a sentence or phrase;
- I asked the audience to yell out Brands for each character (in sequence) and the Protagonist decided, including but not being limited to this input, on the Branding;³
- I asked the audience to yell out relationships (mother, father, friend, employer...etc.) for each character (in sequence) and the Protagonist decided, including but not being limited to this input, on the relationship;⁴
- All the characters attacked the Protagonist.

Having established legitimate characters for the ‘messages’. We started working on them one at a time, using Forum Theatre techniques, to change the relationship so that the Protagonist (who is now all of us) could be more healthy and have a more healthy relationship with themselves, others and the planet.

Audience introduction to the event

As the tour progressed I played with the structure almost every day – trying different ways to introduce the event, different orders for how the structure progressed, different ways to ask questions and make observations, and also handing more and more control of the content of the event over to the audience. By the mid-point or so, I was confident with the introduction and am going to commit it to writing, for the first time, for the purposes of this report:

Hello and welcome to (name of the hall/theatre we are in) in (the local First Nations Territory)⁵. I’m David Diamond the Artistic Director of Theatre for Living, a company you will have known for the

³ On tour I changed this to the person playing the message deciding on the brand.

⁴ On tour I changed this to the person playing the message deciding on the relationship.

last 33 years as Headlines Theatre. We are going through a slow name change. I'd like to thank (the sponsors/organizers of the local event – this changed every night). It is a great deal of work to bring something like this into a community. Thank you for saying “yes”.

I'm curious. How many people here think there are a group of actors waiting backstage somewhere, doing voice exercises right now, who are getting ready to pop out and perform a play for you here tonight? Be honest...a raise of hands? (Some nights there might be just a few, some nights 30 or 40% of the audience.) OK – so to those of you who raised your hands – I don't mean to freak you out, but the publicity material is actually telling the truth! There really is no play, there really are no actors and there really is no script. There really is just us here tonight. We have the chance to speak the language of theatre this evening; a language that belongs to all of humanity – not only those who traditionally get to stand in the light. And we get to speak that language about something that I will suggest is deeply important to us all: our relationships with corporate messaging.

Corporations in our Heads. It strikes us at *Theatre for Living* that corporations communicate with us so many times in a day now, that in many instances, we don't even notice it any more. Sometimes corporations communicate with us more than our loved ones do. The messages we get affect us from a very early age in profound ways. Affecting who it is we aspire to be; what success and failure look and feel like; what beauty is; what aging means; what health and safety are; what democracy is; what it means to be a good citizen; how we understand what is actually happening in other parts of the world, or even in the areas we call home. And more and more in the world in which we live, how we find the balance between our *responsibilities* to clean air and water for generations to come and the fact that we live in a culture in which we have to have money in order to buy food and shelter – these responsibilities and needs, unfortunately, often appear to be in direct conflict with each other. All of these and more are affected by corporate messaging.

I want to put some cards on the table. I am not someone who thinks corporations are inherently evil. *Theatre for Living* is technically a corporation. We are incorporated in the Province of British Columbia (as a not-for-profit Society). I like to think we are not putting evil messages out into the ether. And yet I know that when we design a message, we design it to be healthy for and to benefit the Company – just like any other Company. I also know that some corporate messaging is very UNhealthy for us as individuals, for our families, our communities and for the planet.

Now, this is an interactive theatre event tonight – not a lecture, which is what it might feel like right now. I promise we will get to the theatre. Something I want to say first, though, is that no one, under any circumstances, is going to get dragged up onto the stage tonight. I'm curious. How many of you walked in here tonight afraid that that might happen? (There were always hands that went up.) This is entirely against my rules....so.....relax! Having said that...some of you are going to end up on the stage tonight. Some of you who are sitting there right now and thinking, 'there's no way in hell I am ending up on that stage tonight' are going to end up on the stage tonight. But it will be voluntary.

⁵ Of course these changed every time the location changed. I make a point of always acknowledging the First Nations Territory we are in – it is the respectful thing to do. Also, with *Corporations in our Heads* it starts the event making a very particular statement. Branding is everywhere. We relate to Vancouver as an urban centre – such a beautiful city. Evidently, according to corporate polling, one of the most desirable cities in the world. Vancouver is a Brand. The city sits on unceded **Squamish, Musqueam** and **Tsleil-Waututh** Territory. We are, in fact, here at the tax-free good graces of these Nations. When we recognize this, mustn't our image of the Brand change? The same was the case everywhere the project went.

Having said *that*.... I do have a request of you. There will be many times when I ask questions here this evening. When that happens, please, risk expressing an opinion. Risk it. This needs to be a space in which it is OK for us to disagree. How can we possibly have a meaningful dialogue if we have to agree? It is OK to disagree; to have really different opinions. Risk expressing these. The more you do that, the richer the event will be and the more you will take away. The more you sit back and 'consume' this event, the less rich it will be and the less you will take away. It really does rely on you.

I'm saying this because the first question is coming. I'm using a word: *Corporation*. And I am certain this word means different things to different people here. In a sentence or two please, not long paragraphs, what is a Corporation? Anyone?

The responses to this were, of course, different every night.

I've also made a statement that the messages of Corporations can be unhealthy for us. How many of us here tonight recognize that is true? (each evening, most if not all of the audience would raise a hand.) I'm going to ask that you answer this question personally, because this event tonight can't be about 'those people out there' – it can only be about 'us in here' and so, personally, in a sentence or two, how are you struggling with corporate messaging in your own life?

The responses to this were, of course, different every night.

OK. Here's what's going to happen tonight. I'm going to walk us through the event so you know what you are agreeing to do.

We are going to do a warm-up. This has already started because things are already bubbling in the room, but eventually we are going to do a physical warm up. It will help you understand the nature of this event. And then, I am going to ask for three of you who will be willing to offer stories out of your own lives. Not friends' lives, not relatives' lives, not the movies – your lives. A story of a moment when you had to make a decision about something and in that decision-making moment, you know the messages of corporations are in your head, and you know they are giving you advice that you know is unhealthy for you.

These stories can be about 'big moments' or they can be about 'small moments'. Our lives are not made up of the 'big moments'. Our lives are actually made up of the 'small moments', the sometimes seemingly inconsequential moments that weave together into the fabric of our lives. These small moments build into, create the bigger moments. The story can be you on your own or with another character. Both are fine.

I'm going to give you two examples of stories – from a different project called [2° of Fear and Desire \(http://www.theatreforliving.com/past_work/2Degrees08/index.htm\)](http://www.theatreforliving.com/past_work/2Degrees08/index.htm). This was a project like this where everything came from the audience, but about what it is that stops us from taking action on global warming. I'm giving you examples to help you think – not to direct the stories.⁶

⁶ I tried to cut doing this a couple of times because I was concerned about how much time the intro was taking. Both times not giving examples caused confusion and a lot of questions about the kind of stories I was looking for.

The first story comes from a woman. She is in the grocery story. It is just her, and the tomatoes. What do I buy? The perfect looking GMO tomato? Or the not-so-perfect looking locally grown tomato? A seemingly simple, everyday moment that opened up a wonderful exploration about our relationship to food and how we function on the planet.

The second story, again, from a woman. A hard core environmental activist. She is on a beach in Australia with her uncle. She is explaining to him that because of her concern about global warming she will not be getting on a plane again and flying from Canada to visit. They can visit over Skype. The uncle says to her, "If you love me you will get on the plane." A very emotional moment with someone you love. A big moment. Again, this opened up a terrific exploration about the barriers to changing our behaviour – how we are and can be with each other – in the face of what is coming because of climate change.

So stories will be offered. We will hear the three stories and you will vote for the story that resonates with you the most. So...I want to be clear about something. "What's your name" (I ask this of someone in the front row). If this person offers a story and the room chooses their story, they will be here with me as themselves for the rest of the event. I don't want you getting into something you are not prepared for.

Having said this, please understand, we are not here to do a psychoanalysis of the storyteller. She will take a lot from the event, but the story will quickly become a symbol much larger than the original story – an "image" that the whole room owns.

We will dramatize the story on the stage. If it involves a second character, someone from the audience will come to play that character. Not to make fun of or satirize the character, but to honour the other character. Not a lot will be asked of the other character – it is just to set up the scene. So we will see the story on the stage. I will, as a theatre director, be looking for 'that moment' when I can see in the storyteller's eyes, the messages of corporations are active, and I will say "freeze"! in this moment are the messages of Corporations in your head giving you advice that is unhealthy for you?" Yes? OK, from now on we are frozen in this millisecond for the rest of the event.

You can't speak. Please don't explain, but the theatre is a physical language. You can use your body. Make a shape of what the loudest message is telling out. A shape that communicates what the message wants you to do. The person will make a shape and I will ask you, the audience, "who recognizes this shape"? Lots of hands will go up. "Who can come here and take on the shape and with my help, turn the shape into a character – for the rest of the event?" Lots of hands will go down. But someone will come. Why would this person come to play a shape from inside the storyteller's head? Not because he knows what is inside her head, but because he recognizes the shape.

I am one of the very early people who was involved in the Vancouver wing of Theatre Sports. I really enjoy what that is – but it is not what we are here to do this evening. Please do not come onto the stage to play improvisation games. Come onto the stage because you have information to share.

Another message, another shape, another person; another message, another shape, another person. We are going to people the stage with the messages from inside the storyteller's head. Then we are going to turn the messages into characters. We are going to have them do "internal monologues" (I will help) to understand some of the things they are saying. Then, we are going to brand them. We

know which brands they are. And then, because I've discovered something doing this, we are going to identify their personal relationship to us.

Why do some messages stick to us more than others? One of the reasons is that we attach very personal relationships in our lives to the messaging. Mom, dad, brother, auntie, etc. And so we are going to understand how the messages are characters. And then using interactive techniques of Forum Theatre, we are going to work on the messages one at a time.

The storyteller will play a scene with the message character and, if you have an idea, on behalf of the storyteller, that could change our relationship to the corporate messaging, you are going to yell "stop". The action will stop. You will come out of the audience area, come here into the playing area, take the storyteller's place and try your idea. I am framing this invitation in a particular way, to "change the relationship". Why? Because I think it is unrealistic to expect that corporations are just going to stop communicating with us – that is going to continue – so asking for ideas to shut them up is a waste of our time. But asking for ideas so that we can change our relationship to the messaging, so that we can live healthier lives and build healthier families and communities is something we can do.

So this is the structure of the event. I said we'd do a warm-up and that was true and so...please, this will take just two minutes, it is fun, it will get you out of your seats and help you understand the event tonight. Everyone, please, out of your seats and find a partner – any partner will do. This is going to involve pushing against each other a little bit. And then we did the "pushing" part of the "balancing" game. Here is a copy/paste of the directions from my book, *Theatre for Living*: (<http://www.theatreforliving.com/tflbook/tflbook.htm>)

Take a partner – any partner will do. Stand facing each other and place your hands on each other's shoulders, and push. Really push. Use your muscles. One of you is going to be stronger than the other. That's life. The person who is less strong, push harder. The person who is stronger, push less hard. Don't try to push each other over. This isn't about winning or losing. The idea is to find the balance of strength between the two of you. Do this without speaking. Have the conversation with your bodies. You should always be moving. Don't just lean against each other, push!

Use different parts of your bodies. And again. And again.

(There was always a great deal of excitement and laughter doing this.)

OK. We have entered a theatrical space now in which everything is symbolic. So, I am going to ask you to think about this pushing we just did. Is there any symbolism that emerges from the pushing game that helps you reflect on your own struggles with corporate messaging?

Every night was different of course, of things people said that repeated over many events included:

- The messages push against me and I push back;
- I feel overwhelmed by the strength of the messages;
- Using different parts of my body (different parts of me) I find it easier or more difficult to push back and stay centered;
- I think I may be addicted to the pushing itself – to the fight;
- I wonder what happens if I just stop pushing – stop engaging;

...and many more insights, I am sure.

There is also another reason why we've done this exercise. I'm asking you to think about the level of engagement that was necessary to actually use your muscles and push against each other. The theatre is not two people standing beside each other simply exchanging intellectual concepts. The theatre is a physical, psychological and emotional language. If you come into this event tonight, please, come to engage at this deep a level. Come with information to share. Come, giving yourself the permission to feel.

OK. Stories. I am looking for three of you who are willing to offer stories out of your own lives. Not friends lives, not relatives lives, not the movies – your lives. A story of a moment when you had to make a decision about something and in that decision-making moment, you know the messages of corporations are in your head, giving you advice that you know is unhealthy for you.

And then I'd wait. Most often the stories came very quickly, as in immediately. Waiting a long time meant waiting a minute, or maybe 90 seconds. An eternity of silence in the theatre, but in reality, not long at all.

Vancouver #1

Thursday, October 10, 2013

Sponsor: Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House

Venue: Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House

Capacity: 80 attendance: 46 % of House: 58%

This was the 'kick-off' for the project. We went into the evening with 58 reservations and had a very high 'no-show rate', considering at least 8 or 10 people were 'walk-ins'...people without reservations. While the number is a disappointment, the audience was very receptive, and NOT because they were friends; I recognized very few of the faces.

This was also our first time getting the event "up". The MPNH stage is very old and quite 'wavy'. Two feet high, it has no stairs. We had to rent stairs today – that kind of juggling going on...still Dorothy, Dafne some people from MPNH and I got the lights, sound, stairs, seats, etc. done fairly quickly – it taking some time to figure out the sound board. But these things are done now.

I am playing with the introduction – I think it could be a little more playful still – I was a bit tentative starting off tonight – trying to find the right order of things. I can do this all I want on my own, but the real test is with people who have never heard it before. I can only do that at the events.

The chosen story: a woman is in Paris, walking down the street, and stops at a store window. There are beautiful shoes inside the window and she LOVES shoes – but she can't afford these shoes.

The voices: Adidas (her ex-boyfriend) – buy them....you will look amazing
Chanel (her older sister) – I want you to have the real thing, and this is Paris!

Mastercard (her younger sister) – just spend the money.

The audience really enjoyed both the branding and also the idea that we attach the brands to people in our lives who have influence over us. I'm quite pleased with this discovery – it really helps make sense of the evening and also has deep resonance for people in their real lives.

Interventions came fairly easily – one of the interesting ones with Adidas was to just walk away – of course Adidas followed the intervener around the room. This opened up a valuable conversation about how we manage to 'walk away' even though we know the messaging is not going to stop. It is OK for it to remain in our ears....is it the case that with time the voice gets quieter? Many believe this is true. In order to accomplish this, though, we must be prepared to end a possibly addictive relationship.

Chanel was very seductive and an intervention that resonates with me was a young man who embraced the character – (older sister) and tried on her shoes and tried to explain that he loved the shoes but they were just not for him. He 'made friends' with Chanel....a 'voice' that wants him to 'look good', but insisted on following those directions on his own terms.

Mastercard was problematic tonight – sometimes this happens. The woman playing the character just didn't understand 'the game'. She wanted to be inside the character and be the activist solving the problem and so she would not 'push' against anyone in a scene. I had explained this in some detail but it obviously did not resonate with her. Some of the people in the audience were urging me in non-verbal ways to get someone else to play the role, but this would have been undermining. What I managed to do was take the one short improvisation that happened and create a longer than usual 'dialogue' about it. A young woman had yelled stop and asked for audience members to come and help her resist the advances of Mastercard. No one would, except the friend who was there with her. This opened up a great conversation about community support to live healthier lives in relation to debt...to living beyond our means...to responding to our real needs instead of our wants.

Why, inside the context of the weird theatre event we were making, would no one other than her friend come onto the stage when she asked for help? The responses were fascinating: she is asking us to do something she should do on her own! (the message, of course, of the very individualistic culture in which we live); her problem is not my problem (again...the isolation that makes 'community' very difficult); I don't want to leave my very safe comfort zone.... But how many of us recognize that with 'community' around us we are more capable of dealing with the stresses of the corporate messages that wash over us daily? Almost everyone. A real truth in the room.

The feedback from the event was very positive – I was a bit swamped after. A man from Switzerland who does Forum Theatre, very appreciative of the approach that does not contain the binary model – he really recognized this. A few young people from Mexico who were very, very taken with the work and how it creates very personal investigation and change.

I took another step tonight into relaxing with this idea. The more fun I can have the better it will be, but I don't trust the process just yet. Still finding my way. It is a very 'new' idea.

"My husband and I attended ***Corporations in our Heads*** in Vancouver, and left the space feeling inspired, invigorated, and connected to our community. The genuine dialogue, honest emotions, unexpected insights, and true engagement that we experienced at this theatre event was, for us, nourishment and reminder of our humanity and of our privileges and responsibilities in our world, as hollow and superficial as that world can feel sometimes. The variety of ages, lifestyles, and cultural backgrounds represented in the audience speaks to the fact that Theatre for Living is providing an opportunity for community connection and recognition that is sorely needed by all of us. *Corporations in our Heads* was entertaining, cathartic, and most of all, enriching in long-lasting ways. Thank you for your continued work!"
Caitlin Kopperson, Vancouver BC

"Indeed ***Corporations in our Heads*** is theatre, as it is entertainment, but it is also intelligent, provocative and important. It makes you think as you are being entertained but it doesn't easily let you off the hook."

Betty Gilgoff, [PAGE BC \(http://www.pagebc.ca/Theatre-for-Living-Review.php \)](http://www.pagebc.ca/Theatre-for-Living-Review.php)

Vancouver #2

Friday, October 11, 2013

Sponsor: Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House

Venue: Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House

Capacity: 80 attendance: 79 % of House: 99%

Nice to have a full house. I wanted to 'insert' the concept of patterns of behaviour and structure into the opening but I think it made it too long. The opening felt a little like a lecture from my end – although a couple of people at the end commented on how they loved it. Hard balance to find.

The story the room chose was from a woman who cried throughout the telling of the story. Interestingly, it is 'similar' to last night's story.

She is in American Apparel with her boyfriend. They are looking at clothes. She sees some pink pants and he says "ANY girl wearing pink pants like that....mmm hmmm!" The corporate voices in her head are raging.

Victoria's Secret (best friend)	You need to look like me if you want to be valued.
Facebook (grandmother)	You don't add up to your friends, you need to try harder
LG (lover)	you are hollow, empty inside and need to connect

Victoria's Secret was beautifully played by a young woman. This led to a discussion about body image and that it is both a male and female struggle. So much of the room related to this and the desire to be loved for who we are...the way we are...without the filters of media imposed on us and the people around us.

The intervention with LG (lover) led to a beautiful understanding of looking our fears in the eye – a very emotional improvisation from a young woman who insisted on confronting the message that she has to fill some 'void' in her life with a phone and texting and screens instead of actual flesh

and blood relationships with people. This segment made the audience very, very quiet and a lot of reflection.

The improvisations with Grandmother Facebook led to a lot of laughter while a young man ran around the room trying to escape the Corporation – that just kept chasing him. Another young man came and told Grandmother off....not only are you wrong about me having to compete with my friends, but you have no power over me. Lots of applause. In discussion I reminded him that he had just said this to his grandmother. Deep silence. Then he said, well....this is also my grandmother. How many of us had a parent or grandparent who gave us these messages? Half the room raised their hands.

This led to me saying something I don't say in public often – that just because someone is old, doesn't make them wise. The statement, surprisingly, got applause. What gives you the power to say this to your grandmother? 'I know she is wrong, and being my grandmother doesn't make her right.'

The feedback at the end of the evening was wonderful – people saying they had gained a perspective on their own relationships with their own corporate voices and also appreciation for the idea that we connect the corporate messaging to individuals in our lives.

....and away we go to Nanaimo.....

"Just back from ***Corporations in our Heads***. So profound, and masterful. Got me thinking once again about a subject that I spend most of my time pushing to one side out of frustration and resignation. Also reconnected me at a deeply human level to what is actually occurring within us as we acquiesce to corporate messages."

Charley Lyons Friday, Oct 11, 2013

"***Corporations in our Heads*** (was an) incredible theatre experience. David Diamond ignited the audience with questions about what it means to us when we allow ourselves to be inundated with corporate messages. (He) charmingly invited us to enter a metaphorical space where we look critically at the corporate 'voice' that is created and occupies our thoughts. As an audience member, you will come away with a renewed appreciation and a more critical engagement with the corporate messages we are inundated with. It's cathartic and provocative."

Roslyn Tam, [Vancouver Observer](http://www.vancouverobserver.com/culture/theatre/corporations-our-heads)

(<http://www.vancouverobserver.com/culture/theatre/corporations-our-heads>), Oct. 18, 2013

Nanaimo

Wednesday, October 16, 2013

Sponsor: VIU Faculty Association

Venue: Malaspina Theatre

Capacity: 100 (but actually 300) attendance: 82 % of House: 82%

This was really hard work tonight. I think we are actually on tour now. Eliza, the central organizer, did a great job. This project is, I think, a hard sell. "no play, no actors, no script". The theatre really seats 300, but we were never going to have that many attend. We blocked off both sides. But 82 people, a respectful number, in a 300 seat space feels quite empty. Something to feel good about: now that we are on tour, this is REALLY pioneering work.

The story: a young woman is working for a grocery chain at minimum wage. She feels she “deserves better” (the title of the story) and quits, giving a month notice. Her employer tries to get her to stay. In that moment, there are corporate voices in her head.

The Corporate Messages

Jenny Craig (ex-boyfriend) I want you to realize things aren’t going to get better, in fact they may get worse. She (the employer) will find someone to replace you.

Tampax (Mother) I want you to stay; I’m afraid you will fail; stay here where it is comfortable.

Lululemon (Grandmother) I want you to not let everyone down – don’t disappoint people; I’m afraid you will feel bad about yourself because you will never make it.

There were challenges tonight. In the end, I don’t think the young woman whose story we did ever fully understand the concept of messages from Corporations. Dorothy thinks, and I agree, that she just agreed with me, or chose a brand that she heard from the audience that she thought would be interesting. Why do I think this? Because it was very hard to make the connections....does Jenny Craig tell us things are not going to get better?? Quite the opposite. Jenny sells hope. I mentioned that every evening so far has had LuluLemon (when an audience member suggested it) and she chose that brand saying “I want you to not let everyone down”. Is this was LuluLemon tells us? In the end, of course, I just had to go with it – it would have been far too disruptive to try to reconfigure.

Two of the voices understood the concept but the third (Jenny Craig) did not. The man taking the shape kept trying but he was very difficult....I had some learning through this tonight:

1. when asking for the story, ask for something current that has NOT been resolved...something the storyteller is actually struggling with. The storyteller having resolved this issue really weakened the event;
2. tell the voices in clear language that when they come up with their sentences, “I want”...that I want them to remember the sentences and be able to repeat them. This seems like it shouldn’t be necessary, but it really was tonight;
3. cut the request for a sentence that begins with “I’m afraid....”. This is not the first night people have found this confusing.

So...it all sounds rough but there were some nice moments tonight:

A young woman intervened with the grandmother/LuluLemon message and did a kind of clown work...rolling around over the grandmother, using her as a pillow. In discussion this became a

description of how one can reshape the energy. We can “buy in” to the message just far enough for it to benefit us, but not so far as to have it control us. This isn’t about being in denial that the messages are bombarding us, but about realizing that, embracing the reality, not wasting energy “fighting” it...trying to defeat it, but using what energy we can from it to benefit us. Very subversive.

When we were winding up people had some important things to say. One man mentioned that many times in the evening people had talked about fear and he wanted us to understand how important it is NOT to be afraid to fail and that Corporate Messages often caution us against failure, making new discoveries and progress impossible. Others mentioned that this event had really opened their eyes to the very fact that corporations are affecting their lives in ways they hadn’t thought about.

“*Corporations in our Heads* was excellent!! What a great way to learn! Two points I came away with: Fail. And be okay with it because that's the inside of the wonton! And use your common sense to determine wants vs. needs. There were a thousand gems to glean from *Corporations in our Heads*.”
Natalia Hautala, Nanaimo, BC

Duncan

Thursday, October 17, 2013

Sponsor: VIU Faculty Association

Venue: VIU Cowichan Lecture Hall

Capacity: 70 attendance: 32 % of House: 46%

Our sponsor had a feeling there would not be many people tonight. Interestingly, audience members who came thought there had been very little networking. It was certainly the smallest house so far, and I hope the smallest for the whole tour. A small audience makes for harder work.

So, a small house but, as Dorothy points out, very aware and engaged. The story:

A young woman is in NY for her first time. She wants a certain pair of sunglasses and goes to Saks on Fifth Ave and...there they are. She knows she wants them because a ‘star’ she idolizes wears them – even though she doesn’t like the sunglasses. She pays \$300 for them. This story was chosen by a landslide.

The Corporate messages

Vogue (younger sister)	I want you to be divine, thin and beautiful!
Rhianna (best girlfriend)	I want you to claim your inner glamour, girl. You’ll be seen and heard. You live at the fashion edge.
New York (professor organizing the trip)	I want you to be happy!!! This will make your whole trip better.

The people playing the voices ‘got the exercise’ much more deeply than last night and this was great. Their engagement level was much appreciated.

A young man who came to the Level 1 training this year was at the event tonight and after, he told me that the greatest thing for him tonight was watching me do something he knows I am uncertain of, because mostly he sees me function in a real comfort zone. I am wondering if there isn't a clue in this....to include in the introduction that this is a grand experiment...developing a new technique...some of it will work and some will not....and welcome the audience to the experiment. This might take the pressure off of what seems like an expectation of 'product' in the evening. It might free ME up.⁷

One of the most interesting things tonight (in my mind) was early on when a man came up and put the glasses down, insisted he would not buy them, but go to the bar instead. This opened up a conversation about filling holes in our lives and addiction. The story-teller admitted at this point that indeed, she had 30 pairs of sunglasses!! How many of us recognize the addictive behaviour and how corporations reinforce it? Many.

Another thing of interest was how often people came into Saks, took the story-teller's place and TALKED about putting the sunglasses down and leaving – but never did. I asked the audience what the sunglasses were for them: Holidays, a car, a home, self-image...

Finally, a man actually left and of course the voice [I believe it was the Rhianna Corporation (this was also a good thing, recognizing that "stars" are also corporations with messages)] followed him onto the "sidewalk"...then up the stairs of the lecture hall...until finally he picked up a chair to defend himself!

This opened up a conversation about whether or not it is OK to live with the voices...to discover and acknowledge that they are there and to enter into the dialogue – this being better than not recognizing it is happening at all.

This brings me to a man and woman who left half-way through. Early on he started to suggest that we were immediately demonizing corporations and they are not all bad. I agreed with him wholeheartedly...I had in fact mentioned this in the introduction. THIS event is about altering our relationships with the corporate messaging that is unhealthy for us, I explained. When I asked people to warm up and push against each other – this man asked his partner to stand up and he started kissing her...an act of rebellion, I think. ;). I commented on his action because it interested me, but he wouldn't respond. They stayed until the mid-point and then left. I wish they would have stayed and done interventions....hard to know what was going on there. It is frustrating when someone only offers complaints from their seat at an event that relies on active participation. His perspective was welcome, but he wouldn't "play".

At the end people commented about things they could take away – the above comment about simply realizing the voices are there, again, the idea that we connect corporate messages to people

⁷ I did this for about half the tour. And it did take the pressure off. At some point, can't remember where exactly, it didn't seem relevant or necessary anymore and I stopped.

in our lives, really resonated with some in a totally new way.

As I have written this it dawns on me that the event went better than it felt. I say this because in the midst of it I realized I am already really tired. At about the 2 hour mark I was very fatigued. These are really hard work. We have another two in a row in Victoria and then a little time. I have to find a way to pace myself.

Victoria #1

Friday, October 18, 2013

Sponsor: Praxis Theatre Collective

Venue: David Lam Auditorium, U Vic

Capacity: 150 attendance: 102 % of House: 68%

This may have been the best event so far. A very engaged audience, very energizing.

The organizers are TfL Alumni and really understand the work. They were worried about attendance, but 102 is very good.

The chosen story: is “buy nothing day”...sponsored by Adbusters. The woman is very involved in these issues and has ‘respected’ this day before. Today, she feels kind of depressed and ‘wants something’ and nothing she has at home will do. She walks down the block to the local Safeway, enters, stands at the chocolate counter....and the corporate messages come to life...

The Corporate Messages:

Ford Motors (the “Boss”) I want you to take this deal of the day. You will feel so much better if you take this multi-buy discount. The more indecisive you are, the less likely you are to take positive action.

Maybeline (Pastor) (also GreenPeace) I want you to feel ashamed of yourself. The worse you feel the more you will consume.

“Super” Walmart (spouse) I want you to give in because you are helpless – you can’t resist your animal desires. You are small, what you do doesn’t matter.

There were so many wonderful moments tonight. Tonight was fun. It is possible that something I changed in the introduction helped this:

I explained that I am inventing a new technique and that I understand that people might want to

believe I know what I am doing, (and to a degree I do) but they are also part of an evolving experiment. I want them to know this so we can be in the experiment together. Let's all experiment together.

The woman playing Ford was terrific. She understood the sales pitch that insists that we cannot resist a bargain. But really interesting to me was the Maybeline Pastor, who was really Greenpeace. This young woman wanted her character to be Greenpeace...she got branded by the storyteller as Maybeline, but in the end, she played an evangelical Greenpeace and I honoured that, which she really appreciated. Greenpeace a Corporation that gives us bad advice??? Yes. This was the first time this has come up – the grassroots organization, founded in Vancouver, that we want to love who has itself become the very corporate entity it was born fighting against. Many people agreed we still support and want to love Greenpeace....and that it has become an insular corporate entity that shames people into giving it money, which is a very negative and self-serving way to try to build a movement. It was very courageous and valuable to bring this perspective to the stage.

There was (as seems to be the case each night) an “odd one”...a young man playing the third voice – Walmart...went off and wrote a script for himself on his phone while we worked on the other voices. He then wanted to read the script, instead of playing any kind of emotional scene. It occurred to me in the midst of it that this was a kind of gift. The larger the corporation the more they actually do have a script. What happens if we take away the script? Ignore the script? Refuse to go by the script they have predetermined?

Feedback after is that (once again) people were very struck with the idea that we attach corporate messages to people in our lives. I am very pleased this is resonating with audiences. And also that patterns of behaviour create and sustain structures.

We had good help getting in and out of the venue. I also got told, by a young woman, that I was very handsome.....;).....this was, of course, the most important part of the evening.

“Thanks, Theatre for Living for *Corporations in Our Heads* last night in Victoria. I loved the whole process.”

Randi Edmundson, Victoria, BC

“I thought the *Corporations in our Heads* event was very informative, engaging, and impactful. I can't say I noticed that three hours went by! I wish I could have seen the second performance on the Saturday to see how that went and what changed; I very much look forward to any new performances of this kind that come to town.”

Miranda Harvey, Victoria, BC

Victoria #2

Saturday, Oct 19, 2013

Sponsor: Praxis Theatre Collective

Venue: Metropolitan Church

Capacity: 100 attendance: 74 74% of House:

In case anyone is wondering how I am managing to remember the voices and relationships, Dorothy (Stage Manager) and I have worked out a system. As she has no cues to call, she is taking

notes about the branding, the character and the core sentences, then we have a debrief after the show. (Which also involves a glass of wine...;))

A nice audience again although I have to say a disappointment that it didn't 'grow' from the previous night. Also, although feedback was wonderful (one of the organizers thought tonight was better than last night), tonight was also harder to get going. The young man whose story was chosen was very hard to work with – I had great difficulty helping him understand what I was asking him to do in terms of anything that was self-reflective or engaged at an emotional level: engage in a scene emotionally, think about the messages in his own head and manifest them as shapes. I revamped, on the fly, how the process unfolds and started asking more of the audience and people who were coming onto the stage, putting less and less decision-making power in his hands. This may have been a gift, as it also helped the voices be more clear, and own the characters more.⁸

I had hoped the audience would choose a story offered by an older man about his struggle with his doctor over being prescribed more and more drugs – it was really courageous and different. The voting was fairly evenly split between the 3 stories but in the end, the audience chose this one:

The story: the young man is in his 3rd year of Engineering. He is in the computer lab after hours working on his own project – a strobe light suit. He has other work he could be doing for class, the workload is heavy, but this project is what really excites him. A young woman (also in Engineering) comes and asks him what he is doing. He explains and she aggressively questions why he is wasting his time on such a frivolous project.

The Corporate messages in his head:

The Government of Canada (father) I want you to bend to the pressure of society.

Google (mother) I want you to believe you can have it all. (On the surface this might sound very supportive, but in this context it is undermining – asking him to turn the thing he loves into the thing he is reacting against...something that is just fun into something that is profit driven, to get the best clothes, the most expensive cars, homes...)

Insurance Company (Associate Dean of the Faculty) I want you to do something important before you die.

When the storyteller made the shapes they were very vague and I couldn't get him to place them anywhere specific. I ended up putting this in the hands of the Messages themselves, once they had offered to play the messages. I may keep this. (I didn't.)

Some interesting moments:

⁸ In fact, this difficulty was a great gift as it was a big step in turning Boal's *Cops in the Head* inside out and putting more control in the hands of the audience. This night was evolutionary.

A 'reconciliation' moment with the Gov. of Canada (father) character that felt very loving until we scratched the surface of it. The Father hugs his son and says "I love you just the way you are" (subtext) now that you have agreed with me to bend to the pressure of society.

A very surprising moment of violence (in slow motion) against Google Mother. A young woman came onto the stage and as the mother tried to convince her 'son' to adopt values he does not want, the young woman started to beat up the mother, who throughout the beating never stopped trying to convince the 'son'.

In discussion this led me to make a parallel to what is in the news right now: the Mi'kmaq resistance to fracking in their territory (in New Brunswick) and the potential destruction of their water supply. We see the violence on the news. I heard a great interview with a Mi'kmaq Chief who said (paraphrasing):

'We live on a postage stamp compared to our traditional territories. We have nothing. And now they want to destroy our water. We do not want violence. When is enough, enough?'

This really brought the personal story into the National realm and helped us (I know because there was feedback) think about the corporate control of the news we get – the perspective that gives us 'violent Indians' in NB. It felt like a good "Corporations in our Heads" moment in that it accomplished what I imagine the technique can accomplish – move from the personal to the systemic.

"I found the *Corporations in our Heads* process to be inspiring and engaging." Tasha Diamant, Victoria BC

"I had a great time at *Corporations in our Heads!* It was informative, inspirational and relevant." Rev. Beth Walker, Victoria BC

"I wanted to share with you how much I appreciate what you are doing with your theatre, the critical literacies with which you are engaging your audience as participants, and to express my tribulations for the tremendous psycho-theatrical feat that you are facilitating on the stage with *Corporations in our Heads.*"

Darren Alexander, Victoria, BC

Tofino

Tuesday, October 22, 2013

Sponsor: Clayoquot Action

Venue: Clayoquot Community Theatre

Capacity: 72 attendance: 36 50% of House:

This was the most difficult event so far – a surprise, as I thought Tofino would be fun, really engaged, and a full house. The theatre community didn't come, the activist community didn't come.

People did say, though, that this is the "new Tofino" and that I might have been expecting the "old Tofino". Evidently, great documentary films come, and talkbacks are organized. People come to

the film and no one stays for the talkback. Community meetings happen and no one participates in discussion. Audience members were not surprised by the walls of silence tonight.

The chosen story got named, "How Sweet It Is". This won by an overwhelming majority. The storyteller is in the Co-op Grocery with his partner. They are at the sugar, and it is on sale. He wants to buy many bags and she tries to convince him to buy only one. His starting point is that the sugar is already a metaphor, which is one of the things that made this difficult. The sugar (or something) needed to be real.

The Corporate voices:

Visa (wife)	I want you to spend money (holding a \$100);
Nestlé (old girlfriend)	I want you to choose me, I am better than sugar, more attractive;
Coke (childhood friend)	I want you to eat more sugar so you will be happy

What is the sugar for you? (I asked the audience). Travelling, gadgets, sex, alcohol, eating, TV, surfing the web, escapism, supporting the economy. I latched onto how sugar (metaphorically in this scene) is also the idea that we create jobs by sacrificing the environment...this is, actually, something to which we are addicted.

Getting the Protagonist to play a scene 'straight' was really difficult. He kept trying to make things funny and this led to a lack of commitment, depth. The problem with this is that if the character doesn't care...if nothing is at stake...why should anyone care? This isn't the first time this has happened. I need to crack this problem – the event is relying on people with no acting experience, not even a workshop prior.

There were some interesting moments. A woman yelled stop in the scene with Nestlé. She left the stage, the voice followed. She went into the audience to sit with a friend and started a conversation with him about things that matter to her – not eating more sugar. She allows the voice to remain in her ear, accepts it there....and carries on with doing what she wants. The voice panics...she isn't fighting back, she isn't engaging at all. How hard is this to do? People agree we are very addicted to whatever our 'sugar' is...having community helps. But 'new' Tofino feels so disjointed. People agree that a challenge here is to actually (re)build a sense of community, when a good 60% of the population at any given moment is transient.

Interventions with Coke, our childhood friend, led to a conversation about having to get out of deep relationships in order to be healthy. What kinds of relationships? Relationships with travelling, with a traditional political party, with an employer, with a sense inside ourselves that we are helpless.

The organizers and the man who runs the theatre were very appreciative of the work and figure that there will be things bubbling out there...we shall see if anything comes back.

Campbell River

Thursday, October 24, 2013

Sponsor: North Island College (NIC) and NIC Faculty Association
 Venue: NIC Theatre
 Capacity: 80 attendance: 44 55% of House

Another very small house, although Dorothy says the energy of tonight was much friendlier and more engaged than last night – and that I was more relaxed and had more fun. Honestly, it is getting hard for me to know. People did come out of the audience at the end and say they thought the event “had been brilliant”.

I am seeing a pattern, now that we have left Vancouver. It is harder now to get the people who come inside the event to engage emotionally in the scenes. What makes the Forum Theatre in main stage projects where we have a play so powerful? People HAVE to yell ‘stop’ and make interventions. Why? Because of the level of emotional engagement in the drama. This is not happening in these events. Getting people to engage at that level is so hard, regardless of how I am framing it, cajoling it, etc. So when it comes time for interventions, if the scenes are intellectual exercises, there is very little impulse to intervene because nothing is really at stake for the characters. When interventions do happen they are often intellectual responses to intellectualized scenes.

Dorothy thinks that it is a function of time, that the people engaging just don’t have the time in a 2.5 hour event to dig into the emotional content. This may be true, but I recall in *2^o of Fear and Desire* and *Us and Them (the inquiry)* that there WAS emotional engagement and so...what is it? Is Vancouver more emotionally literate? Is *Corporations in our Heads* too intellectual a topic?

Its all OK, I guess, but the theatre animal in me wants the events to be the best theatre they can be. I think they are being really good social action, social dialogue etc., but I am not satisfied with the theatricality.

I’ve heard from so many people now about how courageous the tour is...so brave. This is true, I think, to be on the road with something this experimental.

The chosen story was called: Good Parenting vs Good Budget. A young mother is in Walmart, a place she really hates because of its business practices. Why is she there? Because she wants to buy the best food for her 4 year old son and they have by far the cheapest “organic” food. She particularly wants their organic blueberries that are on sale.

The Corporate Messages:

Walmart (Mother) I want you to trust that Walmart is OK – it’s a good company. You don’t need to feel guilty;

Johnson and Johnson (insecure, “bad/GOOD” friend) I want you to relax, don’t worry, nobody will know – everyone else is doing it!

Monsanto (husband) I want you to purchase these blueberries and obtain optimum health for your family. Enjoy them...you want them.

What the blueberries were for rest of the audience: cheap underwear, pension plan, better truck than the other guy, LuluLemon (once again!) free run eggs, driving in the car....and many other things.

Moments that stuck to us:

The Monsanto husband was the most engaged and understandable. A heated argument started in which the "wife" refused to "want" the blueberries – she went and grew her own. Of course we are in a symbolic place, not everyone can grow blueberries, let alone all year round. But what does it mean to say 'no' to Monsanto? Many people had no idea what Monsanto is doing in the world, copywriting seeds, genetic engineering and what it means to farmers and to the rest of us. And also what it means to not buy "agribusiness" food, but support local, small farmers and producers. The Monsanto character was furious...both the company and the "husband"...the master of the house.

We talked about how people in small towns can support each other in economic ways that do not rely on big business. Bartering, etc.

We also opened up a conversation about emotion and how, in my observation, it is becoming 'illegal' to display emotion in public...and maybe also in private. When I asked if people knew what I meant (in their own lives) a remarkable number raised their hands. Why? Can this possibly be healthy?

Concrete things people take away: the realization that being inside this struggle (with corporate messaging) is not a sign of weakness; it is OK to talk about and is not "flaky". This is the first time I have heard this and may also explain (partly) the small houses. Admitting this is a real thing is deemed to be flaky!! If one 'comes out' about it, then one can find others (like all of us) who are also experiencing the same struggle and we can support each other. This seems to basic, but here, tonight, it was a very big insight.

I had an interesting email exchange about last night with Bill Roxborough (an old friend and Board Member) and while responding, it occurred to me that once we HAVE the Brand (i.e. the character is Walmart) then we have to not focus on that so much, but focus on the relationship (**Mother/Walmart**) and in analyzing the actions later, bring it back to the brand. People may be running into trying to play the corporation too much and this may be what is what is getting in their way.

Courtenay

Friday, October 25, 2013

Sponsor: North Island College Faculty Association

Venue: Stan Hagan Theatre

Capacity: 100 attendance: 75 75% of House

A better turnout here and (not meaning to be negative) if 75 is a 'large house' on the tour, I think we may have a problem. It appears that so far the publicity some (not all) sponsors are doing for this event are very much inside their own networks (ie, in this case, inside the University community) and not to the general public. When we were setting up, our central organizer here was saying he was hoping for 40 or 50 people. This is setting the bar quite low.

One of the reasons I say this about the University is because when we checked into the hotel we got to chatting with the Desk Clerk. When I showed him the project brochure he was very, very interested and would have attended, but was working. He had heard/seen nothing at all about the project coming to town. He offered to let all his friends know, immediately, as he was sure they would also be interested.

Liza (Outreach Coordinator) did some (last minute) remote networking having Googled agencies in town and asked them to help network. We need to do this for every event, 4 or 6 days prior to the event. The audience tonight was very friendly, though, engagement was high.

I put the 'relationship' in the hands of the person playing the role tonight, and this worked I think. Emotional engagement was deeper for all the voices. This was a systemic breakthrough for me, in that it is very contrary to Boal's way of doing this work. Everything comes from the Protagonist, because it all focuses on the oppressed⁹. I am finding more and more that the power of the work is that it is "ours" not one person's. And so broadening out who makes the decisions about how things unfold on the stage makes more and more sense.

The story - Sonya¹⁰ and the flyers: Sonya is living in a new apartment building with her boyfriend. Environmental issues are really important to her and she resents all the flyers she is getting in the mail. She asks the caretaker if he can do something about the flyers and he can't. He explains to her that the flyers may not be bad, as they keep Canada Post in business. Without the advertising of corporations, Canada Post would go under.

We put the improvisation up and I had to (for the first time) redirect the 'other character'...in this case the caretaker. He started trying to help Sonya ...trying to solve the problem. It was very entertaining, but it also ate up a lot of time. THEN, when I froze the moment, I asked Sonya about the corporate messages in her head. "What?" she said....as if she had never heard this before. I checked in with her and restated the directions that I'd said at least 3 times at this point and she started talking about what she felt about the flyers....and that 'she felt it was possible to create a space around her, a small space, in which to be centred and from that centred place'.... I had to interrupt her as she had spoken for minutes without answering my question about whether the messages were in her head. The audience was on edge....it was very quiet. She just stood and stared at me. Then, I realized that in this instance, she didn't need to understand. The story-teller in

⁹ When it comes to the messages of corporations in our heads, we are all equally targeted and in layered ways, all the oppressed, whether we are aware of the process or not.

¹⁰ Not the story-teller's real name.

the exercise just needed to make a shape. OK – make a shape of what you are feeling in the moment, she made a shape. Then I asked the audience if they could identify corporate messaging in this shape. Yes!....can anyone come and play the shape?....and someone came.

I don't want to do the technique this way all the time, as I think the request to 'make a shape of what you are feeling' at this moment in the exercise is quite vague – and the more specific we can be setting things up the better, but it was a further step in accessing the consciousness in the room. Sonya "got it" after this and provided another shape. And then one came from the audience.

Corporate Messages

Exxon (Boss) I want you to just give in and stop trying to fight. Resistance is futile.

Sony (boyfriend) I want you to quite fighting the modern world. You are living in the past. Its time you lived with the way things are going.

Shopper's Drug Mart (Mother – standing on a chair) I want you to accept that we are sending you these flyers to make your life better. Be different than you are.

Interesting moments for me:

The emotional engagement was higher. I really hammered away at this in the introduction and also made a point of saying, 'OK...we know this is Shoppers' Drug Mart – we can come to that later. For now, when you play the scene, be "mother". Etc.

A young woman replaced Sonya and got up on the chair with the Mother/Shoppers Drug Mart and after a short confrontation, told her she loved her but that she needed to be her own person, and hugged her. We froze in this moment and in secret thoughts heard that neither of them really trusted the moment – it was theatre.

I realize now that I missed bringing the questioning back to Shoppers – this was an error on my part, but goes hand in hand with experimenting so much. I think the instinct to make it personal is a good one, it makes the improvising work, but I have to remember to bring it back to the Corporate, otherwise we are not doing what we came together to do.

Another woman came (with Mother/Shoppers) and sat on the floor and meditated. The stage was quiet for a long time. Shoppers said, from on top of the chair, 'its OK, I can wait.' The woman stood and walked over to a desk and sat very quietly. Shoppers came over, off the chair and stood beside her. What was going on here was an emotional DISengagement with the Corporate Message. This was only possible (to disengage) because there had been engagement. It was a very powerful moment and opened up a discussion with the audience.

About 50% thought it had been effective and 50% not. Why not? Because it didn't DO anything...change anything, some said. Why was it effective? Because it disengaged. This was a very rich moment for people and was brought up later, that the audience could split and see the same moment so differently. We talked about meditation and how it can cleanse one's consciousness – not quickly, but slowly – increment by increment and that this has real relevance to changing our relationships with corporate messaging.

We didn't have time to do the third message. The first time this had happened for me – a result of the first improvisation and then getting the making of the messages started having taken so long. We also started about 10 minutes late and ending at 9:30 (2.5 hours) seems like a really good goal. The man playing the third voice was fine with this and approached me later to say how much he had loved the event.

There was a lot of appreciation after the event and interest in bringing the work to Courtenay for various other kinds of projects. The man at the hotel desk says a few of his friends did end up going to the event because of his message to them and were raving about it on Facebook.

Prince Rupert

Tuesday, October 29, 2013

Sponsor: Harbour Theatre Society

Venue: Tom Rooney Playhouse

Capacity: 60 attendance: n/a n/a of House

Well...had a bad feeling about this all day. As we wandered around town we didn't see a single poster. The woman at the desk at the hotel (as had been the case in Courtenay) was really interested and had heard nothing.

We arrived at the theatre, a very nice, intimate small space in which the event would have been terrific, and set up. Three adults and a very small child showed up. And the two organizers, making six people, 5 of them possible 'participants'. It is impossible to do *Corporations in our Heads* with 5 people. It isn't like a "one person show" where you can just perform regardless of the number. We cancelled. I offered to do a 2 hour workshop if we got to 10 people, but we didn't. Too bad – it was a lovely little intimate theatre and 40 people in it would have felt "full".

What happened here? By their own admission, the organizers did very little. They put up a few posters and didn't, it appears, really use the flyers at all. They just assumed people in their close networks would come. The people who did come saw the poster and had an interesting comment – that the poster didn't tell them anything, they just knew, because of the title, they had to come.

I've already articulated this, but, while the poster is gorgeous, I think we missed the boat on the information on the poster. We have no way to fully explain the event on the poster...only the brochures can do that, but there should at least have been quotes from previous projects on the poster. The idea that the poster is a "trigger" that connects up to other parts of a publicity campaign **might** work in Vancouver (I also question this strategy) – but out here, the poster has to sell the

project. Ours don't. Now, it isn't just the poster – other sponsors have brought audiences out with the same poster, because they have done the necessary work....but it is a piece of a puzzle.

Another piece of the puzzle is, I think, another lesson for us. There were some communities where we offered “discounts” to the sponsors to get them to fill holes we had in the itinerary. I OK'd these...the idea being that we are all “in this together” and we trust that the organizers will do the work necessary. It was naïve of me to OK these. The unfortunate truth that is appearing is that we live in a deeply Capitalist culture. The guarantee per show should have been at least \$1,000. This would have meant fewer communities and a different itinerary, but so be it. A lesson to learn. This is very sad...as I have a strong commitment to “community”.

I asked the organizers if we could have done anything to help them more and they said ‘no...you provided us with a lot – we just didn't get the job done.’

This email went out from the office today, addressed from my email, to all upcoming sponsors:

Dear upcoming *Corporations in our Heads* sponsor. I hope this finds you well.

Please excuse the bulk email, I've asked Liza to send this out for me while I am on the road. Hitting "reply" will actually go to her, as I am a little overwhelmed with office work while touring. Also, if you are already doing everything I'm mentioning, excuse the nagging....;) I hope you will understand the necessity of this as you read through.

We've been touring for almost 2 weeks and I am seeing a pattern now that I want to share with you. Some of the events have been terrific and some, while the response has still been very good, have been quite difficult. The difference, to a large degree, lies in numbers.

Because of the audience-interactive nature of the event, if the audience is small (50 or less), people feel very exposed and are not as willing to engage. I've managed to get them to do so....but it is REALLY hard work. The events are best when the 'energy' in the room is high. This happens in a few ways:

1. A larger number. The best events so far have been 80+, one was over 100. 150 or 200 would be great ;)
2. If the venue is smaller, then PACKING it helps...a 60 person space with 55 people in it is more energized than a 300 person space with 60.

I have a request, because I am seeing this happen on the road with some of the events. Please, do not rely solely on your own, personal networks for publicity. When we have had small audiences it has also been the case that only a few posters went up and they were often inside places making them invisible. The city or town needs to be plastered with posters and the brochures need to be put into people's hands...not left in piles somewhere. Human contact is essential.

Facebook is a good tool, but it does not bring people to the event. We find this in Vancouver all the time. Someone clicking "I am going" does not mean they are. Generally, we've found people do this to "support" the event, which is good, but this is different than attending.

Please reach out to people and agencies you don't know. In the end, this will leave you with healthier networks for your own work/life...however it is that manifests. One of the reasons we are doing the tour is in the hope that organizers are left with a legacy of stronger and broader networks to work on local issues.

Please talk, personally, to all of your local media outlets, well in advance. (Some people are not, or doing so at the last moment). We find that if the media get turned on to the local/global/creative aspect, that they will cover the event...it being in the paper or radio or TV the day of the event is too late. Theatre for Living Staff have provided you with material to use for this, and are also trying to make connections from Vancouver, but there is only so much they can do long distance.

I guess what I am saying is don't underestimate that *Corporations in our Heads* is a very innovative event and while this is exciting, it also makes it a harder "sell" than usual. It may be the case that you and you committee need to work harder than you think to get people out. Please don't take people attending for granted.

Again - I hope you understand the nature of needing to send this out.

All the best and see you soon...! David

Hazelton

Wednesday, October 30, 2013

Sponsor: Storytellers, HATS

Venue: Hazelton Secondary School

Capacity: 100 attendance: 110 110% of House

What a difference a day makes. From cancelling to our largest house yet – in Hazelton! There are some reasons for this. The Theatre Company and I have a long history here, going back to 1987 and the creation of No` Xya` (Our Footprints). Barb, the central organizer told me some interesting things tonight:

1. No` Xya` is what got her interested in theatre – she is the drama teacher at the school;
2. I am really trusted in the community for being able to create very safe space in which difficult conversations can happen;
3. There were very volatile opposing views in the audience tonight and amazingly, the usual controversies that stop meetings from being productive didn't come up.

She "hoped" for 50 people...but they really did their networking. The audience just kept coming. We had to move the set back in order to bring in more chairs in front of the front row. It was very mixed (Native, non-Native) and really intergenerational. A LOT of young people, both from the school and young activists who live in the community. The level of engagement was very high.

The chosen story was called: Fucking Computer (told by a young Gitxsan woman). There was a story that was overtly about Enbridge and the pipeline, but the room went for this one, which also plugged into the pipeline issue, which is very hot here. Barb thinks that the audience chose the computer story because it felt more safe.

The story: Young Woman (YW) is at her old computer, hating it and wanting a new one. She hates it so much she is prepared to destroy it herself in order to get a new one...it does still work. At the same time, she really does not want the pipeline in her community and she knows that it is exactly the process of buying new computers, new "stuff" that creates the consumption for oil that creates the "need" for the pipeline.

The Corporate Messages

Nike (best friend)	I want you to get an identity and try our product;
“O” Organics (Mother)	I want you to be part of the crowd; I want you to be accepted.
Enbridge (younger sister)	I want you to think you are cool – go ahead and break it, get a new one, and be cool.

I worked very hard to bring the audience into a space of emotional authenticity and it was great when the people playing the voices really understood this. It grounded all the improvisations. Because the pipeline and Enbridge had come up overtly in the telling of the story and was one of the characters, I gave myself permission to bring the symbolism back to the pipeline issue.

Some things that rose up: fighting for the world we want and not against the world we don't want. Feedback from so many people after was that this resonated very, very deeply regarding their activism AGAINST the pipeline. Three different young people, who I would identify as having “radical” views came after and thanked me for this aspect of the evening. They are fed up with always being in opposition, and agree it is time to just start creating the world we want, including talking in human ways with human beings inside the Enbridge Corporation.

The difference between being “in relationship” with something, and therefore having a responsibility to it, and demanding it as a right. If we have a relationship with clean water then we have a responsibility to protect it. Our actions are different this way than if we demand clean water as a right.

The way corporations now target our hearts...try to be our friends...insist they are protecting us, even give us things (like happened here recently) like Health check-ups, and skates – if we will repay them with our friendship.

Our ability (and responsibility) to protect ourselves at times from abusive relationships, even if it means hurting someone. Many in the room recognized they are in long-standing relationships with corporations (The Government also being a Corporation) and changing the relationship, or ending it is very difficult, but perhaps necessary.

There was so much applause along the way tonight and lots of laughter. Applause when the voices did internal monologues, when they "attacked" the Protagonist as part of the set up...when improvisations took on layers of symbolic meaning because the emotional engagement in the characters was so high. I understood something tonight. This audience was really “along for the ride” and reveled in watching characters and scenes emerge out of “nothing”; out of the consciousness and knowledge in the room.

A lot happened, and I am very tired. But this will give a sense, I think of the success of the evening. What a relief.

"*Corporations in our Heads* was a truly amazing experience. Thank you."

Yet Klare, Hazelton, BC

"Thanks again for putting us on the *Corporations in our Heads* tour schedule. It was so exciting to see people get mobilized around their own political self! I thoroughly enjoyed the evening and found it thought provoking - the conversations are still happening in my house."

Anne Docherty, Hazelton BC

"I especially feel grateful for the message that I took from *Corporations in our Heads* that even I, a peace-loving person, can change my relationship to the corporate messaging and begin to change my pattern of behavior."

Doreen Angus, Kispixox, BC

Vanderhoof

Friday, November 1, 2013

Sponsor: Nechako Creative Communities Collective

Venue: Nechako Seniors Friendship Centre

Capacity: 80 attendance: 40 50% of House

So....we are all very disappointed. The organizers put 80 chairs out and were confident there would be at least that many. The Saik'uz Nation, was bringing a busload of people. They didn't show. Many people who the organizers were certain were coming didn't show. I don't think it is that the organizers didn't do the necessary work – I know them and believe they did. One must come to the conclusion that this is something people just didn't want to attend. I come back to both what the project IS and the way we have packaged the project.

I am pleased and proud of the fact that at 33 the theatre company is innovating and risking at this level – and personally that I am doing the same at 60. When risks like this are taken, there are consequences. Still it is hard not to want tonight to have been 150 people. If Hazelton could be 110, Vanderhoof could be 150. The difference? Many people in Hazelton came for *me*. I don't have the same cache in Vanderhoof.

We know that if we get people in the room, they (mostly) really like the event. We are not, though, getting them in the room. This must also mean that the materials we have developed and the approach we are using for this project aren't working. At some point we just have to 'own' that.

It is also possible that the project itself – touring this kind of event outside of Vancouver – was not a good idea. These events have been very successful in Vancouver, but, numbers-wise, are not translating outside the large, urban centre.

The story: "Out There" is about body image. A large man, who used to work in radio did so because he wasn't visible. Now, in order to stay involved in the public work he loves, he accepts invitations to MC events. Every time, the messages in his head are about his large size, his weight, and whether he can be seen to be competent when people see him. A very courageous story.

Corporate Messages:

PGX (Mother) I want you to go on that diet and take those pills. Lose weight.
 Nike (Teacher) I want you to get with the program, you know you can do it. Exercise, exercise, exercise.
 Axe (Coach) I want you to be skinny and strong. Don't be flabby.

On the surface, these voices might be giving good advice. Exercise. Lose weight. What makes these unhealthy messages in the context of the story? They are not actually about his health....they are about an image of a virile man, and what that is....in the same way that women are given impossible role models, so are men.

In the setup improvisation with all the voices, the Protagonist's way to "deal" with them was to give up and say, 'OK...whatever you want me to do, I will do'. How does this translate in the community, I asked?

People were quick to respond: OK...I am tired of the consultations, just build the pipeline;
 OK, I'll shop at Costco;
 OK, I'll betray my own values to fit in.

What is the symbolism? If this story is not about body image, what is it about?

The mining company in town is giving us the messages that extraction is good for us, but that's a lie. It is only about extraction, we make nothing here. No local manufacturing;

We are constantly being asked to 'compete' unrealistically with Vancouver;

We are pressured to conform to a conservative image and agenda...to fit into a certain role that is not authentic to us.

The pressure to immunize my daughter when I think it is unhealthy for her.

Some interesting moments: A woman intervened against Mother PGX and created an improvisation about self-acceptance....but always physically actually leaning against "mother". There is an image of dependency here. This led to a question from the audience. Is Government a Corporation? How many believe it is? Almost all. THIS led to a comment about how we may have turned our relationship with Government into that of Children and Parents....expecting Government to solve things for us. I don't want to suggest that Government doesn't have a role to play but if we hand over our own agency, our own ability to problem-solve, then we disempower ourselves and our communities.

Still with Mother PGX, a woman kept edging away, actually being cornered by Mother PGX. She had to make a decision to either jump off the 3 foot stage (into the unknown) or move around Mother. The unknown was too scary and so she stayed engaged with the Corporate Message, when

she COULD have leapt into the abyss. Leaping means risking failure, and we all know how scary that is.

A woman full of anger intervened against Nike-Teacher and told her that she'd made a system that doesn't fit me, and that I am not listening to you....but for a long time stayed engaged. Finally, she went off and started doing things – the voice still always buzzing in her ear. This comes up a fair bit in these events. How many of us think that if we do this, just get on with what we know is healthy, that eventually, the voices will calm down inside us? About half.

When I asked about what people were taking away, a man who works for the City (a City Councillor) spoke up. He talked about realizing tonight that the City needs to do much more consultation than it is doing. This opened up a conversation about how consultation really needs to be open ended – not a vehicle to get affirmation for a plan that has already been decided.

If only THIS happens out of tonight, it will have been a very worthwhile event.

ADDENDUM Interesting breakfast with Lisa and Sylvia, the two central organizers in Vanderhoof. They are very familiar with the TfL work, have taken training, sponsored many TfL touring events in Vanderhoof and use the theatre in their own work. They were shocked and frustrated at all the people who told them they were looking forward to the event who didn't come.

Some thoughts: Some people told them that, in their opinion, people would not come. Why? Because Mining and Forestry are the major employers in town and, while interested, people are both very tired of the jobs v.s. environment conversation and also frightened to be seen at anything that might be anti-industry. People assume that the events are going to be that. If this is the case, then many of the people who said they were coming did so just to please Sylvia and Lisa, and get them to stop pushing.

They agree that people are also very frightened of the interactive nature of the event. At least with other projects there was a play an audience could watch. The "rumour" with this is that people will somehow be forced to participate and this is very hard to counteract. Coupled with the fatigue and fear mentioned above, we have a deadly combination of reasons not to go.

Lisa and Sylvia agree that putting "No play. No actors. No script" on the poster was an error. The material is visually very beautiful and the written content is both scary and not inviting all at the same time. So, people's response is that it all sounds really interesting, but they are afraid to attend. This deepens if the community is split over issues that arise out of corporate agendas. Hazelton seems to have broken through this because of the trusting relationship with me.

I am kind of at a loss as to how to counteract this now – the materials are all out there. All that is in my mind is to tell organizers to either back off the interactive aspect (although I have no idea how they'd do that) or really hammer away at participation being voluntary – no one is forced onto the stage.

I should also say that Lisa and Sylvia, while disappointed with the numbers, were really happy with the event – what it stimulated, the level of participation, the way people could see and hear each other in new ways, think about their own relationships with corporate messaging in new ways....many things. They are going to go to the people they knew at the event and gather feedback and write their own.

One more thing as we finish the North – there seems to have been a CBC blackout of this project and no one knows why – the guys in Rupert say they experienced it, Vanderhoof knows the producers in Prince George and went to them directly, I know Mallory did from the office....no response at all. This is highly, highly unusual. CBC has always been a very strong ally when we have toured.

Prince George

Saturday, Oct 19, 2013

Sponsor: Global Neighbourhood Network

Venue: Canfor Lecture Theatre, UNBC

Capacity: 100 (really 350) attendance: 34 34% of House:

The event went very well. Taking a deep breath about the attendance. Here's some insights: the University has a Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) just outside the theatre entrance. PIRG is sponsoring one of the Vancouver events and are very involved in local/global issues. Our sponsors, working on Global Networking issues, never contacted PIRG to help with networking. Also, people were arriving at 7:10 for a 7:00 event saying....OH...we FOUND you!!! The theatre has zero signage. It is invisible on Campus. And no signage was organized. If I sound frustrated....

The story: "Eat This" a man is watching television. He has a weight problem and is trying to lose weight. He's also had a very stressful day and eats to relieve stress. A Kentucky Fried Chicken commercial comes on the TV and he really wants to call and order.

The Corporate messages:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| Doritos (child) | I want you to imagine that satisfying crunch. You remember it, you always remember it. |
| Lindt (Grandma) | I want you to reward yourself with this indulgence. This once won't hurt. |
| Blackberry (trainer) | I want you to know how good it is for you – you feel better every time. |

This one got kind of weird...my fault. The other two voices seemed quite similar and so I wondered if we could imagine beyond the Food Brands, on order to broaden out the investigation....we landed on Blackberry and a physical trainer and I think this really confused the person playing the voice. Oops. Won't do that again.

A young woman intervened with the Trainer and tried to divert the issue to another day. I'd really appreciate it if you'd listen to me, I've had a really bad day and I need a break, she kept saying. The scene became about her trainer trying to get her to exercise. It all started going sideways. So, I asked what messages do you, the audience, receive that are presented as being good for you but actually are not? Northern Gateway came immediately and this started a conversation about very large corporations who couch what they want to achieve in terms that are good for us.

Doritos (child) A very young boy intervened – he said, I don't want to do this anymore...I want to change my life. But he kept just saying that, very engaged with the message and never leaving. Why didn't you leave, I asked? Because he's pushing me and I have to push him back, he said. This opened up a conversation about how we get addicted to the fight and also our fear of the unknown. Many, many people related to this.

On the same voice, a woman started to hum and agreed with the voice, embracing the desire and transforming the desire into something healthy for her. A kind of Judo approach. This opened up a conversation about acceptance...a different way to 'fight' that is very centered, realizing the voices are not going to go away, and so, if we accept their presence we find ways, without "fighting" to live without giving in to their desires.

I asked about how what we'd done so far translated into larger issues for people: seeing McDonalds spread into every country; liking to watch NFL football but players are having long-term injuries and that this is a "cost" of the sport; buying cheap clothing and understanding what it costs in human terms on another side of the world.

Lindt (Grandma) a woman intervened and told Grandma she loved her, and would take the chocolates and give them to her grandchildren!! This opened up a conversation about how we download issues onto younger generations.

Global connections were Enbridge; our parents did it to us, only fair we do it to our kids; landfills. People started making connections to the World Bank and how it operates like an Elder who patronizingly, knows what is best for us.

Are there any concrete insights you can you take out of here, tonight, and use in your life? Yes. Remember I know what I need; reflecting on the relationships I want and need independent of corporate messaging; questioning corporate messaging; when I am tired and worn out, looking for support of other people.

There was a lot of very nice feedback from people. Dorothy is asking me to really listen to what people say, that they are having really, really important insights at these events. I am wearing too many hats. The 'actor' knows I have to set the numbers aside and just do the event with who is in the room, and I think I do manage to do that in the moment. The Producer is freaking out.

"Corporations in Our Heads was engaging, inspiring and thought-provoking. I was hesitant to attend, and I was even more hesitant once I read the program and it said 2.5 to 3 hours long. However, my boyfriend and I both agreed that it was 3 hours extremely well spent. I came out questioning all of the messages that we are fed and the way that I deal

with those messages. I came out realizing just how deeply embedded these messages are in our culture, our society and ourselves. It was an emotionally moving presentation that was expertly executed."

Erin Giesbrecht, Prince George, BC

Edmonton

Tuesday, November 5, 2013

Sponsor: University of Alberta

Venue: ABR Studio, U of A Campus

Capacity: 80 attendance: 60 75% of House

Dorothy thinks this was the best event so far. Very engaged audience and a lot of insight in the event. Hard for me to know, they are all starting to blend together in a way, but I know tonight went very, very well.

The story was "Hungry on 109 street". A young man is walking home from a lecture on Democracy on Campus. He is hungry, has very little food at home and wants something fast. He does not normally go to McDonalds, it is against his principles for various reasons, and yet....there are the Golden Arches.

Another story that was offered scared the audience, I think. The title given by the woman who offered the story was, "It is OK to rape me". The story involved how dangerous she feels it is walking home after dance classes. The Corporate messages in her head that tell her that it is her fault, she is wearing dance clothes, is a dancer, is alone and 'offering herself' as prey if she doesn't have someone there to protect her. In the sexually violent culture in which we live the voices inside her that she fights against say, 'It is OK to rape me.' I've explained this because of its bravery and also because it came up later in the evening.

The Characters and interesting moments¹¹:

Easy Breezy Buddy McDonalds
and reliable service.

I want you to go towards the Golden Arches for the fast

What is McDonalds to you, audience?

To get a cellphone or not; to change a frenetic lifestyle (or not); cooking at home or not; cheap and easy or organic and responsible; dealing with a bully; self-betterment today or later; buying a Starbucks coffee when I have good coffee brewed at home.

¹¹ I changed the way the characters got notated here. It feels more integral, makes more emotional sense to have the 'relationship' and then the Brand.

An intervention from a young man who said – that’s enough! I am going home to have a peanut butter sandwich! I’m home now...I’ve won!!...”oh yes”, says friend McDonalds.....”wait till you turn on the TV”.... This opened up a conversation we have had before at these events about how one can accept the voice in one’s ear, and get on with life, being true to one’s self. Does the voice eventually get less compelling? Many experience that it does.

Grandmother Mastercard I want you to satisfy yourself; you can have anything you want.

A man intervened very emotionally and said, Grandma, if I go to McDonalds every day, I’ll get fat! Grandma said, but I want you to be happy....What Corporations want you to be happy, audience? Nestle, Freedom 55, Bottled water companies, Enbridge, Soy Product Companies, Airline Companies, Weightwatchers, Costco and car companies.

Another intervention - a woman says, also very engaged: no Grandma – you are doing this for yourself!! I love you, but I have to live my own life. She sat down and said, “I have a different Grandmother now!”

A conversation came from this about engagement and ending relationships. Also about age and wisdom. We want to respect our grandparents, our elders. But what if they are not wise?

Victoria’s Secret Spouse I want you to feel so good right now. You know nothing will taste better than me.

This was a very powerful corporate message. A young woman intervened and started yelling: you are invading my personal space! I don’t feel comfortable with you right now, I am changing my mind. What do you mean you have changed your mind? Asked Victoria’s Secret Spouse. You used to love me!! In distress, the woman pleaded...tell me the truth about what you are saying!!

This opened up into the rape story. When we have been in ‘intimate’ relations with a Corporation for many years....(How many of you know what I mean? 80 or 90% raised their hands.) How do we say “no – not anymore” when the Corporate Voice in our heads has a sense of ownership of us. Is one of the very scary messages inside us “It is OK to rape me?”. (Of course, this is not to minimize the violence and physical trauma of rape. At the same time, we are dealing with a powerful theatrical symbol here – in Northern BC and Alberta, in which Corporate interests and Government are preparing to push through a pipeline that the majority of the population in BC has said very clearly they don’t want, because of realistic fears it will utterly destroy the environment.) The audience was very, very quiet sitting inside this question. The woman who offered the story was nodding yes and yes and yes.

A woman intervened here and at the end of the intervention, really attacked Victoria’s Secret Spouse. This took us into territory of asking when is it appropriate to meet aggression with aggression. When is it time to fight back? Perhaps with violence? Defensive aggression. What does this apply to? Sexual violence....perhaps environmental violence.....

There was a tremendous amount of both laughter and deep thinking/feeling tonight and a lot of great feedback. The Editor of Alt.theatre was there tonight, a well known theatre magazine. They want to do a feature on *Corporations in our Heads*. This is the third feature on the company's work in 3 years. What does the Canada Council mean we are not having an effect on Canadian Theatre?¹²

"I feel changed and inspired by *Corporations in our Heads*. There is not much these days that make me feel like that! David Diamond is so engaging, like a magician on the stage! Transforming our reality in real time in front of us."

Anonymous from a feedback form, Edmonton, AB

"'Behavioral change that impacts structural change' – this is a huge concept. Theatre for Living planted the seeds for this with *Corporations in our Heads* and now it is the our responsibility to allow it to grow or not."

Anonymous from a feedback form, Edmonton, AB

Banff

Friday, November 8, 2013

Sponsor: Banff Ideas Bank

Venue: The Club, Banff Centre

Capacity: 120 attendance: canceled 0% of House

What can I say that I haven't already written? The two main organizers who wanted to take this on are not in town at all. There are no posters up anywhere that we can see, including the main "what's on at the Banff Centre" poster kiosk in Banff! I handed some leaflets out today and each person said, 'wow, this looks really interesting! Oh...it is tonight...I had no idea it was happening.' The young woman who works at the Banff Centre who was doing our lights had no idea it was coming. She was told today she'd be doing the lights. When I showed her a leaflet she said, 'wow, so many people I know would have wanted to come to this!!' There was zero signage up at the venue. It was invisible. You had to walk through a parking lot, up a lane and squeeze through a space between a wall and a big truck at the back of a building to find the door. And Banff had no idea we were here.

In the end, 8 people came, but 2 of them came from Calgary because they wanted to see it so badly but can't go when we are there; 2 of them were friends of Dorothy's from Canmore. This means the local organizing brought out 4 people. I explained in some detail what the evening would entail. Four of the eight thought they might participate and not just watch. We cancelled the event.

I laid out what I've written above to the two organizers who were there. They agreed the group had dropped the ball. One of them was obviously very embarrassed. She explained to me that when the opportunity to take this on was presented, she had said she thought it was not a good idea – not because the event wasn't interesting, but because they would have just finished a film festival the previous week and would not have the energy. Then, the two people who really wanted it to happen left town and left her with organizing. The other organizer put his coat on and left before

¹² This refers to a disputed assessment of the company's work in 2013.

we could pack up and load the van, telling Dorothy he “had to go because he had to work in the morning”. I am including this because it was so infuriatingly rude.

Calgary #1

Saturday, November 9, 2013

Sponsor: Calgary Forum Theatre Collective

Venue: Cliff Bungalow Arts Centre

Capacity: 60 attendance: 30 50% of House

I know the organizers. Some of them have trained with me. They were really excited and the help was great. Very friendly. One of the first things that came up was that they were worried about numbers for tonight. They are doing two events in Calgary and many people transferred their tickets from tonight to tomorrow at the last minute. Most interest was already for tomorrow.

The event went very, very well tonight, even with 30. They were really animated and involved.

The story: “I can have a blonde moment” (I don’t choose the titles, and, as troubling as this title feels to me, I chose not to question it – which opens up a question for me, but not for here) and offered by a woman who has just aged into her 50’s. She started going grey some time ago and was finding people were calling her Ma’am and offering her seats on the bus. It was really depressing her. And so...she decides to put toxic chemicals in her hair and dye it blonde – not her natural colour. And, Voilà! people treat her like she is 20 years younger. The decision for her is whether or not to continue dyeing her hair.

When animating the voices, I asked the audience: If this isn’t about having grey or blonde hair, what is it about?

Not being seen for who I am; wrinkles; belly or no belly; make-up or no make-up; things defining me that I don’t want to define me; a culture obsessed by youth; being nice when you are having a bad day; being judged by how you look and your profession.

When the messages went after the story-teller, she stayed very close to them. Why did she stay? People offered: We don’t have choices. We try to look for different solutions instead of avoiding the whole thing. We are afraid to jump into the unknown; physically removing one’s self doesn’t make it go away. it takes a lot of courage to leave what we know.

Voices and interventions

Employer Mattel (Barbie)

I want you to look this way; don’t be you.

A man intervened and started playfully pushing back and dancing with the Employer. This really threw her off guard. Then he threatened to quit and the Employer liked this. It was easier to deal with. The dancing was totally unexpected. Judo move...using the opponent's strength against them. Employer was expecting aggression, could not deal with the playfulness.

What relationships do you have with Corporations that you find hard to give up? Starbucks, Apple.

Another man intervened and said you didn't hire me for my looks, you hired me for my brains – so why do I need to wear a suit? The employer changed the game and told him he was up for a promotion – she offered him a raise and an expense account....to much laughter from the audience. They recognized how Corporations keep changing the rules on us. This opened up a conversation about how corporations are telling us we should all conform, for our own good. Phone companies; Green washing; conforming to social norms.

Father Royal Bank of Canada I want you to grow up and deny your creativity.

A young woman says, Dad...I am not underage anymore. You keep telling me what to do. Father responds, I want what is best for you. I am exactly the way I want to be, she responds....etc.

She confronts the RBC father. He tells her he loves her and she responds that he does not love her if he doesn't accept her. I asked if people recognized that marketing had shifted so that now corporations were telling us that they wanted to be in real relationship with us – that they love us. This got a huge response from the audience – it resonated later as a very big insight in the evening.

Mother Maybelline I want you to be a good girl. Don't make waves.

A young man intervened and told Mom she looked great and that he loved her and then tried to disassociate. He stood there, silently, while she went on and on. This opened up the conversation (again) about going about our lives while the voice is still in our ear. The audience was split –some found this successful and some indicated it didn't work for them.

What is Mother Maybelline for you? Who tells us to be good people and not make waves? RBC; Telus; the Conservative Government; Pharma; Oil and Gas; Monsanto.

One of the big things people said they were taking away was this idea that we attach real relationships to corporations and that once we understand this, we can work on changing the relationships. This is, of course, at the heart of the project.

We are hoping tomorrow is bigger, but again – tonight went very well. A lot of people were very complimentary about tonight.

"I thoroughly enjoyed *Corporations in our Heads*. It was fun, informative and I could see it got people thinking. I noticed that there was a sense of beginning to know one another a little, and I believe as we start to see people as people and not strangers we break down the barriers of 'them and us'. Thanks for making that happen."

Debbie Du Heaume, Calgary AB

Calgary #2

Sunday, November 10, 2013

Sponsor: Calgary Forum Theatre Collective

Venue: Scandinavian Centre

Capacity: 80 attendance: 93 116% of House

We had to bring in more seats. ;)

During the introduction I ask audiences what corporate messaging they are struggling with in their own lives. Here people said: When I see a nice car I want one because it will make me a good person; money = happiness; Altria controls most of the food I buy; I'll be happy by accumulating things; confusing inadequacies with desires; what is around me I must have; it makes me angry to have to connect products with beautiful things.

The story: "Waste" Alex¹³ has a fairly new cellphone, but the warranty is over. The screen has stopped working, but the phone works. He can't use it though, because everything happens via the screen. He is in the mall, trying to decide if he should repair the phone, meaning having no phone for 10 days or two weeks, or buy a new phone. It costs \$180 MORE to get it fixed than to buy a new one. His dilemma is that he does not want to turn the phone into waste....and yet everything is against this.

If the cellphone is not just a cellphone.....what is it? A window to the world; speed; convenience; Facebook; embarrassment over not having an iPhone; a status symbol; a tracker; a representative of me out in the world; a pain in the ass; an addiction; something that corrodes my discipline.

The messages and some interesting moments:

Boss/Monsanto I want you to stop fucking around and buy the new phone, now. I am all encompassing in every part of your life.

A young man intervened and, at first was intimidated by the Boss's insistence that he was hired under a contract that stipulated he have a phone and so he could not wait for 10 days or 2 weeks, but needed to buy one NOW. Then the young man turned the tables and said, 'the contract says a phone, not a 'working phone'. A scene began about whether or not a court case would ensue.

¹³ Not his real name.

I froze them and asked them to take a step in the direction of what they want. They both went for each other's throats. I asked the man playing Boss/Monsanto what he understood about the character. He said, "I have a wife and kids. This is the way the world works. Let's get on with it." This opened up a conversation about the 'humanity' of the 'oppressor' and how, generally speaking, they are working from a world view from which they are doing the right thing.

It also opened up a conversation about entering the legal arena and using the culture of the corporation itself as a weapon. The Gitxan and Wet'suwet'en did this, (as have other First Nations) taking the Crown to court and winning. Hard to do, expensive and exhausting; but it also has a history of working.

First Date/Victoria's Secret I want you to buy the newest, hottest phone out there and show everybody; you are nothing without me.

A woman intervened on the 'first date' and created a very funny, highly sexualized and touching scene about being judged by what one has. The woman playing Victoria's Secret also really knew the character. The intervener tried and tried to break through and just have a human relationship on this 'first date' but didn't have the right 'equipment'. She finally gave up and went home to 'eat ice cream'.

I asked the intervener how she had the strength to walk away from this 'highly desirable' first date. She responded saying it demands having a strong sense of self and values.

How does this translate into big companies for you? The commodification of social relationships; not all of us have the skills to walk away; I don't want to spend the time and energy to climb that ladder, but that is all there is.

This inspired me to refer to Vanderhoof and the Mining Company telling the City that they had to accept the mine in order to 'compete with Vancouver' and not remain a 'hick town'. This really resonated in the room. Calgary is home to so many resource companies.

Lover/Apple I want you to come to me and buy me; I am at your beck and call and will do anything you want.

A young man intervened and the improvisation remained very much on the surface. Both 'characters', but mainly "Lover/Apple" just giving us an 'evil cartoon'. And then a kind of 'soap opera'. There was no depth. I tried various ways to get them to actually play a scene and then stopped them and basically told them we weren't on stage to fool around and make fun of the characters. They are lovers and there are things at stake. They were good about receiving this direct direction and suddenly, we had something really serious that was riveting on the stage:

The intervener started saying he was leaving the relationship, but instead kept moving further and further into an embrace. He told Lover/Apple that eventually her best would not be good enough

for him and very gently, putting his finger to her lips, tried to shush her..."Freeze"! I asked the audience for the characters' secret thoughts:

Lover/Apple: Oh God, he's slipping away; I'm going to be alone; I've failed; I can move on. I've nearly lost him.

Intervener: I'm already looking around; I'm sure I don't love you; I can do without you; can I ever be satisfied? I really wish it would never end.

How does this translate into or relationships with corporations? I'm being promised unconditional love, but it really isn't; I have to go, but I don't want to; brand loyalty. This brought up [Century of the Self](#) – a handful of people had seen it – I gave it a strong recommendation and explained briefly about the evolution of marketing towards the promise of 'best friends and/or lovers' from Corporations.

When I asked Alex to move the voices at the end, he brought them all closer to him – a highly unusual moment. I interpreted this as a kind of 'failure' on my part to explain, but the audience did not. They said: keep your friends close and your enemies even closer; he increased his awareness of the voices; he made a human connection; he is not afraid of them anymore.

What do you take away? we need 'community' in order to resist; the tool of looking at corporations as relationships; I've realized tonight that I can talk back; I wasn't aware I could make it personal, this really helps; we need to research our relationships...are they good or bad; we build relationships with corporations because we've lost them with the living world.

I was swamped when this ended – a great deal of gratitude for the event and the new theatrical form that we are touring.

ADDENDUM: The organizers had feedback about the material we gave them. Like everyone they love the graphic, but found the poster hard to use. It is too big. Finding a printer to overprint their material so it looked good and professional was very difficult because of the size and cost them extra money.

What I hadn't heard before was difficulty with the flyer. They expected and needed a blank box on the flyer for their own info. Something they could stamp. "THIS local event at:.....". We put the whole itinerary in the middle and this served us and the whole tour, but it didn't serve them. Their feedback was that people's eyes glazed over when they opened the flyer and asked, when/where is the Calgary event?

"I thought *Corporations in our Heads* was terrific. It was interactive but so well facilitated that it was hard to separate the audience from the characters from the leaders. If only we lived by more exploration, inquiry, playful conflict resolution, and artistic solutions in our day to day world- we may feel less controlled by corporations and more in the driver's seat....it was great food for thought."

Janice M. Fraser, Calgary AB

"*Corporations in our Heads* was thought provoking and uncomfortable at times and has been in my head running playback since. What Theatre for Living does is phenomenal! It is transformative and takes the audience on a journey that is deeply personal and deeply human and spiritual."
 Trayah Zinger, Calgary AB

Lethbridge

Tuesday, November 12, 2013

Sponsor: Complex Social Change

Venue: CASA

Capacity: 60 attendance: 67 112% of House

A good turnout. We had drinks after with the organizer and Dorothy and I agree we are too tired now to do any reporting, and so will do it after we get into Castlegar tomorrow (8 hour drive).

I am reminded of the reason I do these reports the night of the event. Last night feels so far away now....after drinks with the organizer, sleeping, breakfast, a long drive, getting into the hotel, dinner....thankfully, Dorothy is taking great notes:

The Story: Diane¹⁴ and the Sketchy Bathroom

Diane is a young woman, an "ex-bulimic" in her words. She is in a restaurant with friends. At the table, the conversation turns to body image. She goes to the women's washroom, with no "intention" but once there, looks in the mirror and the old voices, old purging impulses, begin again. She needs to decide whether to purge, or not.

The Messages and some moments:

Ex-girl friend/Cover Girl I want you to be like the other girls, but you'll never be as good or as pretty as they are. There are so many that are much prettier than you are.

A young woman intervened and said, confidently – I AM one of the other girls...we all feel the SAME insecurities. Ex-girl friend responded with you just don't measure up. The intervener: 'you don't know what the other girls want....You see NOTHING! I am BETTER than the other girls, I accept myself and you will never accept me. As long as I accept myself I will never hear your voice again.

Ironically, in order to have this response, the intervener had to make herself superior to 'the other girls', which bought right into the hierarchical messaging Cover Girl was proposing.

An older man wanted to be Diane's father and speak on her behalf. I explained that the father wasn't in the scene, although I am not certain why I did that now, why not let that happen? At first he didn't want to play 'Diane' but did...but his idea was the same thing as the first intervener except this time they ended up hugging and telling each other they loved each other.

¹⁴ Not her real name.

in. How many of us in this room know someone who ran away from home? So many hands.....This opened up issues of suicide and mental health issues.

Is it your intention to drive your daughter away? (I asked the Father/Organized Religion) No....I love her and want the best for her.

What about Lethbridge I asked? Many people responded: The Hypocrisy of the Religious Leaders; someone who is different is not accepted; religion is creating divisions; because of the rigidity, young people leave or don't join.

What do you take away? It is important to know that we choose how we have relationships with corporations and that we can choose not to; the concept of behaviour creating structure; the idea of corporations as 'family' members.

"Corporations in our Heads was awesome. My dreams that night were awesome. I look at this as a very therapeutic way of group healing. We all need, from time to time, a little boost in life. This theatre was just that."

Dennise Two Spirit Sage Walker, Lethbridge, AB

"Let me say how grateful I am that you (Lisa Doolittle) brought David Diamond and *Corporations in our Heads* to Lethbridge - what a skilled and engaging facilitator/presenter he is! I was quite in awe of his ability to create and maintain a safe container for the work the community was doing with such sensitive and personal material. That young woman took quite a risk offering her story that way, and I was so happy with the respect and care that was shown to her by everyone involved. David was largely responsible for that too."

Anonymous audience member from the Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary at Lethbridge

Castlegar

Thursday, November 14, 2013

Sponsor: Mir Centre for Peace, Selkirk College

Venue: Mir Centre for Peace

Capacity: 40 attendance: 25 62% of House

25 was, evidently, a good turnout for an event at the Mir Centre. It is VERY hard to find. Selkirk College is easy enough, but then you go into a parking lot, into another parking lot, to the end of that lot and up an unmarked dirt road that winds around until you get to a house where the venue is. If you KNOW the Mir Centre then you know. If you don't....it is invisible.

So this is our smallest house so far. The event actually was really lively – the space being very intimate. We didn't put up our lights as the ceiling was so low and our sound system would have overwhelmed the room so no speakers. No mike. Dorothy ran back to the hotel to get her little speaker that attaches to her computer so we could run the preshow music off that.

The Story was called "Fractured". A young woman has fractured her nose three times. She loves her nose. It has character. She has had an ongoing exchange with her mother, who wants her to get a nose job, because she doesn't look right. This actually started when she was very young. She is now in her 20s. In the moment, she is in the bathroom, looking in the mirror and needing to decide whether or not she is going to give in to her mother's ongoing request and change her appearance.

Messages and some interesting moments:

Father/Royal Bank of Canada: I want you to accept my authority; I am better than you.

A young woman intervened: She put her hands on the Father's shoulders and stayed in this position throughout the intervention. She said, I like my nose the way it is. The Father offered to give her the money for the operation...most girls would be thrilled with this. I am not like most girls....I will keep my nose the way I want it.

This opened up a conversation about whether or not the intervener was stuck, or holding her ground. There were differences of opinion about this.

What is the nose for you? Conformity, shame...whether one is loveable, being enough, having a good enough job; status....

I make a point of saying in the introduction that it is OK for us to disagree in these events. This happened tonight.

A man intervened – a business owner I found out later. He did a strange “Star Wars” thing of waving his arm in front of the Father/RBC's face and saying “You like my nose” over and over again. A kind of “follow the Force, Luke” thing. It was hypnosis of the Father and, rather than working, it pissed the father off.

When it was clear that people didn't think his idea was working, the man intervening said – you can't blame the Corporations for this...families have been doing these sorts of things to their daughters for centuries. I asked the audience if they thought Corporate messaging was telling us we didn't look the right way. Most hands went up. Do parents also become infected with this messaging? Yes – people thought overwhelmingly this was the case. I asked the man if there was anything he'd like to say? “Not that I will say here.”.....and he went back to his seat. He DID participate more during the evening, as did his wife, who said near the end that Apple gave us very powerful and positive messages about individuality.

Spouse/Enbridge: I want you to disappear; you shouldn't be seen.

A young woman intervened and pushed the Spouse's hands down and said if you love me you won't be ashamed of being seen with me...what can I do to make you want to go out with me? Get a nose-job, replied the spouse. The intervener took a step to break free and gain her independence. But she never left. She agreed later that while she wanted to leave, she didn't know if she could. This opened up a conversation that comes up a lot about leaving unhealthy relationships, either with individuals or with corporations.

If it isn't a nose job, what is it? Making more money; staying home; get a haircut; lose your accent.

A woman intervened and asked the Spouse why s/he was covering her up? Can you see me? Can you put your arms down? I'm not understanding why you want to cover me up at home....I am puzzled by your behaviour....and sorry you want to cover me. Then she hugged the spouse.

This started a conversation about how/why the Spouse/Enbridge got thrown so off balance by the intervention. Because the response was so absurd. This started a dialogue about whether or not we give the Corporation what it wants when we engage in a 'violent' way....the intervention was gentle and full of love. The audience responded to this with enthusiasm in terms of creating the world we want, without violence. This fits very well with being in the Doukhobor Mir Centre for Peace.

Mother/Women's Magazine: I want you to change; you are not good enough.

The story-teller actually made this intervention on her own story....I am finding this happens later in the process as the story-teller becomes more empowered by the event. The story-teller became very strong and confident. The Mother seemed to want to keep the story-teller a child...didn't want her to grow up – remain dependent.

What Corporations want us to remain children? Martha Stewart, Mattel, John Deer, all the Banks, the Government of Canada.

What do you take away from tonight? Don't be afraid to feel; the more I fill myself with my own thoughts, the less I can be influenced by Corporate messaging; relying on community; meet other with honour; to ask for what I need; there is power in being vulnerable.

Nelson

Friday, November 15, 2013

Sponsor: Marya Folinsbee

Venue: Nelson Legion

Capacity: 60 attendance: 40 67% of House

The story: "To be an Artist I have to be someone I don't want to be". A Nelson woman has entered sculpting school at an Art College in Calgary. In order to do so she has taken her teenage daughter to Calgary and also, for reasons that are other than her desire to pursue her dream of being a visual artist, ended her marriage. She has spent a year in Calgary and hates it. Hates all the money, the competition, the glitter. She wants to go home to the forest. She is the top of her class and on a prestigious scholarship, but this isn't what she wants. She goes to the Registrar to withdraw and the Registrar tries to convince her to stay, to take the scholarship and follow her dream.

we talked about youth suicide and the various reasons this happens, including not being able to have and be all the things that are expected inside the consumerist culture in which we live.

This echoed a lot of comments at the beginning of the evening about seeing children influenced by corporate messaging and not knowing how to stop it, what to do about it. The parents in the room expressed feelings of inadequacy in the face of it.

A woman intervened (again...the woman who cried). Its OK honey...."don't patronize me!! Yelled the teenage daughter and the mother asked, what is it you want? I want to stay here, said the daughter...there's shoes....and clubs....(and all that glitters). The intervener then cut the daughter adrift....told her she could stay....find her own way....be homeless if necessary, but she was going back home to the forest.

What about relationships with Credit Card Companies? They want us in debt. Just like with families, once we have "signed up" we are responsible. Buy more and more. A comment was made that Youth are not aware of mortality and the credit card companies prey on this.

There was also a question – what if the daughter is actually right, and the mother is throwing her dream away out of fear of going into debt?

When I asked what it was people took away, people started off saying: not forgetting ALL the players are human; that people really saw the voices in themselves and this was really enlightening.

Penticton

Tuesday, November 19, 2013

Sponsor: Okanagan School of the Arts

Venue: Shatford Centre

Capacity: 50 (actually 200, but we put out 50 seats) attendance: 20 40% of House

This was a very difficult night. When it was obvious there were 20 audience members, I explained the event and asked them if they wanted to continue, and explained how much it would require of them and that there would be no where to "hide". Twelve of them said they could imagine doing the evening. Dacey. But we continued. They appreciated being asked for permission.

The story: "The Fast Food and the Furious"...this is very similar to the story as we had in Edmonton. I say this because in Edmonton it led to a very lively evening. Not so here. A young man is on his way to a friends house but cannot rely on there being food. He gets off transit and A and W is right there. Eating fast food is against his deep principles, and yet....he has a "grumbly in his tumbly".

The messages/character and some moments:

Mother/Walmart I want you to save money. Our food is so cheap – order a combo to save even more money!

A young woman intervened and said, ‘Mom, I know you love me but what you are telling me isn’t good for me. As I’ve grown up I have learned there are other ways of doing things. It may not add up right now....but I know I will figure it out. I can be happy without these things.

This opened up a conversation about breaking the rules about ‘happiness’. We have one idea of what happiness is and the younger generation is questioning that.

What kind of corporations are giving us the message that they know what is best for us? BC Hydro with Smart Meters; Walmart – the idea that more is better; Development – more business, more building....everything has to get bigger or we will die.

Employer/McDonalds I want you to take the time to come in – we are fast!

The storyteller couldn’t help but make an intervention on his own scene. He started saying he was leaving but never left. And so we talked about this a bit, but there was no real response from the audience. One reason, I think, is that the woman playing the Employer/McDonalds had a very, very hard time. She kept getting stuck. Dorothy points out, and I agree, that while she chose “Employer” it didn’t seem that she put any thought into it. The whole evening felt like this.

I asked if there were any other ideas for the Employer and after a VERY long silence a woman came, but again I couldn’t make any sense of what was happening on the stage. I asked the two characters what they wanted from each other and they just looked at me, blinking. Finally it twigged for me. I asked the intervener if she had come with a real idea or just to save the evening, and she laughed – I was right. No one else was doing anything so she came up to rescue the event, but had no impulse beyond that. She returned to her seat.

A man came and asked about “slow food”. He acknowledged that he was an Employee of the Employer and left. The Employer stood there, not knowing what to do....not as a character, but as a person from the audience. I urged them to play the scene, that the scene was not over. He sat down and she went over to the story-teller and they started to make jokes together, not in a scene, just as two people who actually know each other....it was sooooooo hard to get any focus from them.

Trying to make something of the moment I asked what Corporations treat us like they are our Employers and have that power over us when in fact they do not. Google; Banks; Microsoft; Enbridge....someone offered that First Nations People are treated like children by the Government in this same way.

The story is about the sexualization of our young sons and daughters – happening at a younger and younger age. What does the symbolism of the story mean, beyond the story? More jobs will enhance the community; our wants get confused with our needs; drive big trucks and don't worry about pollution; keep on working despite the stress; take the medication – even if it makes you ill; eat in restaurants - its faster.

The messages, some interventions and interesting moments:

It became apparent early on that the scenes needed to be three person scenes – that it was all happening THROUGH the son. And so all of these scenes include him.

Brother/Bowflex I want you to come feel my muscles; this is what real men are like.

A woman intervened and said to the Brother – you know what, this is your thing it doesn't affect me at all. She said to her son – you need to listen to me! The son replied that he wanted his Uncle's muscles. The mother offered to go kickboxing with him and then went into competition with the Brother. I RAISED you, she told the son. He became the battlefield for his mother's struggle with Corporate messaging and it scared and disturbed him.

A man intervened and said to the son that he CAN look like Brother Bowflex...and that he is going to teach him how. He got an Aunt, a family member, and together they offered other options. This was a very moving intervention – it acknowledged the power of the Corporate message and 'countered' it with community – with family.

Grandma/Hollywood I want you to get out of the way so I can be alone with your boy. You are old fashioned.

A woman intervened and tried to stop Grandma from speaking and told her to get out....and limit her visiting – her influence. But Grandma – a very powerful (Hollywood) voice, overwhelmed her by insisting that sexuality is human and we all need to deal with it. The intervener crumbled saying 'yes, this is true' and gave up.

This opened up a conversation about a statement the storyteller had said early on – that she didn't EVER want to have this conversation with her son. Yes, he is seven, but when is too young? He is asking questions now. We get defeated because we want it to go away, but the sexualization permeates everything.

This opened up a conversation about how so many things are becoming taboo to talk about – while our world is getting more "outrageous", actually DEALING with things, having REAL conversations about them is getting harder. Global warming seems to be one of these things.

Teacher/Lululemon I want you to be sexy like me; all women look like me.

The improvisation went on for a long while with no “stop”. I asked the audience: who is enjoying watching this? About 50% of the hands went up. Yes, we have done this, haven’t we? Turned other people’s struggles into our entertainment? A very good “chill” went through the audience. They recognized the truth of this.

Who are our Teachers? Other older kids, parents, religious leaders, politicians....

A woman intervened and took the son away from the TV. She then looked like she was going to beat the teacher up and decided against this. She sat beside her son and a complex scene unfolded, the Teacher still in the mother’s and son’s ear, but the mother having a heart to heart with her son.

This opened up a conversation about how the son actually feels safe. The man playing the son said it was the first time he “felt safe”, having been removed from the environment in which he was being bombarded and having a REAL conversation with the mother - not being the battleground.

I asked the woman why she started a physically violent action and then pulled back. Because I didn’t want to become what I am fighting against. The audience agreed that over time – not in this single instance, but with ongoing vigilance, this approach seemed very healthy.

What do you take away from the event?

I gained a better understanding of living in a multi-textural world. As a mother I have to learn to deal with the messages that my children are getting. I am going to have to change how I am relating to messages of sexualization. Accept it is happening and deal with it, not ignore it. I am more aware now that Corporate messages are actually in my head. They won’t go away, but I am better equipped to deal with them.

"The *Corporations in our Heads* experiential mode is so excellent and David is a master at his craft; it was at time fiercesome, as William Blake might say."

Dave Bosomworth, Lumby BC

Kamloops #1

Friday, November 22, 2013

Sponsor: Glenn Hilke

Venue: The Yacht Club

Capacity: 100 attendance: 47 47% of House

Kamloops had a very big and complex build-up. Glenn, the organizer, is relatively new to Kamloops. He sits on the local Arts Council and heard about the project there. The Ajax Mine is a very, very contentious issue here in Kamloops – ripping the City apart – and Glenn presented the possibility to us that the project could help address the issue by being an avenue for communication.

Liza, the rest of Tfl Staff and I agreed that it would be possible to acknowledge that the Mine is a big issue in the City, but also explained that in the moment, the stories that were offered would determine the content. This might be about the mine and it might not – there was no forcing it to happen. He agreed, and took on two events, with the support of the City, who have, I learned yesterday, given the event some funding.

But then, local promotion started appearing promoting the event as “Community stories of the Ajax Mine”. This created a lot of confusion with media and others because our material clearly states that it is audiences who determine the content.

There are a lot of posters up in town, there have been 3 stories in the papers – some of them trying to clarify what the event really is, and a local CBC interview and 3 other radio interview that Glenn did. I hoped that the controversy that he has created would be good for attendance. Kamloops knows we are here. For the first time on the tour, a server in a restaurant knew about the project when we showed her a leaflet. However.....47 people tonight.

Dorothy and I agree that we had a good night tonight and the response has been fantastic.

The Story: “Family Matters” a woman has put a bumper sticker on her car against the Ajax mine. She has become visibly resistant. She has had a lot of conversations in her community and been supported and also argued with. Her father was a miner. She would see him rarely, as he worked away from home. She is at the schoolyard. She is watching a friend’s children greet their Dad, who is a miner and who works away from home, and she thinks for the first time – the Ajax Mine will mean this man, who I know loves his family, can work at home. She goes home and scrapes the anti-Ajax bumper sticker off her car. The moment we focus on, is when she is watching the children and their Dad.

When the messages went after the story-teller she ran away to the back of the audience and curled up in a little ball. Then she got up and went and got a coffee. They followed her. She focused only on her coffee while they attacked her.

If this isn’t coffee, what is it? Wine. Food. Movies. TV. iPhone. My car.

The Messages and interventions

Psychiatrist/Gov. of BC I want you to trust me. Just be compliant. The psychiatrist has her arm around the storyteller, in an embrace, like an old friend.

A man leapt onto the stage with a lot of momentum and said to the Psychiatrist, ‘I have no faith in what you say anymore. I don’t believe what you are saying. I’ve heard this solution before, it didn’t work. The psychiatrist just kept offering him pills. Not these pills? Then what about these pills? Eventually he froze and fell silent and said....I have no idea what to do now.

can't please everyone all the time; there are a lot more options out there than we see on the surface; us being polarized keeps us trapped; there is so much information, we feel powerless.

What are you taking away? I tend not to be an activist – I should be more active; corporations have so much power, but we give them the power. Then, the room opened up. A man spoke who is a mining professional and explained that he thought the Ajax mine people had done a TERRIBLE job in the community and this was why everyone was so polarized and it didn't need to be this way. A comment got made about needing to develop one's own values and not be swayed by other's emotional responses. A man said he was stunned by the silence in Kamloops and that tonight showed him it was necessary to 'find the right microphone'.

A woman went to Dorothy after and said, "Thank you very much for bringing this here. It was amazing". The man who did the first intervention and froze came to me. It was his 8 year old daughter who had also intervened. He thought the event had been brilliant....there was a lot of good feedback.

"Thank you for such an inspiring, energizing evening at *Corporations in our Heads*. I know that I - and many in the audience - will take the ideas we've learned and felt and complete the circle by engaging them in our 'real' lives."

Thomas B. Friedman, Kamloops, BC

Kamloops #2

Saturday, November 23, 2013

Sponsor: Glenn Hilke

Venue: The Yacht Club

Capacity: 100 attendance: 58 58% of House

Not that many more people tonight, but it felt like a lot more. And yet, it was also a more conservative feeling audience. The demographic was pretty aged, last night was the young families. No kids tonight.

After the pushing game, we talked about what it meant symbolically and becoming addicted to "pushing" came up, and this got a big reaction of personal recognition from the audience.

The story: "Buying your way into town" a man has bought Season Tickets to Western Canada Theatre Company. They are opening Les Miserables soon. He loves the theatre and wants to take his wife and grandchildren. But, Ajax Mine is a corporate sponsor of the Company's Season. He is vehemently against the mine and feels betrayed that the Mining Company is "Buying their way into Kamloops". He does not want to hurt the theatre company – he has already bought the tickets and does not want a refund. But he does not want to betray his values by going to something that the Mining Company is using to "look good". The decision he has to make is whether or not to betray his values.

The messages and some interventions/insights:

Father/Conservative Government: I want you to understand that it won't make any difference; you are just one person. I have more power here.

A man intervened and said, you raised me to believe in myself and now you are telling me to go against myself. You are a hypocrite. The Father countered with the son stressing himself out – and the intervener responded, (quite stressfully) that he was NOT under stress. The intervener questioned the Father's courage to live by his own convictions, and this was why he was telling the son not to.

A lot of the audience liked the intervener "standing up" to the father, but I questioned this. How did the father feel? The father was getting exactly what he wanted. The Son was deeply engaged and really listening. The Father still had all the control. A comment came from the audience about how taking a stand makes one visible and sometimes makes one feel like an idiot. It is very risky because it can be isolating.

A woman intervened (a return visit from last night) and asked the Father if he didn't remember the struggles in which he engaged when he was younger? The Father replied that one can't win them all and one realizes it doesn't matter. Father accused the son of marginalizing himself. The intervener then painted a picture of how a movement builds one person at a time, to much applause.

I asked the two to take one step in the direction of getting what they want and the intervener went to hug the Father/Conservative Government, who pushed the hug away. This started a dialogue about the Father not being able to deal with the emotional reality. As long as it stays cerebral, in theory, studies, legalese, he feels safe. That we must reach out at an authentic emotional level.

Best Frat Buddy/Hollywood I want you to forget about your values; just enjoy yourself and go to the play.

It took a long time to get an intervention. There was a lot of laughter. This prompted me to talk (again) about how other people's struggles have become our entertainment. It was a big "poke" at the community but they recognized it. You could feel the energy in the room shift. This happened a few times this evening....what is it we are doing here right now? Are we succumbing to being entertained by someone's real-life struggle? Don't we do that as a result of Corporate Messaging – they very thing we are here to investigate? Dorothy and I agree there was a lot of this kind of group discovery going on tonight.

A woman intervened and said there are more important and healthier things she could be doing. She suggested after a lot of back and forth that the Frat Buddy come on a mountain hike with her, instead of going to the play. He would not. And so she went anyway....and then he did follow her, because he could not "let go" (being a voice in her head.) This opened the window to getting on with our lives...and knowing the messages are going to be in our ears.

Older Brother/Organized Religion I want you to keep calm. We are going to take care of you. You have no control over the situation.

The Older Brother did a very insightful thing in the improvisation. He started using the fact that *Les Miserables* was about Revolution, and that the Mine sponsoring the play was irrelevant. Thousands of people would see the play, including the children and get inspired by the possibility of revolution.

A man intervened and said, "I love you (older brother) but you've always been a bullshitter." The intervener kept talking about how he was going to fight. I kept encouraging him to actually DO what he wanted, and he just kept talking. And so I pointed this out and asked about it. Do we recognize that we talk a lot about doing something...about taking action...but that often that is all we do, is talk? What I didn't know, was that the man on stage was the local MLA, and this was resonating very strongly in the room. A man in the audience commented, 'sorry (intervener's name inserted here), but all this is true.' A big theatrical moment that had resonance in people's real lives.

How does what we just witnessed happen in your lives? Other people commented: I can put my name on a volunteer list but never actually volunteer; another commented on how the local City Council pays lip service.

A woman intervened and asked the Brother – what are you going to tell your kids? The voice stumbled, but recovered and went on the offensive. I will ALWAYS be older and wiser than you – I am your older brother and I know what is right.

What Corporations want us to remain children? I asked. This got a real "grunt" from the audience, as I think it was the first moment they had seen the scene this way. The Federal Government. Ajax. The Church.

What are you taking away? People said: It was amazing feeling this experience in my body. The personalizing of the relationships was really important. This made me very aware of the struggles in which I am already engaged but don't think about. It is important not to accept a passive paternalism; I want to hear specifics now from Ajax, not generalities.

"I really enjoyed ***Corporations in our Heads***. It was empowering, positive, and a real opportunity for community bonding."
Ginny Ratsoy, Kamloops, BC

"I thoroughly enjoyed ***Corporations in our Heads***. It was remarkably thought provoking. We left the event talking about it all the way home! It's refreshing to attend such a unique event. Keep up the great work!"

Bruce Campbell, Kamloops, BC

Abbotsford

Tuesday, November 26, 2013

Sponsor: U of Fraser Valley Garden Club

Venue: U of Fraser Valley

Capacity: 80 attendance: 40 50% of House

The "Garden Club" is quite politicized. They are growing things in a mechanizing environment. The organizers had some certainty 70+ people were coming tonight and so were very disappointed when 40 showed up. It has become the common story.

In a conversation with one of the women she said something I haven't heard before regarding this project: That people are afraid, to the point of being in denial of facing that their/our minds have been colonized. People just do not want to look at it. It is fine to talk about colonization of other people, but not of our own minds. I think that regarding this project and the difficulty around getting people to attend, there may be truth in this.

There were a lot of students present. They told me after that they are studying my work in TWO different classes and that I am a "living legend" at the U of the FV. (This is also where I got my Honorary Doctorate). This was very nice to hear, but I wondered, if that was the case, why there were not more people at the event? No one had an answer. I told them I'd try not to take it personally.

The Story: "The Dilemma of Success" a young woman and her partner have just found out they are pregnant with their first child. They live in Abbotsford. He works away, often, in Edmonton as there is no work at home. She wants to have a career in social justice work but becoming a mother is changing her perspective on everything, as she now feels pressure to create a stable environment for her child. Should she give up her dreams to be a mother?

The Messages and some moments:

Successful older (Cosmo) sister: I want you to quit. You're a failure anyway.

A woman intervened and got down onto the floor. The older sister was in a bent over shape, almost looked as though she was in pain. Getting onto the floor was the only way to look her in the eye. The woman asked if her Cosmo sister had a soul at all. Her sister was important to her and there was a sense of wanting to "save" the Cosmo Sister throughout this, while the Sister kept urging the woman not to be so "nice" all the time, as it led to failure.

Hmmm.....what Corporate messages are telling you, in Abbotsford, not to be so "nice", not to be a "bleeding heart"? People responded: anything regarding the Pipeline; Nestle; the Abbotsford Business Association that is blocking a project on homelessness.

A different woman intervened and tried to convince the sister that it was OK that they were not making the same choices about money – that success and failure were not measured by money alone. The Cosmo Sister would not give in, though, and insisted that because she was older, wiser, her ‘younger sister’ should listen to her. But the scene was with a character that looked like she was bent over in pain. This led me to ask if we were not witnessing a sick “system” telling us that it knows what is best for us. Many also saw this and led to a discussion about the importance (once again) of ending toxic relationships, even with loved ones; even with intimate corporate relationships.

Mother-in-Law/Baby Einstein (a baby game): I want you to get out and get some things for the baby otherwise you’re going to be a bad, horrible mother.

A man intervened and showed the mother-in-law some respect and love, but also drew boundaries. He wanted to share her experiences with the understanding that in the end, he would make up his own mind about what to do. This translates into not throwing the entire message out the window – are there parts of it from which we can benefit? If so, why not listen and learn?

There was a sense from the audience that, as the Mother-in-Law/Baby Einstein responded well to this, that she would not be satisfied with the terms that were laid out, but once she had her daughter-in-law’s attention, would just keep asking for more.

How does the pressure to make your children excel (or you are a failure) manifest in you? The sense that I will never be good enough; building bigger houses for people who only focus on status, not community.

How do you manage to shift the balance? Be what you are and do the best you can and find contentment in that.

Father/Harper: I want you to shut up, quit trying to change the system and get a regular job. You’re not going to win anyway.

A man intervened and suggested that the father hadn’t changed at all in nine years and while he respected that he was his father, he didn’t respect the actual person anymore. There was a long scene in which this was stated over and over again. I asked them to take a step in the direction of getting what they wanted and the intervener raised a fist to punch Father/Harper.

How does this (the threat of violence) resonate with you in connection with the Harper Government? It is a response to the bullying, inflexibility, insensitivity, arrogance of this Government. How else to respond finally? Someone said, “First Nations have experienced the ‘Great White Father’ for many years.

I can’t remember how, but somehow this led me to ask the audience if they recognized that it’s getting harder to be creative in the world in which we are living.

Yes, many people said. How? New, innovative techniques of food production, energy development, holistic medicine, transportation, etc., are not encouraged but squashed by corporate messages; Corporations are working to limit our choices; the continual pressure to be entrepreneurial; curriculums at schools already set. From within this we have a responsibility to look to the ourselves and our communities for power and to stay centered and connected.

Another man intervened and did not try to “win” against Father/Harper and simply said, if you can’t help me I will move along, and then he did. Of course Father/Harper followed him, but this opened up something that comes up at many events and that is the sense of realizing the voices are going to be in our ears, and that we can choose to get on with our lives – working to create the world we want instead of always fighting against what we don’t want. ACTING, instead of always REACTING.

What can you take away from tonight? That it’s hard to stay in the present moment when being bombarded with all the messages, but finding ways to do so inside myself is essential; to pause and breathe when I am overwhelmed; that my relationship to corporations is personal and emotional.

"As a fifth-year university theatre student I have to see several professional productions, (and reflect critically on them) for class, and I just wanted to say that **Corporations in our Heads** was one of (if not the most) interesting and thought-provoking theatrical performances I have seen in all those years." Nial Harrison-Morry, Abbotsford, BC

Squamish

Thursday, November 28, 2013

Sponsor: Quest University Canada

Venue: MPR Room, Quest University

Capacity: 50 attendance: 28 56% of House

This was a very weird evening, although the event was very deep and appreciated by the audience. Attendance was especially low and as we progressed, we lost people who had never planned on staying beyond 8PM, when the event had started at 7PM.

Our organizer is a Quest University student. She encountered this work in Quest’s Art for Social Change Program. She then came for a Level 1 TfL training.

She asked the Dean of the University for financial support so that the event could happen at the University and serve the University. She was refused any financial support, but was given a performance space at no charge. The Student Union kicked in (\$375) half the guarantee and (I learned tonight) she put the rest up (\$375) out of her own pocket.

A TfL Board Member who lives in Squamish attended this evening,. She imagined that because the event was AT the University, that the University would do promotion, as this happens all the time. The University, however, did not do any promotion whatsoever, even though the event is directly connected to part of the University curriculum, which is an Art for Social Change Program. Instead, a week before the event, the University booked an Ashoka (changemaker) event

<http://canada.ashoka.org/> in DIRECT conflict with this event. I say direct conflict not only in scheduling terms, but in accessing an audience terms. Theatre for Living cut the young woman a cheque and returned 50% of the amount she put in herself. She didn't want anything. We could agree on this amount. It just feels so wrong.

Because we were such a small group, after explaining everything, I asked for permission to do the event. It became apparent in discussing this that time was a real issue for people. Many had only planned on staying an hour, and so I made the decision to do two Corporate Messages instead of the usual three.

One of the stories offered bears mentioning. A young man is a First Responder in a medical team. He gets called to the home of a very elderly woman, who, he can see on her medical history has numerous chronic and painful diseases. His job in this moment is to save her life, and bring her back into her world of pain. This was a very powerful story. But when I asked him if, in the moment, there were corporate messages in his head giving him advice that was unhealthy for HIM, he said no....unhealthy for her. But the exercise is not about her...it is about you – are there corporate messages that are unhealthy for you in this moment? (Personally, I believe there are...as I can clearly imagine the moment.). He said I really don't know. Difficult situation because if the audience chooses the story and then when we get there he cannot offer anything, we have a real problem....and so my choice was to thank him – explain that although the subject matter is really important, that we need there to be messages he can identify that are unhealthy for him, and ask for a different person. Feedback was that this was handled with grace.

But still, I wonder how it may have been possible to proceed and to just “get there” and see. My gut tells me that there are some very central requirements that we must have, because so much else about the technique is up in the air.

It was also eventful to get to the ‘chosen’ story. The votes kept being an equal number between this and one other. We voted numerous times. Always the same. Finally, the audience started suggesting, with a lot of laughter, we resort to “rock, paper, scissors”....which we did...and the two women kept coming up with the same symbols!! Finally, of course, one of them ‘won’ and we proceeded:

The story: “Goodbye, Clothes” a young woman is at her closet. She has so many clothes and some of them are “labels” that she no longer feels comfortable wearing. She has had a spiritual awakening and is different now, and needs to shed her former self. And yet....when she considers giving these clothes away, there are so many corporate messages in her head.

Messages and interventions

Father/Louis Vitton: I want you to feel beautiful. You are not going to be complete without these clothes. I own you.

A man intervened, put his arms around the Father, and told him it is OK, you don't have to worry. How are you going to fit into Society, asked Dad. The intervener calmed him and calmed him, and calmed himself....

He turned to face the Father/Louis Vitton, head on – did not try to deny the voice, but embraced it and was sympathetic to it and in creating that generous space, was able to set his own firm boundaries – not from a place of anger, but from a place of centered love and compassion for both the Dad and himself.

If this isn't about clothes, what is it about? Body image; my social status; my hobbies that no one understands; spirituality.

A woman intervened and asked Dad....why? why do I have to be beautiful? I have changed inside myself. You are telling me the same messages from before, but now I am different. I need you to walk away, Now! Get out! She went to push him away and he sidestepped the push.

This opened up a conversation about becoming visible – something we ALL have to do at some point in our lives in order to become individuals, separate from our parents...to be who we truly ARE. We have to assert ourselves in the same way with Corporate messaging.

What does “becoming visible” mean to you? Understanding a personal truth; owning your own power; realizing that you have strength and using that strength.

Older Sister/Cosmo: I want you to feel insecure; you need to fit inside the box. The shape was hugging the storyteller from behind – had her arms wrapped around her waist, trapping her.

A woman intervened and wriggled out of the “box” the sister had created. She turned to her sister and asked if she remembered when they were small together. I can't live inside that box anymore, she said. It hurts me. The “sister” responded with...no...you have to be beautiful....look great....get yourself a husband. The intervener responded with ‘that hurts me. You are telling me I need someone else. Imagine saying that to a 6-year old girl. I am still that insecure girl inside.’

If this isn't about clothes, if we recognize Corporations are telling us we will never be “grown up” and that they have to take care of us like older brothers and sisters, what is it about? The Government; the University itself; the Oil Industry; pharmaceuticals; food industry; public schools.

A young woman intervened and started to sing and then sing and dance, forcing sister/Cosmo to dance with her. When I asked them to make the strongest emotion, they reversed positions from the original scene. The “oppressed” had become the “oppressor”, to use those terms.

What is the singing and dancing? Freedom; being carefree; inspiration; confidence; being whole; beauty. OK...is it getting on with one's life? This opened up a conversation, as in many other evenings about getting along knowing the voice is still in your ear.

What concrete can you take away? I am going to take a long, hard look in the mirror and try to calm down the self-criticism that I now know is Corporate Messaging, not really me; I have understood that I can have compassion for the Fear of the Corporate messages and that if I do, I make space for myself inside that compassion, to change my reactions; I have seen for the first time that others, who I judge harshly, may be doing what they are doing because of the influence Corporate Messaging has on them.

A young woman came to me after, vibrating, gave me a big hug, and said “this was the most real thing I have ever attended”.

Langley

Friday, November 29, 2013

Sponsor: United Churches of Langley

Venue: United Churches of Langley

Capacity: 60 attendance: 30 50% of House

Once again – the organizers, who worked with us on a successful “Us and Them (inquiry)” a few years ago – were very disappointed with the turnout. Many people said they were coming and then didn’t.

Because of the small number, I asked for permission to proceed once I had explained the event. Obviously, we went ahead.

Something happened in the warm-up: about 80% of this audience was quite elderly. When I explained the pushing game, I could see they were very, very reluctant. But they dutifully got up and did it....and had a great time....laughing....yelling.... this led me to comment on how important it is for us to play all through our lives. This was the first of many moments when this audience got very quiet and I felt like (Dorothy agrees) someone who was saying and doing things that were very much outside this audience’s frame of reference.

The story: “To eat or not to eat”. A 17 year old is on his way home from school. He is in the Mall and hungry. He sees McDonalds and also an organic vegetable store. He wants the carbs, meat and grease. But his conscience is telling him to go for the vegetables.

The Messages and some interventions

Alpha friend/Nabob I want you to surrender; you know you’ll feel great.

A young man intervened and was silent for quite a while and then said, ‘I like you – I like spending time together, but you can’t always be in the top part of my life. People who spend too much time together have a dependence on each other, we should help them break that.

At the end of the improvisation the young man had very naturally entered into a shape that almost exactly mirrored the shape of Alpha friend/Nabob. This opened up a conversation about how we end up doing this, bending ourselves into a similar shape to the Corporations and people with which we are in relationship.

How does this relate in your lives? People talked about being habituated to various brands...addiction...

A woman intervened and said 'you know I like you but we can't have this relationship anymore. I love you, but goodbye. She left and went into the audience and sat with her husband and tried to make a connection with him, but he wouldn't 'play'. And so we chatted about relying on community for support and what happens if there is no support? (This was, I think, a little challenging for the husband.)

Employer/Visa I want you to understand you cannot leave; you can't escape me.

An older man came on stage and very angrily (truculently, says Dorothy) told the Boss he did have a choice and was leaving. He claimed his perception was reality. But he never left. He seemed very nervous. We talked about what he accomplished, but I didn't have the heart to say what I really saw, which was that he expressed his anger forcefully....but never left. The way people do...rail on and on inside themselves but never leave, including with the Bank and say, go to a Credit Union. My own kindness in this moment robbed us of a challenging insight.

This did open up a conversation about how the Banks tell us that part of being an adult, a grown-up, is being in debt and what an unhealthy message that is. Many people indicated they understood and related to this.

What is this about for you? Control over myself and my choices; self-determination; opting out; I need to get a job to get what I want and so I buy into all of it; wanting 'out' but not knowing how to achieve that.

Forbidden Girlfriend/Coca Cola I am delicious; I want you to enjoy life.

I took this person aside at one point and encouraged her to not be afraid to be seductive (we were in a church.) She rose to the occasion. The improvisation got huge, huge laughter...people loved watching the storyteller squirm inside his dilemma.

After a long time with no intervention, I asked three questions:

1. How many of you understand, inside you, the attraction of the "forbidden girlfriend". About 4 brave souls raised their hands.
2. I also asked the audience how many of them knew this scene was a very dangerous struggle for the storyteller. They all raised their hands. And so I commented on how we have turned

other people's struggles into our entertainment. I saw many faces drop..."that's true"....a few people said out loud. This was a profound "poke", and it led to interventions.

3. What is the Forbidden Girlfriend for you? Cookies; nice clothes; entertainment;
financial problems; not being able to say no.

A man intervened and tried to stay friends with the girlfriend but also keep a distance. It was a very wordy scene and so I took away their words...physical only, and she started dancing with him. And he danced with her, and enjoyed it.

This opened up a conversation about how he thought he was creating a healthy boundary, but the majority of the audience saw he had "given into temptation".

A woman intervened and said, I recognize how attractive you are but I have to make a choice – all or nothing, and I choose nothing. And she left. She sat down and ignored the Forbidden Girlfriend. We talked about determination and what that looks and feels like, because she LOOKED in distress, but inside her felt very centered.

We also chatted about how Corporations need us to need them. This led to recommending the Century of Self and the evolution of publicity and marketing.

This also opened up a conversation about how "nice" many of the interventions had been – wanting to set boundaries but not upsetting anyone. Someone commented that sometimes, we just have to be willing to do that (upset people) in order to protect ourselves, our loved ones and our communities.

What are you taking away? I recognized determination in myself tonight in a new way; I learned that the voices are there and also how to get around them; I am reaffirmed in the need for community to deal with corporate messaging; actually talking about it with others is helpful, not being ashamed of having the struggle.

Vancouver #3

Wednesday, Dec 4, 2013

Sponsor: Theatre for Living

Venue: Gordon Neighbourhood House

Capacity: 50 attendance: 28 56% of House

Well, I thought Squamish was going to be our smallest house. This was the same number. We had a very wonderful, deep and much appreciated event – the people who were there loved it...MANY came to me after – this is great. And....

...we have just come off of a Western Canada Tour and have 5 Vancouver events in small venues. Considering the company's history here and the energy created from *maladjusted* last year, we should have been turning people away at the door tonight and every night this week. Because the

number was so small, as I usually do with very small houses, I explained the process and asked for permission to proceed.

The Story: Dilemma in the Produce Aisle a young woman who is aware of food issues is looking at the lettuce counter at Choices – a high end, health food store. She has money. Her issues are philosophical. Do I buy the expensive organic lettuce or the cheaper lettuce? They look the same. Is there a difference? Am I being green washed? I want healthy food, but I don't want the pressure I am under to pay more to buy it.

The Messages and Interventions

Best Friend/LuluLemon: I want you to follow me to live this Yoga Life. (In a difficult Yoga pose). The character seemed very needy...grabbing at interveners...hugging them.

A woman intervened and said I don't feel comfortable, drawn to that lifestyle. I want to find my own passion. I love you, but I don't want to do something I am not passionate about.

What just happened, audience? She is being passive, saying what she doesn't want, not what she does want....this opened up a conversation about our activism – how we have become patterned fighting against what we don't want...what do we want?

How does the neediness of the Best Friend/Lululemon translate in your lives? They draw us in emotionally; they are surrounding me online.

A man intervened and said I am not much of a follower...I do some Tai Chii on my own. He asked to be listened to and respected. Then he went off to do his Tai Chii. This opened up the conversation, as in many events, about doing the thing we should do, knowing the message will continue in our ears.

No Name/Grandmother: I want you to look at what's in front of you and see what's really better...are the two lettuces really different? This young woman really understood the grandmother.

A woman in the audience wanted to make a comment about disagreeing about the process....she does want to remove herself from the Corporations but not the friends. This led to me explaining why I am approaching things this way. How many of us know we are in intimate relationships with Corporations? About 50% of the audience. How hard it is to alter those relationships? Very hard. If we can identify how these relationships parallel our relationships with humans, we can gain insights into how to alter the relationships with Corporations. Does this make sense, I asked? Yes – a great deal, thanks, she said – and we continued.

The story-teller intervened on her own scene and explained to the Grandmother that huge Corporations are trying to take control of our food and the Grandmother responded beautifully with "I just want you to be healthy – this is why I give you money!".....this went back and forth,

No Name being the perfect grandmother who believes she is doing what is best for her granddaughter and turning any comment made around to favour her point of view.

Which Corporations are telling us they know better than we do what is good for us? The Government; Fast Food Companies; Hospitals, Kinder Morgan, Enbridge; BC Ferries.

This led me to tell a story about Hazelton, where Enbridge, the week before our event, gave kids in the community skates and led meetings with mothers about nutrition, all to buy favour in the community.

A woman intervened and said, I've heard what you said, Grandma...I don't care....and left. The Grandmother kept the conversation going, regardless how far away the woman got. Where did you go? I asked the intervener. Home. the audience interpreted this as having just moved to where the problem isn't anymore, leaving it for other people to deal with. This opened a conversation about whether our tactics are about building community or about staying isolated and how easy it is to get isolated.

Dove/Therapist: I want you to be content and be at peace.

A woman intervened and said I understand that you want to help me. Tell me exactly what your message is and I will decide whether or not I want to follow your advice. She kept trying to get a straight answer, but all she got were platitudes. I took their language away and at this point, moving in slow motion, it got violent...she started kicking and punching the Therapist.

What happened here? She tried to take control away from him. The therapist, someone said, is being Stephen Harper – ignoring the question and just doing what he pleases.

Which Brands in your lives do this? Organized religion; Banks, Self Help Groups; Drug Companies...

Why did it get violent? The woman said, because I had to change the rules. This led to a conversation about when it is important to change the rules...when is it time to stop trying to reason? Now...Long overdue.....people said.

What concrete can you take away? I've realized Corporations try to disguise themselves as family members, filling the gaps in our lives with false love; resisting is not enough – we have to find something better; I see in my own life that I have pathetically turned my iPhone into a family member; I have to change my tactics.

"Thank you for **Corporations in our Heads** and keeping alive my hope that theatre can be a positive force in our collective struggle moving forward."
Kathryn Binnarsley, Vancouver, BC

"**Corporations in our Heads** (is the) human event of the season."

Lauren Kresowaty, <http://niftynotcool.com/2013/12/05/corporations-in-our-heads-the-human-event-of-the-season/>

“Corporations in our Heads has the ability to ease the constant hum of systemic ringing in our ears by making us think more critically about what creates this behavior in the first place.”

Tania Ehret, <http://rabble.ca/news/2013/12/corporations-our-heads-explores-exploitative-corporate-culture-and-consumer-awareness>

Vancouver #4

Thursday, December 5, 2013

Sponsor: Theatre for Living

Venue: Gallery Gachet

Capacity: 60 attendance: 44 73% of House

The story: “This is bullshit”. A young man was, in his youth, a gang member, doing very terrible things. His first day in prison he sat on his bed and decided he needed to change inside somehow, as he had brought himself to this incarcerated place. After getting out, he went “straight” and ended up selling stereo equipment in a Sony Store, wearing a suit. He hated it. Today, on “Sony Celebration Day”, watches arrived for everyone, and a corporate congratulatory fax. His colleagues in the store, he has retreated to the back room and has to decide, once again, to “wake up”, as while his job was “legitimate”, he had ended up in a similar soul destroying place as when he was a gang member. In this moment, the voices of corporations are in his head.

The messages and interventions:

Visa/Child: I want you to think about a promotion; your pockets will be full; you need the money!

A man intervened and asked the “child” to sit on his knee....money isn’t everything, kid...they entered a scene in which he tried to convince the child to change her values but the child, very slyly, played on her “father’s” emotions by telling him that he could stop handling “crooked money”...a reference to the Storyteller’s past and have “clean money” and all of a sudden he was offering to buy her a dress!

We got into a conversation about him ending up buying her love and equating this with getting into deeper and deeper debt...accepting more and more credit. Who are we doing this for? What does it fulfill in us? How many of us navigate “clean” and “unclean” money? Many in the audience recognized this in their own lives, working at jobs the ethics of which they don’t support, having their money in banks that are investing in terrible practices. Also how we are encouraged to consume, to buy things, as an indicator of our live for others and for ourselves.

A man intervened and said I can’t take this anymore, I am going to cut you up. And he cut the Visa/Child in two! We discussed leaving corporate relationships...people mentioned leaving Mobile Gas; leaving a certain bank, etc.

Mother/Toys R Us: I want you to recognize your value here as a member of the team; we need you; you count.

A woman intervened and asked, 'what do you know!? What's my name? I have other things I want to do with my life. I want to find other places to find love.' Mother countered with 'really? Who buys you a watch??....to much laughter and applause.

What is Toys R Us to you, audience? It satisfies what we need to feel good; pressure from children that we give into. We crave affection and attention and we fall for this team message.

A woman intervened and said, "that's enough! I want you to really mean it". But she was making very unsure, insecure faces – the Mother was speaking VERY loudly and the intervener kept wincing. What is the loudness of Toys R Us to you, audience? She is telling lies; it is the ever present voice of the big promoter; overbearing.

It strikes me that this is a voice that is telling us that she knows better than we do what is good for us. Many agreed. What Corporations do this out there? Enbridge; Apple, my dentist, Yoga Studios, processed food companies; medical institutions; pharmaceuticals, Educational Institutions.

Father/Harper Brand: I want you to forget you ever thought about this; don't cause trouble among your co-workers; be quiet; don't you dare.

A man intervened and in a very heartfelt way said, 'stop – that's enough. I am old enough to make my own decisions. I will be fine. Father responded with you will have nothing and the intervener said, 'I have come from nothing'.....and walked away only to be followed by the Father. This went on, back and forth for some time until Father/Harper blocked the door.

Why are you not actually leaving, I asked him and he answered because it is so scary to go into the abyss where you don't know what will happen. An audience member said, yes....what if Dad is right? We got into a conversation about when do we grow up?? When do we realize that marking a ballot once every five years is not democracy?

A woman intervened and, also from a very heartfelt place said, "what I am doing now hurts my soul. I have to stop doing this. I am going to leave you with your beliefs"...and she left. Father followed her, of course, and the woman pulled her hood over her head, protecting herself, becoming invisible.

I took their words away and asked them to play the scene in slow motion and they started a very intricate "dance" pushing and pulling against each other. I asked her why she didn't leave and she responded that she didn't feel there was anyplace to go.

What did pulling the hood up mean, audience? Self preservation; withdrawal; retreat; protection; inner strength; cocooning; trying not to be noticed.

Why did you engage in the dance? Hiding didn't work, I tried to look Father/Harper in the eyes.

This was the final intervention and I made an observation that all night the interventions had been solitary...no one had used the people in the room – the community that was in the room. Why? People said, because I like to believe I am not IN this battle; because relying on others is a sign of weakness; by reaching out to others I initiate even more voices; people will think I am crazy or reactionary.

What can you take away tonight? Deciding to leave is different than actually leaving; recognizing the voices exist; the ability to transform myself; it is hard to remember that people (good people) are speaking from inside Corporations.

“Corporations in our Heads was entirely entertaining and very cathartic. You leave the experience shaken and excited. That’s powerful theatre.”

David C. Jones <http://outtv.ca/blogs/clowns-jokers-tour>

Vancouver #5

Friday, December 6, 2013

Sponsor: Theatre for Living

Venue: Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre (VAFC)

Capacity: 60 attendance: 44 73% of House

The story: “Shopping psychosis”: a woman is in a trendy store. She sees a jacket she loves. Its regular price is \$800 (way too much) but it is 50% off. She doesn’t have this money....well she does, but it is her emergency fund. Still she wants the jacket. Why? Because it will make her beautiful.

The Messages and Interventions:

Father/Walmart: you are really mindful about your money; I want you to feel good about saving all this.

A man intervened and said I don’t have the money, it is for emergencies. He put the jacket on and walked out of the store, shoplifting the jacket. Father Walmart followed him out of the store where the intervener said, “are you proud of me, Dad?” This prompted the two of them to shake hands. I asked them to take one step to get what they want and the intervener turned away and Dad put a very authoritative hand on the intervener’s shoulder.

The audience had various ideas about the secret thoughts of the characters, most of them having to do with Father/Walmart having “won”. This really surprised the intervener.

What is the jacket for you, audience? Success; identity; career choice; a car; mobility; a house; children; love; emotional stability.

I asked the intervener if he’d got what he wanted and he said yes...although he hadn’t planned on the “hand” on his shoulder at the end. He seemed to think it was unfair. Yes, this makes sense.

Shoplifting is a crime, after all. This opened up a conversation about how Corporate voices lead us into crime, something that has never come up before.

How is it possible corporate messaging leads us into crime? Don't we have free will? Yes, of course. And everything also has a context. We are living in a culture in which we are judged by others and also ourselves by what we can be perceived to possess. Corporate messaging really encourages this twisted version of "worth". Not everyone turns to crime, there are many factors, of course. I do think, though, it is fair to say that when self worth is even in part determined by possessions, and some people cannot possibly hope to have those possessions, that simply taking them or acquiring them by other illegal means becomes more of an option. Some "crime" is fueled by concrete need – the street child who steals a loaf of bread; other crime is fueled by value systems.

Lover/Mercedes: You are the best and I want people to look at you in this jacket.

A very wonderful improvisation went on for a while that was very seductive; lots of laughter. No interventions. This prompted me to ask two questions:

1. Do we recognize the Protagonists struggle as our own? A resounding yes.
2. Have we turned her struggle into entertainment? A lot of silence.

Let's not do here what we do out there....even us...people with a social justice conscience. A man intervened and he got onto the floor, crossed legs, and meditated. This threw Lover/Mercedes into a frenzy of trying to get his attention; even rubbing her body against him, to much laughter and applause. Except under the humour, it was very serious. I took their words away and this led to her kicking his hands, trying to move him, but he stayed there, centered and silent.

He talked about "not needing anything" and from that place not "wanting" anything. And having to tell oneself that you are worthy and complete. Have any of you done this, audience? how?

- I had to decide I'd be OK in the future, even when everyone else disagreed with me;
- I had to take the moment to understand the message is harmful.

This seemed particularly important coming into the Holidays, a time when people go into debt to prove their worth and their love to each other.

Best Friend/Visa: I want you to look like a movie star; I don't want you to worry about the consequences.

A woman intervened and just started repeating everything the Best Friend said. This was an interesting moment for me as I found the juvenile nature of it annoying. I took away their words and the Best Friend picked up the jacket and tried to put it on the intervener. They started a kind of "dance" between a matador and a bull. A blood sport.

I asked the intervener if she was getting what she wanted and she went onto a long explanation of trying to reflect back the words by repeating them. I see they are coming from a toxic place, she said, and they can annoy you and derail you. I tried to point out that the tactic also led to a deep engagement with the voice (and actually didn't accomplish anything), but much like the intervention itself, we started talking in loops.

I think my reaction to this may be a function of how deeply tired I am. I don't think I dealt with her very well.

What are you taking away, audience?

- I need to engage more in critical thought;
- Personifying the voices into relationships gives them intimacy;
- I thought Corporations were faceless when I came in here, but the idea that they can be our lovers, fathers, friends, has really changed something inside me – I will use this;
- I was going to try and make things for Xmas for friends, decided not to – but realized tonight that it is the Corporate Messaging in my head that wants me to think my friends want bought items – I am going to make gifts after tonight.
- The storyteller said she had had something inside her change and shift tonight. She doesn't want the jacket anymore.

Vancouver #6

Saturday, December 6, 2013

Sponsor: Theatre for Living

Venue: SFU Terrasen Lecture Hall

Capacity: 75 attendance: 40 53% of House

We went into tonight with 60 reservations and had an audience of 40. Maybe the weather, it is -8C at the moment – but still, disappointing.

The Story: “What’s my Soul Worth?”: the storyteller is a Yoga Coach. She has a need to rebrand her business. Her Branding Consultant wants her to go with a very glossy, Corporate brand because it will bring in a more monied clientele. Our Protagonist feels that this image is against her values. She has a decision to make about whether or not to keep working with this consultant and in that moment has lots of Corporate Messages in her head.

The Messages and some interventions:

Mother-in-Law/ Enbridge: I want you to listen to my messages about branding. Stay inside the box.

Mother-in-law started the scene saying, ‘I know what’s good for you. I have so much experience. I am so much older than you. No one in the world is real. You will learn that as you get older. You can’t change the world.’

A man intervened and said, 'it is so kind of you to say those things – I am going to take a nap now.' And he laid down on the floor and closed his eyes, to much laughter. The message just stood over him and kept talking. This continued for a long time, me waiting for him to do something, but he just lay there.

I asked the audience what this intervention meant to them. 'he separated the voice from his authentic self; he shut down in the face of abuse'.

When you went to sleep, did you expect the Mother-in-Law to stop? 'not really'....he said.

Audience – do you know anyone who has 'shut down' in the face of this kind of pressure? Many. This led me to mention Canada having one of the highest youth suicide rates in the industrial world and how in the North, images of things that are impossible to have are beamed into homes. The Corporate messaging around this contributes, it seems to me, to the high suicide rate. We entered a discussion about shutting down and that it might lead to something like suicide or it might just be a temporary coping mechanism. True. How do we know which is which?

Mother/Facebook: I want you to say only what will make you money; don't be authentic.

A woman intervened. She confronted Mother/Facebook and said, 'shut up, sit down, go away.' She silenced the mother and said over and over again in various ways, 'I am not listening to what you have to say.'

I pointed out that she kept saying she wasn't listening but kept communicating. The character is not only mother, but FaceBook. Isn't this exactly what we do with FaceBook? SAY we are not listening....but keep going back anyway? Isn't it the same with a lot of corporate messaging? Lot of agreement in the room.

Cool Girlfriend/LuluLemon: I want you to walk this path with me like everyone else otherwise they won't accept you.

A man intervened and told LuluLemon her whole premise is lies. You are selling skinny women. I totally reject that. You are no longer my consultant. I will go with someone who represents my values. This audience member changed the 'game' in more than one way. He turned the Corporate Message into the other character in the real storyteller's story, the branding consultant. Nevertheless, we continued. The intervener walked and then ran away. LuluLemon/Girlfriend followed him.

I asked the intervener why it was so important to convince her of his perspective? Because she was grabbing at me. How many of you, audience, have turned, left, and got on with your lives knowing the voices were still going to be there? Many.

Sometimes we have an opportunity to step off into the abyss. The unknown. When where we are is just too unhealthy, but we don't actually know where we are going. The intervener agreed with this and thought the ability to do it might come with age. I am not so certain.

What do you take away from tonight? You can be mindful all the time, just honour your values; The storyteller said she was going away with so much; you can't engage without taking a risk; we have to change the frame; I am not alone, this helps me to continue the struggle; Tfl is a Corporation, so not all Corporations are bad; just knowing the messages are voices has been important tonight; acknowledging that we have a choice.

Vancouver #7

Sunday, December 8, 2013

Sponsor: Theatre for Living

Venue: Café du Soleil

Capacity: 89 attendance: 96 108% of House

Closing night. Of course it was packed. Always the way. They wait until the end.

Café du Soleil is a challenging space to do theatre in, but we have had very good events there. People come. They see it as their space. And the kind of event this is works so much better in a café than in a formal theatre or a lecture hall (like last night). In retrospect, maybe events like *Corporations in our Heads* should NOT happen in theatres....but ONLY either workshop spaces or cafes. A lesson to learn.

The Story: "to Challenge or to Please" a woman is in Toys R Us, shopping for Christmas presents for her young nieces. She wants to get them meaningful and empowering gifts, but knows they want "pink dolls" and things that define them as "feminine girls". The storyteller says, 'I want my nieces to grow up to be strong women. I want to be a good Aunt.' How does she balance what they want with what she wants to get them?

When the Corporate Messages went after her (part of the technique) she ended up curled up in a little ball on the stage.

The messages and some interventions:

Niece/La Senza: I want you to buy something cute and pretty, because all little girls want to be cute and pretty.

A woman intervened and said 'how long has it been since we spent time together? I want to get to know you better, spend some time together. Let's do something you would like. How about Roller Skating?' Ok – said the Niece OK....that can be my present to you! And you can buy me what I want.' After some negotiation, the intervener offered to rent pink roller skates. The Niece wanted to know if this was, in fact, her Christmas present and the intervener, not knowing what to do, put her

hands on her head, looking at the ceiling. “Freeze”. Taking one step, the woman ended up reaching for the niece and the niece begging.

Audience – if this isn’t about a Christmas present, what is it about? Belonging; building relationships; the brevity of time we have with each other; that we need to get what we “want” in order to be good enough; expressing a need through materialism; to build strong women.

A woman intervened and, as the Aunt, said, “your Aunt is a whack-ball and I am going to give you exactly what I want!” the Niece countered with well, if I don’t like it I will throw it out. A very intellectual argument followed, considering the Niece is 6 or 8 years old, about the “joy of being different’ and ‘what a rough world the world really is’. I kept telling the intervener to DO what she was suggesting, but she kept talking about it instead.

We chatted a bit about having an intellectual conversation about empowerment with a 6 or 8 year old. Then a woman yelled stop and made a quick intervention. She said, ‘I understand where you are coming from, Niece, and it is normal to want to be like your friends.’

What are you watching, audience? A generation gap; a lack of communication; not really addressing the child; not giving her any real alternative.

Mother/Disney: I want you to buy, buy, buy so you appear to be loved by those that you love.

A man intervened and hugged the mother. Mother Disney collapsed in his arms to much laughter and applause, and said, “I’m not happy....I want people to love me. Mother/Disney went on for a long time, regaining momentum after the collapse, gesticulating and spewing wall to wall words, regaining her control. The intervener stood and stared at Mother Disney.

What did you just watch, audience? Manipulation; using a different strategy; marketing; showing the patterns we’ve developed; protecting vulnerability.

I know this might be a strange connection to make, but Nelson Mandela died yesterday. After *so many years* in prison, this man went into negotiation with his oppressors. In his very first speech to them, he spoke for 20 minutes feeding them back their history of settlement in South Africa. Not as colonizers, but as people trying to make a life for themselves. He managed to say to them, ‘I see you, and I know you, and here I am trying to understand you.’ It was impossible for them to fight against this; to negate it. Mandela’s approach was, as they say, a “game changer”. I am not naïve, Mandela and all that he stood and stands for has not solved all the problems in South Africa. That is always too much to expect. But his enormous courage (physical yes, but in my mind, emotional courage) should be an example to us all. What do we want? To keep fighting the same old fight? Or actually change how things happen on the planet?

I asked the intervener if he understood why I had talked about Mandela. Yes....because of the hug. This started a dialogue with the audience about the people who LIVE inside Corporations. Are they

the Corporation? Later in the evening, this led to comments about reaching out, community and forgiveness.

A woman intervened and followed up on this. She put her arm around Disney/Mom and stopped her. She told her she loved her, but explained that Mom was hurting her, her love was toxic, and that she could not listen anymore and had to change the terms of the relationship. I took their words away and they ended up in a struggling dance.

I asked the audience about getting out of toxic relationships and many, many had. How have you done that with Corporations? Changed from TD to VanCity; sold my Enbridge stock; stopped using plastic altogether and that got rid of a lot of Corporations in my home; got rid of my TV ten years ago; I am growing my own food; bringing the awareness to home earlier.

Boyfriend/Visa: I want you to buy three of these so that your nieces will love you.

A man intervened and said, if I buy, where does it stop? I will just buy more and more. I don't want that – I want a relationship with my niece. This is about mutual happiness.

Audience, what are you watching? The intervener is afraid of losing the Boyfriend; he can't just walk away. I mentioned to the intervener that his need seemed to be to engage and he said I want the boyfriend to understand there are other ways of dealing with the issue.

A comment came out of this about our relationship with Banks – that we want them to understand that we want change, but we are not willing to or capable of ending or changing the relationship.

This opened up the issue of addiction, and our own addiction to consuming, to buying etc. What does this make you think of? We say Corporations are evil but we are not willing to give up cars or other things that make our lives easier; we have a tendency to give up the struggle and just buy stuff; a man commented that Corporations have given us the new "bible" they are now giving us our spirituality in the absence of real spirituality; we see Corporations as our Saviours. We want rescuing. Will Corporations really do that?

As always, I asked the audience what (if any) concrete things they are taking away? we have each other as a source of support and strength; Can we re-appropriate the Corporations' stories? Slow down and slide down from the head to the heart; Corporations are in it for the long haul and I have to be, too; forgive the Corporations, they are addicted, too; we need to start a 12-step program for dealing with advertisement addiction; we can build our own culture, not let Corporations do it for us; this work should be in schools; I feel inspired that others are also questioning this; gratitude involves not wanting "more".

There was a standing ovation tonight, one of a very few on this tour. I have a sense that tonight went well, but the ovation was also a response to the end of 33 of these events, and people appreciating what an undertaking that was. The ovation wasn't just for tonight but for the project.

Having said that, I was inundated tonight with thanks for the event from a broad diversity of people. One man, from the UK, feels that this event would be very well received there and has suggested that when he gets home, he is going to try to make that happen. We shall see.