

Us and Them

(the inquiry)



An intimate evening of theatre (created by you)
Oct. 22 – Nov. 28, 2010
At various venues throughout Metro Vancouver

Artistic Director's Final Report



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THE SHORT VERSION	3
The context of Us and Them (the inquiry).....	3
The <i>Inquiry</i> phase.....	4
The invitation to the audience	4
the Rainbow of Desire process	5
Insights from the Inquiry events.....	7
The skills transfer.....	9
In hindsight, what might we do differently?	10
US AND THEM (THE INQUIRY) ATTENDANCE FIGURES	12
THE COMMUNITY EVENTS	13
City of Powell River and Avanti Films	13
Mission Restorative Resolutions	15
Headlines Theatre (opening night)	18
Qmunity and Quirk-e	19
Phoenix Society, Transformative Communities Project Society	23
First Nations House of Learning.....	25
Langley United Church and Agricultural Workers' Union.....	29
Collingwood Neighbourhood House	31
In the House Festival	34
Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House.....	36
Foundation Radio & Black Dot Roots and Culture Collective.....	38
Unitarian Church and Amnesty International	40
Nikkei Heritage Centre & Museum	42
Portland Hotel Society and Heart of the City Festival.....	43
Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre and United Native Youth Assoc.....	45
Newworld Theatre.....	48
Newworld Theatre.....	51
Youth Initiative Canada and the Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Assoc.	52
North Shore Welcoming Action Committee.....	56
Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House	58
Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House	61
Vancouver Coastal Health	64
APPENDIX A (LIST OF ORGS. IN THE <i>US AND THEM (THE INQUIRY)</i> NETWORK)	68
APPENDIX B (PUBLICITY REPORT)	72

The short version

The context of *Us and Them* (the inquiry)

Us and Them, in all its phases, is a two-year undertaking culminating in a large production to celebrate Headlines' 30th Anniversary. It is also the reflection of how Headlines' and my own work has evolved over many years and in this way is at the cutting edge my own and the company's experience.

Headlines was born in 1981, doing satirical agit-prop theatre (*Buy, Buy Vancouver*). By the mid-80s the company was drawing on the work of two Brazilian men (among others): Paulo Freire (best known for his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) and Augusto Boal, who became a mentor and dear friend (and founder of the *Theatre of the Oppressed*.)

By the early 90s invitations were coming from communities across Canada to do Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) work. Some of these invitations, in particular from First Nations communities, had a caveat attached to them that involved finding a way to change the oppressor/oppressed language. The people making the invitations loved the work, but didn't like how it polarized their communities. The binary model of TO, in which characters are either "oppressor" or "oppressed" and audiences are invited to 'replace the oppressed character and do battle with the oppressor' didn't work for the issues they wanted and needed to explore, like the results of Residential Schools, addiction, violence, language loss, dislocation, etc.

I found the request to let go of the TO model very personally challenging. With hindsight, I understand I was challenged because at that point in my life I was very attached to having clearly defined enemies. It made my political activism easier; it made my life simpler. Honouring the requests, though, was the right thing to do and it set me on a path of questioning the binary lens through which we tend to view the world. And so, slowly, sometimes in ways that were barely perceptible, the work started to change.

By the mid/late 90s I realized that not only had the language of oppressor/oppressed gone from the work, but I was now operating with a new model, one that had developed through a blending of the desires at the heart of these invitations and my own interest in physics and systems-based theory (the work of people like Fritjof Capra). Headlines as an organization was now collaborating with communities, recognizing that they were living, complex, integrated organisms; entities that contained the polarity inside them, just like all individuals do, as an integrated whole. I had slowly realized that even the great, iconic oppressors – the Hitlers, the Pinochets – don't drop in from outer space to make our lives miserable. Humanity grows them. Whether it is at the very personal and individual level or at the very large systemic level, it is time we get beyond

dealing with symptoms – the fact something is happening – and down into the root causes of why and how behaviour that hurts humanity occurs.

And so in the very late 90s I changed the name of the work; no longer Theatre of the Oppressed, it became *Theatre for Living*. My book, *Theatre for Living: the art and science of community-based dialogue* (with a foreword by physicist Fritjof Capra) is an in-depth look at the hows and whys of the transformation of my work.

The global warming issue has the potential, I believe, to be a great teacher for humanity. Some of the questions that are there for us to ask are: On this tiny blue speck hanging out in the middle of nowhere – you know, science fiction aside, there really is no where to go – who are “they”? When do we realize there is only “us” here? What is it about humanity that compels us to create “the other”? What kind of structures and systems would grow from us, that would transform the world in which we live, if we understood this, at a fundamental level? The “Us and Them” project was conceived as a two-year undertaking to explore these issues.

The Inquiry phase

In the first phase, “the inquiry”, we mounted twenty-one events in a broad diversity of locations, hosted by many different communities, plus two “preview” events for a total of twenty-three events. A detailed list, with box office figures, is on page 11 of this report.

We used a theatrical technique called **Rainbow of Desire**, that comes from Augusto Boal’s “Theatre of the Oppressed”. In my own work, Rainbow of Desire has become a valuable tool in the investigation of the complexity of the feedback loops in which we all exist. We all have our own internalized struggles that manifest as detrimental behaviour to ourselves, the people around us, and the planet. When I facilitate this exercise, we spend time looking at the fears and desires of **both sides** of the story.

The invitation to the audience

Each night I explained the context and origins of the project and asked for three stories to come from the audience – from people’s own lives – not friends’ lives, not relatives’ lives, not the movies – their real lives – and in the relative present, say within the last 5 or 6 years, not way back into childhood. The focus of the story? A moment when you came together, into the same physical space with another person and, through an interaction with that person, either turned him/her into “the other” or s/he turned you into “the other”.

Stories came. We heard the central details of each story and then the audience and the story-tellers voted for the story that resonated with them the deepest at either a realistic or symbolic level.

the Rainbow of Desire process

Before stories would be offered, I would explain the process, so people would know what they were agreeing to do:

If you offer a story, and your story is chosen, you will be here onstage with me for the rest of the event. Having said that, it is important to know that we are not here to do a psychoanalysis of the story-teller. The story will become a symbol, owned by us all. No longer “your story”, it will become “our story”.

Let’s say this woman here in the front row – what is your name, please? – Mary – let’s say Mary offers a story and the room chooses Mary’s story. Let’s also imagine that it is a story between Mary and her employer. I don’t know Mary, I’m just making this up. Someone would need to offer to come to play the employer. Why do that? Not to demonize or make fun of the employer. People do the things they do because they believe they are right, not because they believe they are wrong. If we want to get inside this story and investigate “Us and Them” then we have a responsibility to put both sides of the story on the stage in as honourable a way as possible. We don’t need to agree with the employer, but we have to get inside his/her reasons and motivations.

So someone will come to play the employer. Someone who can honour that side of the story. Already we are moving away from Mary’s real story, because this is not the real employer. Already “we” are starting to own the story.

We will put the story between the two characters on the stage, through a process that I will direct. I will be looking for ‘that moment’ when I can see the fears and desires of both characters bumping up against each other and I will say “freeze”. For the rest of the event, we will be frozen in that moment. And I will say:

OK – Mary – in this moment – you have desires towards the employer. Please do not speak – do not explain – but, by making a shape with your body, show us your strongest desire towards the employer. Maybe Mary wants to strangle the employer. OK – so here is a shape of strangling the employer. And I will ask the audience – who understands this desire of Mary’s? lots of hands will go up. Who can come here and be the desire; turn the shape into a character? Lots of hands will go down, but someone will come. Why would this man

come to play Mary's desire? Not because he knows or imagines what is inside Mary. We are not here to do a psychoanalysis of Mary. This man would come because he recognizes the desire inside himself. Again – "we" are starting to own the story.

Now a fear. Mary has fears in relation to the employer and these fears also set up actions inside her body. A shape, please (don't speak or explain) of the strongest fear. Another shape would come. Another person from the audience.

And so we will people the stage with the fears and desires of both characters. Having done this, using the theatre as a laboratory, we will get each individual fear and desire playing out scenes in various ways with the other character and other fears and desires. In doing so funny things will happen, because it is live improvisation, profound things may happen, we will peel the layers of complexity away from what started as a personal story about "Us and Them" but has become a symbol owned by this audience, this group of people in this room tonight.

And so – I want to be clear, so you know what you are offering to do – we need to be willing to do some things here this evening in order to make this investigation.

- we need to be willing to be open and honest;
- we need to be able to disagree; how can we have a real conversation if we have to agree?
- We need to be willing to engage, to push against each other like in the warm up game we played at the beginning;
- We need to be willing to think; I will be coming to the audience, often, and asking you to analyze what you are seeing/hearing;
- And, we need to be willing to feel.

And so stories came. The events were very different each night. Each event is detailed in the longer report, starting on page 12.

There were 27 community partners co-hosting the 23 events and 149 community-based organizations involved in the networking of the project. A complete list is attached as Appendix A. Please also see Liza Lindgren's Outreach Report for details. [Headlinetheatre.com/past work/Us and Them \(inquiry\)/reports](http://Headlinetheatre.com/past%20work/Us%20and%20Them%20(inquiry)/reports).

As would be expected with something this varied, some collaborations worked better than others. As would also be expected, the most successful were the ones where there were one or two consistent people in the partner organization(s) who

were personally very excited by the project and who recognized the potential for the collaboration to help them forward their own work.

Insights from the Inquiry events

I was very struck with how much audiences were ready, perhaps even hungry, for a new “model” a different lens through which to see the world and ourselves. There is a deep fatigue about the polarization all around us and also inside us. It is easy, of course, to sit back and judge others. It is more challenging to take the story into our personal lives. Into our workplaces, our families, our relationships. But of course, over and over again, we saw that it was and is the personal moments that create the larger picture.

So many times Paulo Freire’s writing became relevant. His observation that winning the revolution is not the challenge; the real challenge is having won the revolution, not becoming the very thing we were fighting against. Why does this happen throughout history? I will suggest it happens because we trick ourselves into believing we are prisoners of the structures we inhabit and therefore focus our activism only on structural change. Nature teaches us that it is patterns of behaviour that create structure – not the other way around. So, of course, if we neglect changing our patterns of behaviour we are doomed, regardless of our good intentions, to recreate the very structures we have been fighting against.

In order to change patterns of behaviour we need to embrace the truth that in an interconnected universe the boundaries between “oppressor and oppressed” are very fuzzy. Are children born to rape? Born to torture? Born to discriminate? Born to rob or pillage? Of course not. What happens to us? How and why does humanity grow people and groups of people and institutions that oppress others? The answers are not, I believe, in the “big moments”. They are in the small, human moments, woven throughout the individual stories in this report.

Both over-protective fear and over-aggressive desire play an important roles in our need to create “the other”. This was apparent in so many of the events. On numerous occasions it was apparent that both of these destructive forces emerge from a sense of not feeling safe. It is, however, such a “chicken and egg” cycle. Our fear makes us aggressive and our aggression creates actions in others that reinforce our fear. Distrust grows. Walls are erected.

Something else that became apparent was that sometimes “we” have an **addiction** to creating “the other”. If we no longer define ourselves in relation to “them” - how we are **not** “them”...who are we? And also if we no longer have “them” to blame and lash out against, what do we do? Investigate ourselves? Far too scary, this. And

so, when this is the case, we remain in the addiction, as individuals and as a collective people, nation, race, gender, etc., in relation to “the other”.

At the events themselves, I often asked audiences what they had learned or were taken away. The overlapping patterns from one night to the next seem important.

- From at least 6 of the events: “The other” is a mirror image of ourselves; Honesty, in a multitude of tiny moments, becomes a new way to see “the other” and to navigate very personal partnerships.
- From at least 5 of the events: We must not be so certain about what “the other” is thinking/feeling and to create the space to find this out from them.
- From at least 3 of the events: We turn people into “the other” because we are too tired or afraid to see or hear them.
- From at least 2 of the events: Knowing that “pushing back” isn’t always bad or wrong or impolite. Sometimes avoiding the confrontation is not helping – facing things doesn’t have to be violent or negative.
- At singular events: How hard it is to conquer the reaction of shutting down inside;
To know that even the powerful character has some fear in them;
That one can insist one’s individuality be respected with ways other than violence;
How important it is to set healthy boundaries.

“The other” being a mirror image of ourselves resonates, of course. I would suggest that each of us has whoever we perceive as “the other” inside us.

As I wrote in the original proposal, our need for certainty plays a role. This is also connected to our human need to feel safe/secure. A way for me to be certain, however, is to live in a world of “right” and “wrong” and if these get defined too tightly then I become “right” and they must be “wrong”. Again, I will turn to nature that teaches us that the universe is, in fact, a very Uncertain place. Our task becomes to find a way to live in uncertainty. Doing so creates space – not to condone overtly hurtful acts – but to see and hear others, with whom we may disagree, as having their own perspectives. From this place of mutual Uncertainty, relationships can be forged that dissolve the sense of “the other”.

It won’t come as a surprise that in many events, it was those moments when one or the other of the ‘sides’ of a story could find a way to really listen/see the other side were the most ‘successful’ in the evening and also threw out a challenge. How do

we accomplish that when someone is so diametrically opposed to our world view? It takes such courage and generosity.

There is a difference, though – and we saw it on numerous occasions – between listening to find weapons to convince the other side to change and listening authentically to find commonality across our differences. Isn't this the challenge between the Islamic and the Judeo/Christian worlds (for instance)? The current course of both sides insisting each is correct is leading us down such a dangerous path. How do we navigate a world that accommodates very different world views? Of course this is very complex and the devil is in the details....but as came up so many times – what do we WANT?

In terms of the upcoming play, we are thinking a lot right now about how “family” (humanity) turns in on itself; that a story that starts with “us” deteriorates somehow into “us” vs “them” as now opposing sides dig into their own certainty; how assumptions grow; how violence in various forms manifests and how this is sometimes connected to issues of identity (race, religion, gender, etc.), economics and/or health (physical, mental).

We have to tell this story simply and in a grassroots way, and give audiences the freedom to expand the images themselves into the larger, universal arena. The challenge of the artist is always this. Universality comes from being specific. Trying to create something universal, one makes mush.

And so the current task is to search for workshop group of 14 and a cast of 6. We want these people to have knowledge of what it means to have been pushed by others or themselves to the edge, or off the edge, creating a separation between “me” and “them”. We are looking for people who have experienced this in the context of identity (race, religion, gender, etc.), economics and/or health (physical, mental), and who are willing to participate in a collective creative process. Recruitment material is being developed and will start going out very soon.

The skills transfer

129 people expressed interest in the skills transfer coming in February 2011. We contacted all of them and 32 actually sent in applications. We were initially surprised by this but upon reflection, it makes some sense. It is far different to think at the event that the two-day skills transfer would be a great thing to do, than to actually commit the time (2 full days) and also agree to terms: a highly subsidized \$100 fee (there were discounts) and also a guarantee that one would produce at least one “Us and Them” event in one’s own community within four months of the training, and report back to us in writing. The 32 who actually applied were serious.

We had planned to go through the applications and accept 30, but with 32 applications, and the knowledge that there would inevitably be some dropout because life does keep unfolding, we just accepted all 32 into the training. In the end, we had 26 trainees, who came from a broad diversity of racial, ethnic, professional and philosophical roots. They were youth, youth workers, teachers, activists, psychologists, seniors and more.

The two-days were a very rich experience of deconstructing the Rainbow of Desire. The trainees will have an evening with Liza Lindgren (Headlines' Outreach Coordinator) to discuss strategies for community outreach for their events and then they will go off and experiment. We will be getting reports from them ranging in length from 1,000 to 3,000 words.

In hindsight, what might we do differently?

Collaborations like this, with so many different organizations, are always challenging. We chose not charge organizations for the event in their community, for good reasons, knowing that they were all stretched for funds and not wanting the collaboration to be about money. We fundraised to subsidize all of the events. This worked well in many instances and in some, it did not. It worked well when the collaborating organization(s) took their own ownership and invested staff time in bringing out their constituencies. This was not always the case. It might be that if we would have charged even a nominal fee for the event, we would have had fewer organizations on board, but deeper engagement from all of them.

It was suggested by some people that there were too many events. In the middle of the run, I agreed. Attendance, though, needed time to build – the buzz around the events took weeks to move into communities, especially as it was so difficult to generate media, with “no play, no actors and no script”. In the end, the number of events was necessary and an asset.

We had a challenge with publicity on this project for a number of reasons. We were forced to change publicists less than two weeks before opening and this created some chaos. No fault of the person who took over, the publicity plan was not in place the way it should have been. The fact that we played in the end to 77% houses is a testament to the work of both Publicity and Outreach.

Each event being in a different place was both a strength and a weakness. In terms of reaching into various communities, it was great. It was, however, very difficult to get the whole schedule “out there”. The postcards worked well for this. We made an error, I think with the posters, bus shelters and web site. Because we decided, in conjunction with the first publicist, that the posters and bus shelters could not have

the whole schedule (an error), we led people to www.headlinestheatre.com. The schedule needed to be the very first thing people saw when they arrived at the site. It was instead, three clicks away. This proved to be too much work for people – we got numerous complaints about it.

This error stemmed from a belief that the general public is much more computer literate/oriented than they are. We need to use web-based tools, of course, but there is still no substitute for clear and complete information on all print material. The same was true of the bought newspaper ads. They read, “in various locations, see www.headlinestheatre.com for details”. In hindsight, the ads should have contained the events for that week, and been updated each week. This would have been more initial work, but would have made the ads far more effective.

For a detailed accounting of the publicity aspect of the project, please see Appendix B of this report, written by Kei Baritugo (BoldLove Communications). A PDF of her report is also on Headlines’ web site: [past work/us and them\(inquiry\)/final reports](#).

For a detailed accounting of the community outreach aspect of the project, please see Liza Lindgren’s (Outreach Co-ordinator) Final Report, either in the hard copy package you have or on Headlines’ web site: [past work/us and them\(inquiry\)/final reports](#).

Us and Them (the inquiry) attendance figures

Us and Them
(the inquiry) fared very well, generally, in terms of attendance. The events played to 77% houses overall. The project came together right during all the arts and community service funding chaos of the BC Budget cuts and there is no way to deny this had a negative effect on our ability to organize, because of the effect it had on our community partners.

Day	Date	Community	Venue	Seating Capacity	Attendance	%	BOX OFFICE	Avg. Don.
Friday *	24-Sep-10	City of Powell River & Avanti Films	Katz Meow Café	50	56	112%	375.00	6.70
Saturday *	9-Oct-10	Mission Restorative Resolutions	Mission Secondary Drama Room	80	45	56%	750.00	16.67
Friday	22-Oct-10	Headlines	Rhizome Café	70	67	96%	362.21	5.41
Saturday	23-Oct-10	Community & Quirk-e	Rhizome Café	70	67	96%	406.81	6.07
Sunday	24-Oct-10	Phoenix Soc. & Transformative Communities	Phoenix Centre	80	38	48%	260.90	6.87
Tuesday	26-Oct-10	First Nations House of Learning	First Nations Long House	100	57	57%	256.86	4.51
Wednesday	27-Oct-10	Individuals from the Jewish & Palestinian Communities	Aberle House	30	29	97%	219.13	7.56
Friday	29-Oct-10	Langley United Church & Agricultural Workers Alliance	Langley United Church	100	70	70%	297.87	4.26
Wednesday	3-Nov-10	Collingwood Neighbourhood House	Collingwood Neighbourhood House Activity Room	50	22	44%	154.00	7.00
Friday	5-Nov-10	In the House Festival	5579 Blemheim St.	50	50	100%	296.00	5.92
Saturday	6-Nov-10	Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House	Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House	50	37	74%	224.25	6.06
Wednesday	10-Nov-10	Foundation Radio & Black Dot Roots and Culture Collective	Calabash Bistro	50	53	106%	218.00	4.11
Thursday	11-Nov-10	Unitarian Church and Amnesty International	Unitarian Church of Vancouver	100	65	65%	502.62	7.73
Friday **	12-Nov-10	Nikkei Place	Nikkei Museum and Heritage Centre	80	cancelled	-	-	-
Saturday	13-Nov-10	PHS Community Services & Heart of the City Festival	Interurban Gallery	70	60	86%	339.73	5.66
Thursday	18-Nov-10	Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre and Urban Native Youth Association	Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre	70	63	90%	227.85	3.62
Friday	19-Nov-10	Newworld Theatre	PL 1422	60	39	65%	227.25	5.83
Saturday	20-Nov-10	Newworld Theatre	PL 1422	60	33	55%	281.50	8.53
Sunday	21-Nov-10	Youth Initiative Canada and the Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Assoc.	Café Deux Soleils	98	95	97%	322.78	3.40
Thursday	25-Nov-10	North Shore Welcoming Action Cmtee	North Shore Neighbourhood House	100	35	35%	106.50	3.04
Friday (2PM)	26-Nov-10	Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House (MPNH)	Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House (MPNH)	80	62	78%	200.75	3.24
Saturday	27-Nov-10	MPNH	MPNH	80	75	94%	380.72	5.08
Sunday	28-Nov-10	Vancouver Coastal Health (Mental Health anti-stigma campaign)	St. James Community Square	150	115	77%	668.00	5.81
* Preview performances for set fee								
** removed from percentages								
				1728	1,233	77%	7,078.73	5.74

The community events

From now on, all entries will be from my daily journals, edited for confidentiality and in the (relatively) present tense.

Friday, September 24, 2010 (first preview)

Place: Powell River
 Host: City of Powell River and Avanti Films
 Venue: Katz Meow Café
 Capacity: 50
 Attendance: 56
 Percentage: 112%

This is an early start to the *Us and Them (inquiry)* events. Tony Papa (Avanti Films) was contracted by the City of Powell River to do a documentary on issues of diversity. He contacted me, knowing *Us and Them* was happening and wanted to shoot some events. It was going to be too intrusive to take him into already booked Metro Vancouver events, not having any way to inform/prepare/get permission for filming them. We agreed it would be best to do a special event in Powell River, specifically for the cameras, with everyone knowing they were coming to be filmed.

The attendance was high and also surprising. Almost entirely Caucasian. A Sliammon Elder was there to do a welcome, but not much of a turn out from the Sliammon Nation. And also, I'd say at least 70% of the room was 50+.

The invitation to the audience was to offer a story, from real life, where either you turned someone into "the other" or someone did that to you.

The story that was chosen came from a very elderly woman – in her 80s. I learned something tonight that will be in my introduction from now on. I have to ask that the stories be from the relative present. A few years. This was from her childhood. I think the event works best when the source material isn't so far back in time.

She and her family have just moved from Saskatchewan to the west coast (Vancouver). She is on her way to her first day of school. She doesn't speak English – speaks German (although we find out later she is Jewish). Other children, embodied in the exercise by one boy "Tom" – played by a woman – taunts her (in English) – calling her a dirty German, a Nazi. She is terrified, shut down, ashamed. The room voted overwhelmingly for this story. I had Tom perform the scene in

gibberish. The girl doesn't understand what he is saying – the words aren't important – the emotional content is.

Her desires/fears include:

A desire to run away;
 a desire to move back to Saskatchewan;
 a fear (curled up in a little ball on the ground) of being brutalized.

Tom's fears/desires include:

A raging character, fists raised, who wants to love and be loved;
 a child, curled up on the ground who wants to honour his family and culture and is also curious;
 a fear of being hurt.

The woman playing Tom was great and took on the role with both integrity and gusto. We delved into this character's need to please his family, to be a hero in his peer group. A lovely moment between Tom and the desire to go back to Saskatchewan when Tom moved down aggressively and the desire moved up, at the same time and their eyes met. They "saw" each other for the first time. Tom couldn't continue, something humanized. It wasn't "solved", but shifted dramatically. Also an insight between Tom and the curled up fear. Kicking at the defenseless one wasn't fun – not for this Tom, anyway.

A very emotional time with Tom's timid fear and the Protagonist – lots of tears and an understanding of Tom's fear of what he believes about what he's been told about the "new girl and her family".

An interesting and important moment. Tom's desire – the child curled up who wants to honour his family is improvising with the Protagonist. The desire is being played by a child, a boy...maybe 10 or 12 years old. The Protagonist is being so nice, doing whatever he asks of her. I stopped the improvisation and said I thought she was being very generous. Laughter. She agreed, as did everyone. Why? Well...look at him...how can I not just say yes to this boy? There must be no ageism here, tonight, I said. I understand your impulse, but in the end, I will name what is happening – he is being patronized. She looked at me and agreed...you are right, she said. And we started again.

Also an aching scene with the raging, raised fists desire. How many know this character, have been this character, who wants to be liked/loved from this aggressive posture? Many. This is both individuals we know and Nations.

We had started the third phase – fears/desires of the Protagonist doing scenes with Tom’s fears/desires when the woman whose story we were doing said: “sorry to interrupt you but I can’t breathe and have a bad pain in my chest”. It took a few moments for this to sink in. It appeared she was having a heart attack!

We stopped – others with some medical knowledge came to the stage and while it turned out she was having a muscle spasm, she agreed that an ambulance might be in order. I should say that I had not had her keep shapes for long. In deference to her age, her carrying a cane – she spent almost all of the exercise sitting in a chair. It had, though been an emotional ride for her.

Well.....this has never happened before....while we waited (and she had recovered somewhat) she asked if she could speak before the ambulance arrived. Of course. ‘I learned something big here tonight. It never occurred to me in this moment, or in my life before, to look people in the eye in these moments. It is so hard – but I can see how it is a way to reach out, even when being attacked. This was so powerful tonight.’

I told her no one had ever made so dramatic an exit from a Headlines show – this got a nice laugh. We all sensed she was OK, but it was good for her to get checked. When the ambulance was gone – there was no point continuing, of course, and so I wound the exercise down. The voices had things to say about how powerful the evening had been for them – how challenging, difficult, valuable. Audience members talked about how surprisingly emotional it was and riveting. The film crew was happy. People want to sign up for the training in February.

Saturday, October 9, 2010

Place: Mission
 Host: Mission Restorative Resolutions
 Venue: Ecole Mission Secondary School Drama Room
 Capacity: 80
 Attendance: 45
 Percentage: 56%

“I enjoyed *Us and Them (the inquiry)* very much. I learned a lot, was highly entertained and did some soul searching of my own regarding how I make “Them” and how I could more often make them “Us”. I also gave thought to my fears and desires and how they rule me -- and how I would prefer to rule them more often.”

Sheila, audience member in Mission, BC Oct. 9, 2010¹

The organizers were worried because they had 90 reservations and a capacity of 80 seats. 45 people turned out. (It was unusually cold, raining.) While this was an OK

¹ All quotes used with permission.

number to do the event with, a 50% 'no-show' rate is very worrisome and an indicator of what we might expect in the upcoming run. The community in Mission pushed really hard to get people out. We need to make sure all the co-hosts are doing the same.

The story that was chosen:

A mother comes into a meeting with her 10 year old son's teacher. The teacher lays out her credentials – books she has read and certificates she has in both education and behaviour issues. She informs the mother that her son has an attention disorder, is difficult in class, and needs to go on medication. The mother doesn't want her son on drugs. She feels that in this moment she is turned into "the other"... a mother (and child) who are labeled as "a problem" by a teacher she has had a good relationship with and who is her son's favourite teacher.

The fears/desires:

Mother

Desire – to strangle the teacher;

Fear – her son won't have opportunity in his life;

Fear – of being disconnected and not "seen".

Teacher

Desire – to hug (embrace, comfort) the mother;

Fear – of being attacked by mother;

Desire – to escape by using time as an excuse.

Rainbow of Desire is a challenging process. I know this going in. I was pleased with the level of engagement of a lot of the audience and players as the evening wore on and they got more and more deeply involved in the actual inquiry we were making. I am asking more questions of the audience than usual and also using those questions to bring us back to the issue of "othering". It is also the case that up to a third of the audience were both surprised by the format (no play, no actors, no script) and not excited by it. They sat through it politely, I think.

The audience DID embrace the idea of honouring both sides of the story very well. I think it helped that there were teachers there who, while they didn't agree with the actions of this teacher, understood very well the pressures of the classroom.

I was not pleased with the surface quality of what happened on the stage. Maybe it is fear – not certain – but keeping the participants inside the scenes so that an emotional depth can emerge was difficult. I found myself making statements about how important it is to allow ourselves to feel; that theatre is an emotional

language....it is a lot to ask, I know, but it is also true that the more we can risk that in these events, the more valuable they will be for everyone.

Some interesting things about the evening:

The mother's understandable desire to strangle the teacher didn't help – it brought out a response in the teacher of extreme defensiveness (she was already defensive). Difficult to get past this, of course, but an important moment in the event.

A young boy, a friend, it turns out of the son's, came to play the fear of the son not having opportunity. I THINK he was overly encouraged to come onto the stage by the woman playing the mother....and then it was hard to get him to understand how to engage in the exercise – that he is not playing the son or the mother, but a focused fear of the mother.

The woman playing the fear of being not seen was an old friend of Headlines. She has been at many events and played this fear with gusto. Something that became apparent was that in the situation of "othering" we sometimes fall into the trap of proving to the person who is 'othering' us that they may be right, because of the way we react; creating a kind of mirror. This woman was good at breaking that cycle – of doing something surprising that caught the teacher off-guard and made her see through different eyes.

Another young boy came to play the teacher's desire to embrace the mother. It wasn't until we were winding the event down that I learned that this boy was THE SON of the story, and that, according to the mother, this evening was the first time he had heard her tell the story (!!!). I have all kinds of questions about this that, in the end, are none of my business.

Even more surprising, is that when improvising, he was very convincing (improvising with his real mother) that "the son" really needed to be on medication and that the teacher was, from her perspective, really and legitimately trying to help. The mother could not hear this and something started to emerge about both party's legitimate concern for the boy, but from polarized opposite locations. For the teacher, he is one of many and for the mother, he is one. The teacher doesn't have the time and her solution, for the class and herself, is to suggest medication. The two perspectives can't hear each other across this divide.

A teacher came to play the teacher's fear of being attacked. Arms outstretched, palms facing the teacher. We know it was a fear of being attacked because the teacher explained this later. The audience member transformed it into pushing the mother away – from a protective image to an aggressive one.

Very complex, was the desire to escape – also played by a real teacher. One of the ways we create “the other” is that we mediate the world through our devices – in this case, a wristwatch. This desire to focus on “time” and through that not deal with the mother in a human and authentic way really resonated with the room. How often in a day do we do this? Have it done to us?

Something that came up a few times was that a solution to this moment was a third person – a mediator – who could bridge the conversation between the mother and teacher. Perhaps in this moment it was necessary but also sad that creating a safer learning environment for everyone gets so riddled with alienation.

After we were done a woman came to me and had a desire for me to wrap up what we learned...well – not that exactly... what I *wanted them* to learn, or what SHE wants people to learn. ‘How it is we are all one’, she said, by using what we saw tonight. I told her I would never presume to do that – and think she found that disappointing/confusing. Her friend understood what I meant – that each person would take something else away and if I tried to package or name it, I would limit it. The friend came after and thanked me for this wonderful work that in her words, is “honouring and transforming humanity”.

Friday, October 22, 2010

Place: Vancouver
 Host: Headlines Theatre (opening night)
 Venue: Rhizome Cafe
 Capacity: 70
 Attendance: 67
 Percentage: 96%

Sitting here at the computer at 12:30 Saturday realizing that THIS is exactly why I have to write as soon as I get home from an event. The specific fears and desires from last night are fuzzy for me already – this does happen fast, the events tend to move through me – and I am having a very hard time being specific.

First, though: opening night last night and a full house (or café). As I imagined, the ‘no show’ rate was very high. Thankfully walk-ins balanced that off. This does seem to be the pattern with ‘donation’ events. In the end, though, it was full. This is a signal that the “push” to get networking, word of mouth, publicity out there has to continue throughout.

I was happy with how the opening/introduction went. Decided hours before starting to take some time to explain the journey of Headlines’ work from agitprop to Theatre of the Oppressed to Theatre for Living and how the *Us and Them* project is, at this point in time, the place I am as a socially conscious artist, personally, in

my own journey. People might have understood (or not) the chronology of Headlines' work – but I do think they understood the evolution of “needing to have clearly defined enemies” (a binary model) to working in a more complex, integrated model in which we recognize that all the various aspects of oppressor/oppressed are within the living human community. For me, this is the point of the whole undertaking – to explore humanity's need to create “the other” and to recognize there is only an ever-evolving “us”.

The story:

A lawyer is representing Tamil refugees. This is very current. He, a refugee and other people are in a trailer at the detention centre. A Government Official (GO) enters whose job it is to represent the interests of the Federal Minister. The lawyer is sitting in a chair near the door. The GO insists the lawyer vacate the chair so he can sit in it. At first the lawyer doesn't take this seriously but the GO is serious. Why? Because, for security reasons, he needs to be close to the door. The lawyer and the GO find themselves on opposite sides of so many 'walls'.

The heart of the evening, for me, was how the chair became such a rich symbol. Something that “we” are entitled to, find safety in, use as status and/or power. This happened from both sides of the argument and the need to possess the chair, a physical, emotional, psychological territory, is what created the 'division' the 'othering' in the scene.

The Rainbow worked the best when I could keep the actors, some of whom were wonderful – the woman who offered to play the GO was great, as were a few of the Rainbow fragments – focused on the chair and not divert to the refugee, who was not actually in the scene. I know this sounds weird, but the scene wasn't about the lawyer and refugee it was about the lawyer and GO; it was about the chair – power and security; fear and desire.

It was also the case that one person in particular – was on the stage to 'perform'. I wish I could find a way to nip this in the bud – I tried in my intro by talking about how the reason to come onto the stage was because the moment really resonated – not to play theatre games...but there he was anyway. I did my best to honour his offerings and find meaning there but it is easier if this is what the participant is actually offering.

Congrats to us all at Headlines for getting “Us and Them” open!

Saturday, October 23, 2010

Place: Vancouver
Hosts: Qmunity and Quirk-e

Venue: Rhizome Cafe
 Capacity: 70
 Attendance: 67
 Percentage: 96%

QMUNITY is BC's leading queer resource centre. Located in Vancouver's West End we are a hub for the lesbian, gay, trans, bi and queer community. We have a significant online presence that provides access to information about our Educational Services, Social Events, Outreach and Support Programs for queer individuals, their families and friends.

Quirk-e comprises a group of GLBTQ-identified old(er)-adults and a pair of host-artist facilitators engaged in memoir and creative writing, and multi-media artwork. Quirk-e is a part of the Arts, Health and Seniors Project which aims to support and improve the health of elders in our community through community and creative involvement; we work out of Britannia Community Centre in Vancouver, BC.

This was a very deep night. Interesting, because when we began the chosen story, I was worried I had made an error and this was a story more aligned with Cops in the Head, because the woman at the centre was silenced by the moment. But it unfolded beautifully, through the focus and courageous intention of the participants and audience.

The story: a Caucasian woman (who is Queer – this is important to the story) is walking in the park with her adoptive brother, who is Black (also important to the story). A man, a stranger approaches (we called him Andre). Seeing the brother and sister arm in arm he assumes they are a couple and says to them in a threatening, aggressive way: "Vanilla and Chocolate". The brother lashes out at Andre. The woman is silent and raging inside about:

1. having her Queer Identity being invisible, negated;
2. the racial prejudice, insult, etc. that the comment contains;
3. Her inability to respond
4.more, of course...many layers.

It is the woman's story. The scene was between her and the Andre character. I worked the scene this way. Both the woman and the woman who played Andre were deeply courageous throughout and the audience was really emotionally and intellectually engaged.

Interesting to me that after the mention from the woman about Queer Identity, this did not manifest in overt ways in the work. It was, of course, woven through the fabric of moments.

The Fears and Desires:

Woman

Desire – to scratch Andre’s eyes out;

Fear – a very protective gesture, folded in on herself, protecting breasts, genitals. “I want to vanish”;

Desire – to protect her brother (knowing if it came to it, he could protect her).

Andre

Desire – to be very sexual with the woman – a provocative stance, pelvis thrusting into her, close;

Fear – back turned....fear of being alone, rejected;

Desire – head on the woman’s shoulder/breast – to be nurtured, loved.

Some moments that stood out for me:

The desire to scratch Andre’s eyes out gave Andre what he wanted – the woman’s full and undivided attention.

The paralysis of the fear that wants to vanish – the opposite pole of the desire – wanting Andre to see her as a person not an object, and unable to look him in the eye at the same time. This resonated with so many in the room and spoke to issues of how the recipients of racism, homophobia etc., struggle inside themselves with being shut down. Shutting down creates new layers of becoming “the other”, both to the external world and the internal. How do we combat this inside us?

A heart-breaking scene played between the woman playing the desire to be nurtured and the woman whose story we were doing. A level of emotional honesty here that created such a silence in the room. The story-teller’s sorrow for Andre’s loneliness and his inability to stop commodifying her – that makes it impossible for her to accept him on any terms and the cycle this creates of rejection, anger, lashing out, despair....it was all inside a 45 second improvisation.

I want to be clear – I don’t believe any of us were feeling sorry or apologizing for the Andre character. The women, though (and they were all women who came onto the stage) embraced this character as a way, I believe, to try to understand motivation and did so, I also believe (perhaps assume) because they “know” Andre inside themselves. Working on “him” is working on “us”.

In winding up many participants and audience members had wonderful things to say about the depth of the evening about their own impressions of “the other” being reflections of ourselves we don’t like or want to reject; the mechanization/objectification that makes it possible to create the other.

Someone, as is often the case, wanted “answers” from the evening and was disappointed there weren’t any – others spoke about how grateful they were that there weren’t answers, only impressions and questions – because this was more rich and left space for people’s own answers.

Others talked about the practical insights they were taking away – the woman whose story we did talk at some length about how valuable the evening had been for her.

One woman was angry. She hadn’t said anything all night – hadn’t participated – was far off in a corner. I handed her the mike when she wanted to speak and she said we had silenced the voice of the Black man. She went on about this for a while. The room was taken aback, I think, as was I. I let her finish saying what she had to say. When I had the mike back I restated that this was space in which we did not need to agree and said I disagreed. The story was the Caucasian sister’s story and it was between her and the Andre character – as she had told it to us. It was not the Black brother’s story. If he had been here, and he had offered the story, and the room would have chosen his story, we would have done the story. She insisted we had silenced his voice. I told her that the exercise, *Rainbow of Desire*, looks at an interaction between two characters, not three – this is just the nature of this exercise, and these two characters were the ones we had on the stage. “See? I rest my case”, she said.

Feedback from the evening once we broke was wonderfully positive. This woman, though, is in my head. Why? I will be upfront. The point of view that oppression is a contest offends me. At the heart of her complaint, I believe, is that the Black brother’s voice is more valid than the White sister’s voice. She doesn’t have the same right to be heard, investigated. It is a voice that is, in my mind, so divisive and in its own way, responsible for the very patterns that the Us and Them project is trying to transform.

Don’t get me wrong – this was a very, very successful evening – the exchange at the end is a sour taste. It is important to note that the community partners really pulled out the Queer community in a great way. And there were moments when there was such diversity on the stage, in so many ways, speaking theatre about really intimate things – emotionally, sexually...and we were laughing, feeling, simply being human together; simply being “us” and this was a lovely thing, full of hope.

Sunday, October 24, 2010

Place: Surrey
 Hosts: Phoenix Society, Transformative Communities Project Society (TCPS)
 Venue: Phoenix Society activity room.
 Capacity: 80
 Attendance: 38
 Percentage: 47%

"Us and Them (the inquiry) takes us to the place where we deeply feel the resonant truth that we are just one people on this planet. This is startling theatre that requires action."

Kim Hayashi, audience member in Surrey BC, Oct. 24, 2010

"Us and Them (the inquiry) has the power for both individual and societal transformation like no other theatre event I have ever witnessed. Be prepared to leave the venue viewing your relationships and interactions with others in a new light. There is no doubt in my mind that I will be talking and thinking about this event for a long time to come. "

Anna Vogt, audience member in Surrey BC, Oct. 24, 2010

"The mission of Phoenix Drug & Alcohol Recovery & Education Society is to encourage and assist British Columbians in achieving personal, family and community health free from substance misuse. Our mission statement is an important part of the expression of our vision of service whose emphasis is on program development, advocacy, community networking and community building to support the positive interaction of the individual's development of internal capacity, with the external support of environments to expand and enhance the individual's capacity and resiliency."

"Transformative Communities project is an arts-based, youth-driven, empowerment program providing training in anti-oppression, facilitation, peer-support, conflict transformation, nonviolent communication, public speaking, and community organizing for youth 14 and older; with a particular focus on engaging (im)migrant, refugee, Indigenous and "at-risk" communities in Surrey. We support participants in developing whole and healthy lives to become active leaders in their communities."

The idea was to bring the adult population of Phoenix and the youth of TCPS together, along with general public, for an *Us and Them* event. Phoenix was great and could have pulled more residents out, but we left space for TCPS, who have, unfortunately, been in an organizational crisis. They didn't bring one single person to the event. Even the co-ordinator informed us at the last minute she wouldn't be there and sent an alternate person.

The room was mostly full of men who were Phoenix clients. I had my own fear off the top that the men wouldn't engage – turned them, in my own way, into "the other"; I am not immune. They were wonderful.

The story: a man (played by someone who was in the after homelessness... community workshop, who I know has had his own experiences of homelessness, got it together again, fell into the street again, and is now at Phoenix) is walking on

Hastings Street. He sees a woman, reclining on the sidewalk. They catch eyes and she asks him, over and over, if he will buy her a cup of coffee. He never speaks to her – trying to ignore her.

The fears and desires

The man

Desire – to help her but also have boundaries, not knowing how to do that;

Fear – to really see her and then have to engage;

Desire – to help and through that, define himself.

The woman

Desire – to get the coffee and attention;

Fear – of being completely alone and invisible;

Desire – to have real help (not just coffee) [important that this shape was on knees, subservient].

The interesting (and also sad, I think) thing about this evening is that almost all of the people in the room knew homelessness and violence, addiction and isolation in a way that a lot of the general public finds hard to imagine. It would have been wonderful to have more (a lot more) general public in the room, so that “us” and “them” would have engaged more. As it was, and this was also really valuable, the evening explored how even the homeless population has the dichotomies inside it.

The most interesting ‘rainbow fragment’ of the man (for me) was the fear. Played by an elderly man who was very emotionally engaged in knowing this fear; the fear of really seeing the woman and...then what? Taking responsibility? Getting sucked into a cycle of trying to save her? What does that mean to his own life? And, in this case, I believe, does he want to go ‘back there’?

He turns her into “the other” even though she is him; or he was her. This is similar to what I know, from my grandparents and parents happens with immigrant communities. Having established ones’ self “here”, one no longer identifies with the recent immigrant, who has now become “the other” that we once were. It is the same cycle. Having been homeless and not being so now, the currently homeless becomes “the other”. Always? Of course not. But the self-protective nature of the journey is understandable.

The fear of the woman was also interesting. She is hunched over, looking at the ground. Not wanting to be invisible and at the same time, making herself invisible. The man related to this fear with some disdain. She is pathetic (not his word). Why can’t she just get a job, get out of the street, stop feeling sorry for herself?

Hmmm...that’s very bourgeois of you, I said (partly as a joke)...and his eyes filled

with tears. I apologized for making him uncomfortable; the moment had been real. What was it that did this? Her begging, her whining, her inability to look me in the eye, he said. Why not make the effort to look her in the eye, I asked? Well – I don't want that, he said. And yet you are angry at her for not looking you in the eye. And around and around we go....just like society.

The level of audience conversation was also high tonight. I am figuring out, I think, how to keep the Rainbow exercise animated. Unlike Cops in the Head in which audience members yell stop and make interventions, Rainbow can turn into something you have to sit back and watch. I am going to the audience for feedback a lot now and it is working. This audience tonight was so different from last night. The events, though, were both deeply engaged.

Tuesday, October 26, 2010

Place: Vancouver
 Host: First Nations House of Learning (FNHL)
 Venue: First Nations House of Learning
 Capacity: 100
 Attendance: 57
 Percentage: 57%

The First Nations House of Learning makes the University's vast resources more accessible to Aboriginal Peoples, and improves the University's ability to meet the needs of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. The House is dedicated to providing a positive environment for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students, staff, and faculty. Following the "voices of our ancestors", the spirit of the Longhouse is guided by the Longhouse Teachings of Respect, Relationships, Responsibility, and Reverence.

The disappointment of tonight was that despite the venue and a lot of targeted networking, the First Nations turnout was almost nil. A strong multi-cultural turnout. Rick, the director from the FNHL did say that it is hard to get their population out to an event at night.

The audience started off quite frightened, I think – but warmed up a lot as the evening progressed.

The story: the young woman telling the story reached back into High School – but still, being so young, in her relative present. She and her drama class “friends” are in the theatre, where they hang out to have lunch. She is South Asian. A Caucasian classmate is making fun of “brown people”. She looks at him and he looks at her. “Oh, I don't mean you – he says – you are whitewashed.” “Oh, good”, she says, and then falls silent. One could have done Cops in the Head with this, but the Rainbow was also effective, and more to the point for the exploration I want to make in *Us and Them*.

The Fears and Desires

The girl

Desire: to be seen – a shape all twisted, face towards the boy, body facing away
 Fear: hiding behind a chair – fear of being alone;
 Desire: To befriend/embrace the boy;

The boy

Desire: to be forgiven
 Fear: of being alone
 ??? can't remember.....

Of interest: the young woman had a very hard time throughout articulating any emotions. This became more obvious the more we worked and turned into a part of the discussion. This happened in the context of how much both characters wanted to avoid talking about the issue, even though on the surface they both did. This was mirrored in audience member's experiences of inappropriate comments and how one 'just doesn't want to go there', because of how complicated it might get to open the subject up – how it was just a small thing, why make a big deal of it – how one might become more of a target – how one may have internalized the racism or other oppression.

The various improvisations had this thing in common – characters would not say what they were really thinking, didn't want to have the argument, wanted to avoid conflict. This led over and over again to walls being built up, even when it appeared that both parties wanted to reach across the divide.

When winding up, audience members had a lot to say about insights they had had about:

- the other being a mirror image of themselves;
- how hard it is to conquer the reaction of shutting down inside;
- how honesty in the multitude of small moments might keep our relationships healthier;

Wednesday, October 27, 2010

Place: Vancouver
 Host: Members of the Jewish and Palestinian Communities
 Venue: a private home
 Capacity: 30
 Attendance: 29
 Percentage: 97%

"I attended *Us and Them (the inquiry)* and found it very moving and powerful. This has the potential to rank up there with any transformative public experience you've ever had. The boldness required to make the evening happen is equivalent to the boldness required to transform things in the world so that we can keep the planet going forever and have future generations living in peace and happiness."

Jim Edmondson, audience member, Vancouver BC, Oct. 27, 2010

I made a small speech at the beginning of this evening that went something like this:

We know that this event is framed as a bringing together of the Jewish and Palestinian communities and also general public. I want to acknowledge that the representation from the Palestinian Community tonight is small. (It was two people). Many invitations were made, networking done, space created on the reservation list. I wish it was not the case that it took so much courage to come to an event like this, but I know it does. (The two Palestinians were nodding yes.) We must accept, I think, that this is part of the story of tonight.

People came to me after (both staff and others) and thanked me for beginning this way. I do think it helped create a space in which we could work. During the course of the event members of the Jewish, Palestinian and other communities ended up in the Rainbow together.

The story: a man (Jewish) is on the road in a disputed, dangerous area. He has a backpack. He speaks to some men in Arabic asking for directions – the only Arabic he knows. Moments later a Jeep descends upon him and two men (in the exercise we had one) stop and want to know who he is, where he is going etc. They speak to him in Arabic. He doesn't understand. Finally, they speak Hebrew. They show him badges and aggressively insist he get in the Jeep. Although the three are all Jewish – his behaviour has turned him into "the other" – and the most dangerous other – the "enemy from within".

Man on the Road (played by a Rabbi²)

Desire: to know who the other is and what he wants;
 Fear: that he will be detained, hurt, killed;
 Desire: to run away.

Guy in the Jeep (played by a Palestinian woman)

Desire: to know who the other is and what he wants;
 Fear: that he is going to have to kill this man;
 Desire: to embrace himself...?? (remains unclear to me)

² I don't usually identify people in this way in these reports but for this event it seems appropriate, maybe essential.

After the event, which took just under three hours, the longest so far, a few people came to me and asked where it is that I get my patience. They said that there were times when they simply would have told people to stop talking and shut up. I say this not to congratulate myself, but as a way to explain the challenges of this evening.

Some of the audience were very deeply attached to the problem being structural hierarchy and seemed incapable or unwilling to entertain the idea that “we” create and support those structures through our behaviors. The structures didn’t just appear and they haven’t existed since before the “big bang”. We (humanity) made them.

The evening evolved slowly. The most interesting moments, for me, were around the Guy in the Jeep, played by a Palestinian woman, who really understood how to honour the character. She was fearless both in accessing his anger, his need to do his job, and his fear.

In a moment that involved his fear that he is going to have to kill the man, I asked the room, from a symbolic perspective (not necessarily killing) who had been this character in some way? At least 85% of the hands in the room went up. And so – we are no longer on the road in the desert, no longer Jewish, Palestinian – we are in a place where we can acknowledge that the character in this scene that we are “against” is also all of us – in the same way the Man is all of us. We are both characters. (These were not my exact words, but close enough – they convey the intention of the moment.) A deep silence now. This was one moment, I think when the “Us and Them” project and the reason we are doing it came to life tonight.

In another moment the Man lost any sense of power he had, through his fear and inability to look the Guy in the Jeep in the eye. What does this mean, when we are this fear, frozen, staring at the ground (the fear now being played by a Palestinian man)? It means we are already defeated, someone said. It means whoever is on the other side, gets what they want, someone else said. It means no one can ever see we are human, someone else said.

Oh – the desire that remains unclear. A woman took a shape – a desire of the Guy in the Jeep - her back to the Man, arms around herself. When she started speaking it was a monologue and, regardless of how I asked for her to be in dialogue with the other character, it remained a monologue about an internal struggle. When I questioned her she talked about how she wanted to share with the audience the complexity of the internal struggle. I explained that this is not what we are doing – it is not about performing for the audience or “showing” something. I don’t think she understood. Later she did another improvisation and again, it felt like a monologue – I had to let the Man know that she was actually speaking to him and

she was asking for his sympathy (I think)...and yet....knowing she could move, kept her back to him. She wants sympathy and yet will not reveal herself.

At the very end, a Palestinian man (an Elder in the community, I believe) wanted to tell a story. It was a gift, in particular because of the challenges of the evening.

He and some of his family were trying to cross a checkpoint to get to Jerusalem. They were stopped and kept for many hours, until the checkpoint closed and they had nowhere to go, except back home or stay where they were until morning and keep trying. A man appeared and was getting into his Volkswagen car. He asked them what they were doing there so late. They explained. He was surprised. Why? Because he was the head of security at the checkpoint and he knew nothing about them waiting for so long. They chatted, squeezed into his car, and he drove them far out of his way to where they were going. They became friends to this day.

'This man', said the Palestinian man, 'who we imagined was the head of the problem and who we hated, and cursed all day – was not the problem. I had to completely reverse my thinking'.

Friday, October 29, 2010

Place: Langley
 Hosts: Langley United Church and Agricultural Workers' Union (AWU)
 Venue: Langley United Church
 Capacity: 100
 Attendance: 70
 Percentage: 70%

"I will never look at a blueberry field through the same eyes again."

an anonymous woman said this to David Diamond
 after the event in Langley, Oct, 29, 2010

LUC: Langley United Church has been a presence in Langley for over 80 years. They are an inclusive congregation active in many areas of social justice; offering programs such as: breakfast in elementary schools, feeding homeless, and reaching pastorally to those left alone in our society. Langley United Church works with other faith communities to ensure people from all walks of life have hope in the world around us. They welcome this evening of sharing and dialogue between all groups.

AWA: Agricultural Farm Workers Alliance (AWA-ATA) provide services for agriculture workers, such as working conditions and other issues that migrant workers face while working in Canada.

This was a wonderful and complex evening. It happened because Dafne Blanco, who was Headlines' Outreach Co-ordinator for 6 years, took a position with the AWU for the months before leaving for Mexico. She brought these two worlds

together into this event, two days before leaving Canada. The hope had also been to bring the farm owners. As far as I know, this did not happen, but the general public came from the Langley area and great learning and bridge-building happened.

The AWU organized transport for the workers and about 20 came. That means about 30 general public. The AWU also provided a wonderful translator, and he and I developed a very nice rhythm in the evening. The whole event was translated from English to Spanish – Spanish to English. An indication of how well this worked is that the Spanish speaking workers participated very deeply in the event.

It took a long time to get and process the stories. Having translation was great – and it also slowed everything down a lot. We started at 7:40PM and by the time we had chosen a story it was almost 9:00. Because everything was taking so long, I limited the Rainbow to one fear, one desire from each character. Of course this robbed part of the event, but there was, I felt, no other option because of the time factor. The farm workers, in particular, had to meet transport back to farms and work in the morning.

The story:

A Farm-Worker (FW) is in the field, driving a tractor. The Manager (M) comes to him with a large bag of chemicals and tells him to distribute the chemicals across the field. The FW takes the chemicals. He wants to give them back the M until he gets breathing protection but does not. The M sees this moment “on” the FW and ignores it.

the Farm-worker

Desire: to give the bag of chemicals back to the manager until protection is provided. (played by a young man from the Phoenix event, who came to this one.)

Fear: wants to run away from this danger. (played by a farm-worker)

The Manager (Played by a man from the United Church)

Desire: to get the farm-worker to do what he is told, so the Manager can do his job; (played by a young woman from the general community)

Fear: if this farm-worker will not...who will? (played by a young man from the general community)

The audience seemed to all understood the FW's desire, but I think only the Farm workers understood fully how hard it was for him to refuse to do the work and also

to run from the work. His family is relying on him and the income he is earning for his labour. He feels trapped.

One of the most interesting moments in the evening was when the fear of the M and the man who was the FW were playing a scene. The person playing the FW, in order to create space for the M to BE in the scene, knelt down and brought him the microphone. The audience gasped and burst into applause.

What was this? In a way it was a reversal of roles. The FW having the microphone (serendipity of the moment) was the FW also having the power. But it had meaning. Is it possible for the AWU to recognize the work that is possible with the Managers? One of the things that emerged in the evening, from the audience, was that one thing both sides of the story have in common is that they want the work done – for different reasons, perhaps, but it is a meeting ground. A man who was, I think, an executive in the Union, or Leader of some kind, agreed that this kind of fear inside the Manager, made the Manager ignorant. So...how do we approach and really dialogue with the fear? Why do that? Because as we saw tonight, when both sides entrench, neither side gets anywhere. What do we want in the end? How do we get what we want?

Wednesday, November 3, 2010

Place: Vancouver
 Host: Collingwood Neighbourhood House
 Venue: Collingwood Neighbourhood House activity room
 Capacity: 50
 Attendance: 22
 Percentage: 44%

"I had a fantastic time last night! *Us and Them (the inquiry)* made us think, laugh, question structures and roles."

Lindsay Marsh, audience member, Vancouver BC, Nov. 3, 2010

Collingwood Neighbourhood House mission: To promote the well-being of the Collingwood community by providing leadership and working collaboratively with individuals, families, agencies, and other groups to develop and support inclusive, innovative, sustainable initiatives and services that respond to the community's social, educationl, economic, health, cultural, and recreational needs.

We went into the event tonight with 30 reservations. The low turnout can be attributed to layers of things at this point – least of which, specifically for this night, was the 600+ person meeting in Collingwood last night around school closures and how emotional that meeting evidently was. I chatted with the Collingwood organizer and she talked about how people have really "spent" themselves on the school issue and are exhausted.

The actual event tonight was rich in its own way, and also really hard, because of the small number. There was no where for people to “hide” and we got to a point where the people who wanted to be onstage and vocal were there – but we still needed more and then the audience that was left, wanted me to leave them alone and not ask them questions – not ask them to respond.

I could have seen this coming. Because of the small number I explained what we would be doing and then asked, not wanting to trap them, who could imagine themselves engaging physically in the event. Six people raised their hands. The Rainbow demands eight. I decided to forge ahead, trusting that two would appear at the appropriate time. We did get to a point in the evening when six were on the stage (not the same six) and we got stuck in silence....and the two more who came did so, I believe because no one else would. Not a good chemistry, really, as at that point things start to feel forced.

The story

A woman has cancer and is in remission but...has now been getting headaches and vertigo and vomiting. New symptoms. She knows something else is wrong. She goes to her Doctor, the man who “cured” her, She tries to explain her new symptoms to him. He tells her she is fine and she shouldn’t worry.

(The rest of the story – not relevant to the work on the stage but to our understanding of the woman, is that she was not fine. She had developed a brain tumor that was diagnosed by a different doctor and successfully removed.)

Fears and Desires

The woman

Desire: to get attention and answers from the Doctor;
 Fear: of hearing she is dying – wants to run away;
 Desire: an urgent desire for the Doctor to see her – look into her eyes.

The Doctor

Desire: to help the woman;
 Fear: that he is incapable of helping her and that he has messed up;
 Desire: to protect himself, to build a wall, to not deal with her.

The doctor was played by a man I didn’t know, but learned later had been in medical school until he left to become an artist. And so he brought a lot of integrity to the role.

The woman's desire to get attention had such urgency in it that the man playing the doctor wouldn't/couldn't give the doctor any room to speak. It was actually a good way to start as it opened up the symbolic conversation that was obviously not the actual storyteller's story...but now a larger symbol that the room owned. It started to become clear how our urgency itself can alienate people – can begin the process of creating the divisions that create 'the other'.

This was made even more intense by the other desire to force the doctor to look her in the eye. This was so intense it almost got violent and we went to a fascinating place. Another story that got offered (but not chosen for the evening) was from a Colombian man who had been in the army and fighting the guerrillas – he "woke up", he said, when his friend got shot in the head and he realized that he was shooting at his countrymen – they were killing each other – and he left the army and Colombia. The scene between the doctor and this desire – the ex-army man agreed – could have been from his story in Colombia – not a doctor's office in Canada. We had transcended the woman's story and entered the psychology of symbols.

A young woman with Down's Syndrome came to play the doctor's desire to help the patient. Various people wanted to help her play the scene and I asked them to please stop and let her do it. I'd ask her what the desire wanted and she'd say she didn't know and then I'd ask her to imagine she knew...and she'd know. A simple "trick" I learned somewhere that works with people who are temporarily blocked.

She played a direct, unfiltered desire to help and broke some "rules of engagement" of the exercise but we could work anyway. The woman/patient didn't trust this doctor – and yet...there he was, open and willing! What happened? "Too willing. Too open. I don't believe it", said the woman. She doesn't believe you I told the desire, what now? "I have to try harder, go slower, more time", she said.

What makes what she wants possible? Do we want what she wants? Yes. More doctor time; more staff; recognizing "we" are all patients, even when we are doctors, are some of the things that came from the audience.

The fear that the doctor is incapable, has messed up, brought more intensity into the scenes. This fear, that many of us share, alienated the woman terrible and was consumed with self-interest. In the final phase a very nice scene played out between this fear and the woman's desire for answers and recognition. What might have worked in this moment was the woman's desire "meeting" the doctor's fear, but they are both in "roles" (patient and doctor) and neither would step out of the role to reach across the divide between them.

The doctor's final desire was played by a man who I know who understood this desire for self-protection, probably from his own work and his own desires at times. I appreciated his honesty. He tried to leave the office. Abandon the woman. The fact that she was supposed to be "cured" and was obviously not was too much to bear. He did what we do with issues we don't want to face, he turned his back on her.

There was a lot of appreciation for the event after – interestingly, also from people who had said almost nothing during the evening. They came to me and commented about how inspiring it was, challenging, made them question their own behaviors and how necessary this is in our world. They promised to network.

Friday, November 5, 2010

Place: Vancouver
 Host: In the House Festival
 Venue: Private Residence
 Capacity: 50
 Attendance: 50
 Percentage: 100%

In the House Festival creates intimate, interesting, and unique venues where artists can freely explore their genre, perform to an attentive audience, and promote their talents.

Nice to have a full house. Such a different event, regardless of the capacity, to have that kind of energy in the room.

A different kind of event tonight because the sponsor was the In the House Festival and this means there was no social service agency involved. An audience that is drawn by the innovative theatre/music that In the House highlights. To fast forward to the end, people came to me after really astonished at what had happened, having really loved it and been surprised by it and, in their own words, taking a lot from it.

The story:

The Teacher is in his classroom with the Boy. The boy is growing up in a family of Jehovah Witnesses and in this way is alone in the school (this ended up having no specific importance in the actual animations). The boy has behavioral problems and keeps hurting classmates in various ways, in the teacher's opinion, because he doesn't know how to reach out and wants friends. The boy keeps asking if "he is being a good boy" and also is afraid the teacher is going to tell the boy's father about the troubles. The teacher is trying to find a way to help the boy, but ends up scaring him.

We freeze in a moment when the boy asks for help making friends and the teacher looks away and to the floor.

The Fears and Desires

The Teacher

Desire: to reach the boy (but the shape looks like it is trying to scare him);
 Fear: hands grabbing the boy's head – fear he won't be able to reach him;
 Fear: that he is incapable of seeing him, of speaking the right language.

The Boy

Desire: to touch the teacher and be touched;
 Fear: of being alone and invisible and unreachable;
 Desire: to be wonderful and empowered.

Over and over the teacher's desires and fears shut the boy down, scared him, made him want to run away. Even when they were speaking kind words, it was with a kind of physical violence of judgment. Why? Because the truth was he thinks the boy is broken somehow and needs fixing and the desire to fix the boy has to do with the teacher's need to "instruct" and not his desire for health for the boy. Each of the fears and desires, in their own way, and with the best of stated intentions, objectified the boy and the boy could always feel/hear/see this.

Both of the boy's desires had an element of magic to them, although very heartfelt and valuable. The desire to touch moved in underneath the teacher's fear – took all the responsibility in the scene for reaching out. It was finally the "nakedness" of this desire, the open emotion that melted the teacher's fears enough to bring him out of the chair and onto the floor where this desire sat, and finally look the boy in the eye.

The desire to be wonderful and empowered had a great sense of humor and drama. The desire was elated by its magically acquired upright, fist pumping the air stance. The teacher, trying to reply, said "Great! Give me a Hi 5!!" and this deflated the desire – disappointed the woman playing the desire so visibly. Why?

It is all still on the teacher's terms. There is no recognition here, it is an empty piece of theatrical dialogue that asks things again of the boy. A moment of *taking*: "give me a hi 5", not recognition, not dialogue at all. The air was so thick in the room when this got exposed – one of those moments when it is clear the audience is processing their own lives and how they patronize "the other".

Audience members had a lot to say throughout about what they saw in the scenes and how this reflected back into their own lives. One woman talked about how much she realized tonight that she turns herself into “the other” in relation to people around her. She builds the walls herself. Another talked about how the evening had confronted her with her need to be more open with her own disabled son.

Saturday, November 6, 2010

Place: Vancouver
 Host: Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House (DTESNH)
 Venue: Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House
 Capacity: 50
 Attendance: 37
 Percentage: 74%

The DTES Neighbourhood House is a secular, grassroots neighbourhood house that welcomes DTES residents of all ancestries who face “the soft bigotry of low expectations.” We are activist, reformist and non-violent. We challenge the clichés visited upon the materially poor. We embrace social consciousness and public education, rejecting negativity. We avoid the language of addiction and instead see complex individuals living complex lives.

We went into the evening with 50 reservations, ten of them a group booking from the DTESNH. The Director told us a couple of days ago that she thought that the networking had not happened from their end to bring these people out and although we tried, we couldn’t respond fast enough to fill the gap. Still, there were people tonight from the neighbourhood.

The story:

A young woman (the Demonstrator) is in downtown Vancouver marching against the Olympics. She and her friends have agreed that if it feels like anything out of control will happen, they will go home. When the tension starts to rise and the police start to “push back” she decides not to go home, but to push against the police. An Officer pushes her once, twice, three times – each time telling her to leave and on the third time, pushes her to the ground. She is arrested, searched, etc. the moment we investigate is just after the second push – she starts to come back up against the officer and he really pushes her to the ground.

The Demonstrator

Desire: to push against the Officer;
 Fear: that she is going to get hurt;
 Fear: that she will get arrested.

The Police Officer

Desire: to push the demonstrator down;
 Fear: that he will fail in his job;
 Desire: to protect the demonstrator.

The man playing the Police Officer and I had chatted a bit before the event. He had come very early. And so I know something I might not otherwise have known. He was a Police Officer in South Africa during Apartheid. He now lives in the DTES and is part of a movement against gentrification. We had no way of knowing the story tonight would come an activist and involve a police officer.

This was a very radical evening. I say this because of the place we went in the investigation – a surprising place, that, even more surprisingly, was deeply appreciated by the many “demonstrators” in the room. That is that we want the Police to understand us, but we never really ask ourselves if we understand the Police. How do our tactics change if we bother to investigate (not our clichéd assumptions) but the true dynamics of the men and women in Blue.

Something that became apparent over and over again tonight, and articulated by many in the room....including, for instance by a large, burly bearded man, covered in tattoos and piercings...(I describe him specifically because of clichéd assumptions of my own) that we think there is only one “line” in the scene – the Police Line – but over and over again the Demonstrator(s) displayed their own line – not a physical one – but a psychological and emotional one. No “movement” from the Officer was ever enough. When we investigated this further it had to do with the need to “educate” him, the need to be seen and heard, and the feelings of loyalty to the rest of the group.

The Officer, of course, has his role to play; his job to do. Both sides get trapped really easily in these roles. I played around a fair bit tonight, “difficultating” as Boal would say. In a scene where one of the Officer’s desires had just let the Demonstrator go home, I brought the real Officer in to be a “partner”. Of course the “partner” questioned letting the Demonstrator off the hook. There are ramifications to this kind and generous act, that we want the Officer to do.

How do we break out of the roles? Sensitivity training, of course, comes up – and – more maturity from the Demonstrators’ side. Knowing where they “are”, strategizing more clearly and when the plan is to be non-violent and sticking to that even when it is challenging.

This was a case tonight of not being trapped in the structures we have built. Structures of power that seem rigid but are only so because we let them be so. The tattooed, burly man said at one point – yes – the other side has guns, there is a

power imbalance. But tonight I see that there is power equality inside the different sides' hearts – I've never thought about that. He came to me after (as did many) – he'd been brought to the event by his girlfriend – and was so excited by the evening. Many promised to help do publicity and will, I imagine be at other events.

Wednesday, November 10, 2010

Place: Vancouver
 Hosts: Foundation Radio & Black Dot Roots and Culture Collective
 Venue: Calabash Bistro
 Capacity: 50
 Attendance: 53
 Percentage: 106%

Foundation Radio is a collective of artists, musicians, poets, and DJs from various backgrounds driven to provide a voice for the underground and up and coming talent with the passion to be heard or seen on a conscious platform.

Black Dot Roots & Culture Collective: is a group of artists and professionals, committed to education, creation, and celebration of the Black experience at home and abroad.

Nice to have a packed house, although the restaurant venues tend to give us some chaos at the door, figuring out what to do with the people who have just come to eat and have no desire to stay for the event, but are not leaving to make space for people with event reservations.

Calabash is both a kind of "high end" and also "funky" restaurant, all at the same time, run by a man who is central to Foundation Radio – a station that is a voice for the Black community. Because of this, a very good turnout tonight from the Black community.

The story: a black man (the storyteller) and a white woman are in a car, travelling down the highway. They are colleagues in the education field. They are having a conversation about the difficulty of recruiting minority students (a.k.a. students of colour) into the University. The Man's experience is that it is always the people of colour's responsibility to do this recruiting and never seems to be part of the role of the white faculty members. While he is thinking about this, the woman asks him, "Do you ever wish you were White?" He explains that he knows the question is not being asked in a hurtful way, and yet....it presses so many buttons inside him of being turned into or labeled "the other". He knows his reaction is now to do the same to her. The room voted overwhelmingly for this story.

The Man

Desire: to protect himself from this moment, laden with so much history;
 Fear: that he will lecture the woman;
 Fear: of being silent and silenced.

The Woman

Desire: to shrink and disappear;
 Fear: of having done something terrible;
 Desire: to get out of the car/run away/escape.

The audience embraced this story with gusto and generosity. When I asked at the end what people would take away:

- that 'the other' is always inside us;
- "as it is inside, so is it outside";
- we turn people into 'the other' because we are too tired or afraid to see or hear;
- that being open enough to 'live in uncertainty' takes tremendous courage and strength.

some moments:

the Man's fear of lecturing the Woman is also, of course, a desire. He is afraid of doing it because he wants to – otherwise there'd be nothing to fear. The fear/desire pisses the woman off. She is also afraid of this happening – it makes her very defensive. The Woman has a much easier time responding to his desire to protect himself from the moment.

People in the room see this and point out that the desire makes it possible for her to not deal with the moment – of course it is easier. The desire serves her. The fear (which in the scene manifests as a pointing, lecturing finger) forces her to confront her own racism; it doesn't let her off the hook, even though it is a fear.

The Woman's desire to shrink and disappear (played by a black woman) improvised a lovely scene with the black man's fear that he will lecture her (played by a white woman).³ At one moment the desire stood up and went forehead to forehead with the fear. It took everyone by surprise. This led to a conversation about whether or not this was a confrontation or a coming together. The room was

³ I am being this overt about race in explaining this because of the beauty of how the roles were mixing together – an indicator of the humanity on the stage tonight.

split down the middle about this – and not on racial lines. And then...I wondered inside me and asked out loud – if it is a confrontation – is that negative? Does it have to be an angry confrontation? Can it not be a loving confrontation? Why do we (as I had) put a negative label on it? The woman playing the desire lit up – she hadn't thought about this and agreed that the nature of confrontation feels aggressive and negative but is it always? Does it have to be? This desire to vanish confronted her own fear and through that met the other's fear in a territory where the two could actually see and hear each other. What did she have to conquer to do this? "I had to conquer my lack of hope", she said. Both women in this scene came to me after, independently, and raved about how much they loved the evening.

The Man's fear of being silent/silenced improvised with the Woman's fear of having done something terrible and in the scene that unfolded nothing was possible. These two fears are so very difficult together and it was fascinating to see how they create paralysis.

Another fascinating moment was when the Man's desire to protect himself is improvising with the Woman's desire to escape. She is up against the wall (the door of the car – stage left)...no where to go and he is in a wave movement back and forth from stage right to left...moving from far away from her to very close with his hand on the back of her head and back and forth. I interpreted this movement as somehow keeping her against the wall, because she is frozen there for so long. No one agrees with me; it does not reflect the experience of the room or of the woman playing the desire. She can't see it, but she can feel it and she has a sense it is drawing her back into the car – pulling her in, not pushing her away.

Thursday, November 11, 2010

I did an interview this afternoon for "The Source" and the interviewer said something that struck me, because it isn't something I hear often. She said, "this project sounds really hopeful, from what you are explaining and also people's reactions to it." Gee...this is entering some new and radical realm for me.

Place: Vancouver
 Hosts: Unitarian Church and Amnesty International
 Venue: Unitarian Church of Vancouver
 Capacity: 100
 Attendance: 65
 Percentage: 65%

For over a century, the Unitarian Church of Vancouver has served this city by providing a site for progressive, non-dogmatic religious exploration, social justice and GLBT activism, and as a venue for music and the arts. We are proud of a heritage that includes providing sanctuary

for war resisters and sponsorship for refugees, and for hosting the founding meeting of *Greenpeace*.

Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights.

Remembrance day today. We purposefully did an “Us and Them” event today and the Unitarian Church and Amnesty International came onboard, to ‘counter’ that aspect of Remembrance Day that reinforces Us vs. Them.

A woman in the audience put it clearly tonight, when she asked why we don’t overtly remember all soldiers from whatever side on this day? Why not the Germans, she asked? They were also young men and women who got ‘caught up’. A controversial stance, I know, but certainly most, if not all soldiers who go to war do so as “victims” at some level of forces that they feel or are taught to believe are beyond them. It is a rare individual who becomes a war resister. What psychosis takes over Nations that fuels the mobilization of fighting armies?

The story:

The Man is having a visit from his Cousin, who he has always known as a kind, intelligent, loving person. The Cousin, without ‘warning’ starts to talk to the Man about the threat of Islam and how Muslims are trying to take over the world and we must stop them. The moment where we freeze, is inside an incredulity from the Man – like he has been slapped in the face – he doesn’t know how to respond – wants to lash out, run away.

The Man

Desire: to reach out, openly to the Cousin;

Fear: that he won’t hold his anger, will explode;

Desire: to run away, but remain – a shape in a chair, twisted ‘away’ but still reaching out with arms.

The Cousin

Desire: to be open with the Man;

Fear: that he won’t be heard/understood;

Desire: to lecture the Man.

This was, compared to last night, such a quiet evening. We were in a church and that had something to do with it, but there was also such a different demographic in the room. Many older, left-leaning (I recognized many faces), peace and justice, political party faithful (again, some I know) – an intelligentsia in a way – people who live in their heads. This isn’t so much a value judgment – we DO need

diversity in the world – the evening though, was soooo quiet. They were engaged deeply, but in a different way.

Some moments:

As the evening unfolded the audience warmed to the idea of investigating the Cousin, meaning there was a resistance to this off the top. The woman who came to play him was great, she brought a depth to the character. I don't know how – what she connected to – but I do know it was an act of courage to take the character on and a great service to all of us.

It won't come as a surprise that those moments when one or the other of the 'sides' could find a way to really listen/see were the most 'successful' in the evening and also threw out a challenge. How do we accomplish that when someone is so diametrically opposed to our world view? This came up a number of times and the courage and generosity it takes.

There is a difference, though – and we saw it many times – between listening to find weapons to convince the other side to change and listening authentically to find commonality across our differences. Isn't this the challenge between the Islamic and the Judeo/Christian worlds? The current course of both sides insisting each is correct is leading us down a path of all out war. How do we navigate a world that accommodates very different world views? Yes, I know this is very complex and the devil is in the details....but as came up many times tonight – what do we WANT?

A man commented about this. So many times tonight characters started speaking sentences that were "I want YOU to..." "I want HIM to..."...and I would respond and say – this is what you want HIM to do...what do YOU WANT? The commenting man said this bothered him for some time and then he began to see why I was insisting and how profoundly important it is to know what one wants – not what one wants the other to do. This IS the space in which we can be authentic and take responsibility for ourselves.

Friday, November 12, 2010

Place: Burnaby
 Host: Nikkei Heritage Centre & Museum
 Venue: Nikkei Place
 Capacity: 100
 Attendance: cancelled
 Percentage: 0%

Nikkei Place promotes a better understanding and appreciation, by all Canadians, of Japanese Canadian culture and heritage; and an awareness by all Canadians of the contribution of Japanese Canadians to Canadian society, through public programs, exhibits, services, publications, public use of the facilities and special events.

We agreed, with the community sponsor, to cancel this event. The woman who was our main contact and who was so excited about the collaboration, went on maternity leave and the person who replaced her did not have the enthusiasm or the people-power support for the project. As a result, not much was happening to bring the organization's constituency out. About a week before the event there were two reservations. We called these people and suggested they book for a different event.

Saturday, November 13, 2010

Place: Vancouver
 Hosts: Portland Hotel Society and Heart of the City Festival
 Venue: Interurban Gallery
 Capacity: 70
 Attendance: 60
 Percentage: 86%

Portland Community Services Society promotes, develops and maintains supportive affordable housing for adult individuals who are at risk of homelessness. PHS ensures its services fit the people rather than making the people fit the services.

With a focus on the rich and diverse communities of the Downtown Eastside, the seventh annual Downtown Eastside **Heart of the City Festival** celebrates the culture, heritage and distinct character of the heart of Vancouver.

"Us and Them (the inquiry) is a great project to uncover social injustice and personal obstacles without finger pointing and it opens our minds to discover opportunities for change on personal, relationship and community levels."

Joachim Ostertag, audience member, Vancouver BC, Nov. 13, 2010

"Us and Them (the inquiry) was a very insightful and fun night. It definitely raised my awareness on things I've never thought of, and has had my mind going since then."

Kayla Cardinal, audience member, Vancouver BC, Nov. 13, 2010

A good turnout on the very wet and windy night, in the very heart of the poorest blocks of East Hastings. A great deal of activity and homelessness on the street and in the back lanes. In the midst of this, a good turnout from the Downtown Eastside (DTES) Community. I'd say the audience was about 50/50 local and other public.

The story

The woman has lived in a BC Housing Co-op (which she refers to as a contradiction in itself, because of the BC Housing regulations) for over six years. The Co-op has a garden/courtyard that is underused. She uses the courtyard to play the flute, walk her cat, play a small drum, knit, garden, read. Neighbours have complained about her being in the garden. Some have harassed her. There was a Co-op meeting in which the gardening committee told the six people complaining that the courtyard was “public space”, but this did not resolve the issue. She sent emails around to people; she called the police. Now, she has been summoned in front of the Board of Directors and, as the conversation escalates regarding her use of the public space and the President of the Board’s desire to serve the whole co-op, she asks why the Board is doing this to her and the answer is “because you are there”.

The woman

Desire: to strangle the Board Member;
 Fear: of being very small, not heard/seen;
 Fear: of “losing it” and then becoming what others are accusing her of.

The board member

Desire: to hear the woman;
 Fear: of boxing the woman in;
 Desire:can’t remember....

It is interesting that the woman had two fears and one desire and the board member two desires and one fear. This speaks to the power imbalance that the woman felt in the story.

I should also say that the woman who played the board member was great. Something she understood, and many in the room also did, was how one gets oneself into a position of having to make decisions that make others unhappy.

The desire to strangle the board member kept getting itself into trouble (naturally). The violent aggression of this desire led to either the board member shutting down or meeting the woman with equal or more force. We had an interesting chat in the room about how this mirrors what happens in society in general and in the DTES in particular. People’s frustrations lead them into more and more violent stances and this has its own momentum. How do we get a handle on this, knowing that in the society in which we live today, there is no way to ‘win’ through this desire. We have to be more subversive than this.

A very interesting scene played out between the board member's desire to hear the woman and the woman herself. The desire had his ear almost to the woman's mouth, trying to get her to tell him what she really wanted, but she kept on with the scene as if nothing was different. 'Why won't you listen to me – the courtyard is public space', she shouted (into the ear)... 'yes, I know', said the desire... 'let's try to work it out'...but it was impossible for the woman to break out of the role of not being seen/heard, even when I prodded her to do so. Of course the audience watched this with great interest.

Yes, there is a 'magic' nature to the board woman's desire, considering the scene, but here we were in the theatre. I asked the audience if they had ever done what we just watched the woman do and at least 90% raised their hands. A great moment of *époché*... (read my book for a detailed explanation), in which this roomful of people, I believe, had an 'aha' together and let go of an assumption, went out of balance, and while regaining balance, learned something new. This was articulated at the end of the evening by many in various ways, but basically that in order to bridge between "others" it may be necessary to break our own oppressor/oppressed patterns – by that I mean being stuck in either role. How can we recognize an opportunity for change if we are frozen in a behavioral mode, including that of being a victim?

The feedback after was tremendous from people from all kinds of walks of life. DTES activists, residents, a lawyer, union representatives...people who came just for an evening of innovative theatre.

Thursday, November 18, 2010

Place: Vancouver
 Hosts: Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre and United Native Youth Association (UNYA)
 Venue: Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre, Chief Simon Baker Room
 Capacity: 70
 Attendance: 63
 Percentage: 90%

VACFS: Established in 1963, VACFS provides many services such as child day care, transformative justice, family cultural nights, employment and skills training, and more. VAFCS services all urban aboriginal people regardless of where they come from.

UNYA:
 Metro Vancouver's only Native youth program-providing organization, we work to empower Native youth through our 21 programs including education & training, personal support, live-in programs and sports & recreation.

“Being the person who's story was used in an *Us and Them (inquiry)*, it was at times uncomfortable to relive past injustices that still haunt me today, yet very liberating in sharing with others some of my life. Through David's thought-provoking and interactive model of inquiry, by the end, my story had transformed to “our story”, because all of us present that evening were able to deconstruct it at a level that I myself still had not, and take home mental artifacts of that learning. Thank you! And by the way, my colleagues also raved about the experience.”

Peter, audience member, Vancouver BC, Nov. 18, 2010

This was a lovely and rich evening. Lots of laughter amidst the really serious investigation. Also a big turnout from the First Nations community as well as a really diverse audience in other ways. The make-up of the audience was what the whole project is about. This very diverse audience coming together to look at an issue (in this case of racial profiling), from very different and yet generous perspectives.

The story

The chosen story came from a man who was Black but we agreed could have been any person of Colour. A large majority in the room felt strongly that this story would likely not happen to a White man.

The man is speaking to an old friend, who is in her car. He is leaning on the open passenger window – chatting happily about the future. Suddenly, out of nowhere, he hears, almost in his ear: “Don’t fucking move” and a gun goes to his head. He says nothing. “OK – hands behind your back” – he is being handcuffed and arrested for a home invasion that just happened that he knows nothing about. It is a moment of racial profiling. ‘How many have either realistically or symbolically been this character’? Again – about 60% of the audience. “We” contain both these characters this evening – leading to a rich exploration.

The Fears and Desires

The Man

Desire: to be seen and helped by the officer;
 Fear: that he will be invisible, and that he will be hurt;
 Desire: to understand what is happening (from afar).

The Police Officer (PO)

Desire: to have the Man comply;
 Fear: that he has the wrong man;
 Desire: to prove himself worthy – to be a hero.

Of course there is a power imbalance between the two characters – one has a gun and the authority to use it. We agreed through the event, though, that as Boal suggested, we always have choices, in whatever situation we may find ourselves. Both the Man and the Officer have choices. Both, we discovered are playing “roles”. How do we change the patterns of the roles – make different choices, even within the confines of the casting of these defined roles. And for some, how do we break out of these roles entirely?

A very insightful exchange happened between the Officer and the desire to be seen and helped. The Desire asked for help. This threw the officer so far off balance. Why? We imagined what it means for any human to decide to pull a gun and put it to someone’s head without the certainty that the correct choice is being made. Our natural reaction is revulsion against the moment – to fight back....this “push back” may have the effect of confirming for the Officer he has made the correct decision. In the laboratory of the theatre, dissecting the moment, we were able to do something else – from a non-aggressive position – to ask for help. Yes, I know this suggests that the Man being profiled and attacked take responsibility for the moment and how unrealistic and unfair it is, but we are experimenting in the theatre. How does the Man be grounded and centered enough to not react to this with violence? It gives us an outcome we want. It was one of the only moments in the evening that broke through the fear-laden certainty that the Officer imposes on himself in order to act.

Also a wonderful moment between the Man and the Officer’s desire to be a hero. “Give me a reason...” the desire kept saying ... “a reason to take you down”. The Man got very aggressive with this desire, while also backing away, taunting the desire, giving the desire what it wanted, really. The audience loved it – hooting and applauding. I acknowledged that this had been very entertaining and also suggested it was the most dangerous exchange we had seen so far. Why? Because it seemed to be leading to the Man getting shot. Silence. Who thinks this is true? Every hand, including the Man’s and the Officer’s goes up. And so....we love his defiant response and yet agree it is going to get him wounded or killed. Again, what do we really *want*?

The officer is as ‘frozen’ in positions as the man. He feels constrained by his uniform, by career choices, by an interpretation of duty and by his own fear, among other things. We talked about how this very aggressive desire is fuelled by an underlying fear. Fear of failing in the eyes of his peers, fear of the danger he places himself in as a Police Officer, the danger of making wrong choices in split-second decisions. Some suggested the fear of not being the hero he is setting himself up to be. Others suggested the fear of the collapse of order.

Two women spoke (among others) at the end and talked about how their sons had been beaten up by the police. This event, they said, helped them understand a way

through it better, in a way that released both of them. It isn't helpful, they said (I am paraphrasing now), to just be angry with the Police. How do we get inside the fears and desires of these officers – who are “us” – and build a society in which these kinds of things don't happen? (I asked, at one point, how many of us in the room had “been” this officer? At least 60% of the hands in the room went up.)

The same question arises over and over again. What do we *want*? Do we want to continue the cycles we are in? Or finally find ways to break out of the patterns? Breaking out of the patterns demands taking a much deeper risk.

Evidently, three pages of people signed up for the mailing list tonight – that must be at least 50% of the audience. An indicator of the depth and relevance of the evening.

Friday, November 19, 2010

Place: Vancouver
 Host: Newworld Theatre
 Venue: PL1422
 Capacity: 60
 Attendance: 39
 Percentage: 65%

Newworld Theatre uses popular forms to examine our lives in the context of who counts, who doesn't, and what our relationship is to the people we think we aren't. Newworld is also one of four founding partners of PL 1422 - a creation and development hub here on Vancouver's eastside.

“Thank you for a life-changing, mind-expanding, soul-searching, transformative theatre experience at *Us and Them (the inquiry)*! I have never experienced anything even remotely like this, and am awestruck at the power and the possibilities suggested by this utterly fascinating experiment in community dialogue, risk-taking and shared story-telling. An incredible journey in so many ways, and I'm very excited about where this might lead now and down the road.”

Mark LeBourdais , audience member, Vancouver BC, Nov. 19, 2010

Not a bad turnout, considering there was a snow advisory for tonight. Also a challenging evening, although lots of people came after and said how much they enjoyed it – we ended in tension. Bad tension? I don't know – people stayed and talked and talked after...bubbling.

This was also perhaps the least diverse audience we have had for any of the events. The event itself, focused on racism, had a texture of guilt attached to it and, from some people in the room, an entrenched attachment to the oppressor/oppressed model. “Not seeing the world that way”, one woman said, “is a luxury”. Others said “a necessity”; she insisted....a luxury. This sparked a heated debate that continued well after we had wound down.

The over-riding memory I have of tonight is the challenging nature of the audience. There was a warmth often and laughter, and also a really polarized energy. So different than the generosity of last night and the story from last night was far more volatile than tonight in its way – a gun to a man’s head. But perhaps tonight was more challenging because of the ‘grey’ nature of the territory.

The story

The teacher (a Caucasian man) is in the far north, teaching in an Inuit School. There are palpable divisions in the community between the “White Southerners” (his words) of which he is one, and the local Inuit. They mix in certain situations, but it is at a formal kind of level. The teacher is at a gathering at the local head of the RCMP’s house. It is all visiting professionals, no Inuit guests. The teacher listens to a co-worker talk about how much he hates being in the North and how hard it is to teach here. The co-worker says very disparaging and racist things about the Inuit students and their parents. The teacher disagrees, at a deep level, but doesn’t stand up and speak his own thoughts. In fact he takes a breath and looks at the ground. Although “the other” created here is of course the Inuit in general, in the scene it is also the teacher (and as we discover) the co-worker.

A challenging story as “we” want to challenge the co-worker or not deal with him at all, change his mind, get violent with him and his ignorance, his racism. But, what do we do? This teacher remains silent.

The fears and desires

The teacher

- Desire: to get through to the co-worker – an intense shape, grabbing the co-worker’s head;
- Fear: curled up into a ball on the stage – a fear of being ‘here’ and of being like the co-worker;
- Desire: well – this was very confusing. It LOOKS like a desire to walk out the door, the person taking it on says it is a desire to be empowered – but at the same time wants the shape to be invisible to the audience – an empowered and yet invisible shape....then she suggests the shape is “no shape”....

The co-worker

- Desire: to not be lectured by the teacher – the shape, however, is pointing and lecturing and lectures the teacher about the failings of the community;
- Fear: ...fuzzy now...I think this was a fear of being wrong;
- Desire: to ask the teacher what the problem is...why there is even a problem.

Some moments:

The desire of the co-worker to not be lectured somehow activates the teacher. At the time the teacher says it is because this desire cares and is pushing but it occurs to me now that this is also what happened in the original scene. What was the difference? Perhaps the desire is more 'overt' and because of that is easier to rise up against – easier than the soft-spoken covert real co-worker. (Just a thought, now, in my kitchen)

The same desire of the co-worker was thrown very much off-balance by the Teacher's fear. The woman playing the fear did something surprising – she rolled over on her back, so she could see the co-worker – showed her belly (like a dog would to the Alpha Dog). This giving up of power took everyone by surprise and it also disarmed the coworker. The two had a dialogue for what might have been the first time in the event. The message here is frightening, though, and hard to interpret. Do we have to give our power over to the racist in order to engage in actual dialogue? The woman talked about "forgiveness"...in a same way, really that the women talked about their changing relationship with the Police Officer last night. Very symbolically – she conquered her fear – flipped over – and looked the co-worker in the eye – no longer staring at the floor as she had been in the shape and the Teacher had been when we froze the scene.

A strange improvisation between the co-worker's fear of being wrong and the teacher's desire to be empowered in the moment. They end up standing together, twisted around in shapes, in front of the sofa – each asking the other to validate their point of view – so they can sit down together. But neither will do so first. They talked about needing this validation and I observed that each was depending on the other one for validation, but couldn't they do it themselves? Or why, if it was essential, couldn't one risk going first? We had a kind of arms race in reverse in this scene – the weapon being a deepening personal fear...not an escalation of weapons that builds a wall, but an escalation of fear and self-doubt.

When we were winding up a woman mentioned how she had seen in this event how even though there were 'oppressors and oppressed' there was also always some kind of common ground between the characters. This led a man to vehemently disagree, because there was a power imbalance between the two – the teacher being "alone" and the co-worker representing the structural oppression of society.

I took this opportunity to talk about my own thoughts about structure – Paulo Freire's writing about how, having won the revolution, the challenge is not to become what we are fighting against; and how, in nature, patterns of behaviour create structure – making it necessary to work on patterns of behaviour, so we are

not doomed to recreate the same oppressive structures. I did this last night, too, and the audience responded with very loud applause. Tonight, that statement, at the very end of the evening, led to the woman's comment I mentioned at the top – about this idea being a luxury. I didn't know it then, but was told afterward, that a man turned to this woman at that point (the event was done) and starting lecturing her about the necessity of this kind of change. He did what had been on the stage this evening.

Saturday, November 20, 2010

Place: Vancouver
 Host: Newworld Theatre
 Venue: PL1422
 Capacity: 60
 Attendance: 33
 Percentage: 55%

We began roughly tonight with problems comprehending the stories. I know now that there were mental health issues on the stage – people from a specific agency in town who brought a group. One of the stories was about “I love my kids and that is really hard because they are like their dad”...which could have worked – but I couldn't find the way to get the woman to explain what happens between her and the child. She would only say the sentence above over and over again.

Another story started off being about a school master and then went to Afghanistan and then....well- I got very confused about where we went. The third story, which also needed coaxing to construct but which worked and the room chose was this:

The son tries to confront his father about the father's abuse of the mother. The son tries to get the father to take responsibility, but the father will not. The son hates the father and the father resents the son. They are at an impasse – each turning the other into “the other”. This proved to be a very rich story that took us from a living room in Vancouver into the Cold War and into Islamophobia and back again.

The Son

Desire: to leave;
 Fear: that he will strangle/kill his father;
 Desire: to protect his mother.

The Father

Desire: to embrace the son by twisting around him – to embrace him totally;
 Fear: that there will always be a barrier between them;
 Desire: to protect himself from physical and emotional harm from the son.

Some moments:

The father's desire to embrace the son becomes a burden and claustrophobic first for the son and then also for the father. When the man playing the desire figures out he can keep the shape but also not be twined around the son, this creates a space for them to actually speak. Even though the son needs time now, at least the relationship has shifted. We saw that the father could, following the desire, find a way to start to take some responsibility.

The son's desire to leave gets directly in his way in terms of getting what he wants from the father. The threat of leaving doesn't move anything forward, it just builds a new wall.

In the same way the father's desire to protect himself creates another barrier. There are so many barriers in the scene of anger, guilt, fear – these make the desire that both characters have (underlying) to heal, virtually impossible. This is one of those moments when I asked the audience to explode the scene bigger – if we are no longer in the living room with father and son....where are we? In Afghanistan; in the old Cold War; in the "fight" against Islam.

The same happens with the son's fear to strangle (which I am realizing turned into a desire); a huge output of energy that does not accomplish what the real son wants and also quickly exhausts both characters.

The son's desire to protect makes some headway – in that it is the most flexible and has the ears to hear and eye to see.

Something in particular came up tonight out of one of the interactions – and that was that sometimes "we" have an **addiction** to creating "the other". If we no longer define ourselves in relation to "them" - how we are **not** "them"...who are we? And also if we no longer have "them" to blame and lash out against, what do we do? Investigate ourselves? Far too scary, this. And so, when this is the case, we remain in the addiction, as individuals and as a collective people, nation, race, gender, etc., in relation to "the other".

People after the event loved and raved about it. About the concept, the truth in it, the innovative use of theatre and shapes, the insights.

Sunday, November 21, 2010

Place: Vancouver
 Host: Youth Initiative Canada (YIC) and the Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association (KAYA)

Venue: Café du Soleils
 Capacity: 98
 Attendance: 95
 Percentage: 97%

"I am someone with training and experience using theatre within communities (particularly those "at risk"). *Us and Them (the inquiry)* was one of the most insightful and inspiring performances I have been to and left me more aware of people around me, how we interact and the possible reasons for the ways we perceive each other (and The Other). It made me want to discuss these ideas and characteristics of human behaviour with the people around me, to share **Us and Them** with others."

Amy Bradney-George, audience member, Vancouver BC , Nov. 21, 2010

Youth Initiative Canada (YIC) is a growing network of young people who are peace builders, entrepreneurs, leaders and mentors. YIC engages young people in multi dimensional programs geared towards creating sustainable development through gender empowerment, social entrepreneurship and HIV/AIDS awareness in Canada and Kenya.

The Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association (KAYA) advocates for Aboriginal Youth representation and participation in the community.

The quote above aside, this was a rough night. Both wonderful and really challenging things happened.

I wasn't prepared for how very noisy the venue was – a constant wall of sound to get through from the kitchen. This was really hard for me tonight, am feeling very fatigued from so many events. The evening also threw some unexpected curve balls.

I will say that a woman from the Dalai Lama Centre for Peace and Education came to me after and was just blown away by the event and has asked to get in touch because it mirrors so much what the Centre wants to accomplish in terms of communities finding voice.

At the same time, a young, angry anarchist-activist accused me, quite aggressively, of having oppressed the audience all night by dictating what happened on stage. I tried to get him to explain what he meant – he had been outraged by the instance (below) with the homeless man and wanted, from what I can understand, no "structure" to the evening – a "happening"...whatever happens, happens, by whoever wants to do it. I should just "let go". I actually think there is a great deal of safety and freedom in structure and so we had to agree to disagree – my disagreeing with him, though, was just another instance of me proving to him that I am a White, Middle Class Oppressor.

So many other things happened tonight. Getting the stories started rough. I explained the same way I do every night and yet tonight it seemed as if people didn't understand the request for stories.

One of the stories was about a young guy who met a girl and then she ended up on drugs. He wanted 'the moment' to be when they met in the backyard. How, in this moment, does one of you turn the other into 'the other'? 'We weren't' he said... 'we were one.' I tried to ask about her getting involved in drugs... was there a moment in which this sense of being turned into 'the other' happened then? 'No... I was never around then'. This went on for some time. I let it go, not wanting to push it further and figured the room would not pick the story.

Another story involved skiers and snowboarders. When I asked the person offering why he thought this story was important, he said that he wanted to see someone onstage pretend to ski and shake their bum.

There is a reason to take three stories – it is possible (this happens often enough) that a story will just not fit the requirements of the Rainbow of Desire. The challenge is to know when to let it go and trust the audience to vote.

The chosen story:

A young woman is at a music festival with her friend. A woman beside them (a smoker) lights up a cigarette. The Festival is a non-smoking zone. The young woman asks the smoker to put out the cigarette – it is making her friend, who has asthma, cough. The smoker refuses and it escalates into an argument.

The Young Woman

Desire: to push the Smoker away;
 Fear: of being attacked;
 Desire: to leave and not be involved.

The Smoker

Desire: to push through the Young Woman;
 Fear: knowing she is breaking the rules, she fears being judged;
 Fear: of being exposed (I think).

When I asked for someone to play the smoker, a man, who had just appeared (he had just come in the door and hadn't been there for any of the introduction, the explanation of what we were doing, the demonstration, the picking of the stories) wanted to play the smoker and the young woman chose him. It took me a while to figure out what was happening; his absence from the whole introduction didn't dawn on me until he was on his way onto the stage – I didn't put the pieces together fast enough. When I realized what was happening, I asked him if he had been there for all of the above and the answer was "no" – so...you don't know

what we are doing, right? “Well – can’t you just put me in”, he asked? No, I am sorry, I said – I can’t – it was too far to go back by then, too much to explain. The man also happens to have been a homeless person, carrying a blanket with him.

So...this became controversial for some people. I believe I did the right thing – my decision had nothing to do with his homeless state – it had to do with his lack of understanding of what was going to be required of him. He had no way to know this, having missed the first 45-60 minutes of the event. I don’t believe it would have been responsible to potentially sacrifice the event for him. To say ‘yes’ to him just because he was homeless would, I think, be patronizing and really unfair to everyone – including him. The young woman telling the story clued in to what was happening and agreed. The man seemed afraid he would get sent back outside into the pouring rain and I assured him he was welcome to stay. He did and participated when I asked for opinions about things from the audience.

When we got to animating the fears and desires of the smoker, a youth (14 years old, I was told later) came onto the stage to play the fear of being judged.

We went through internal monologues and it came his turn to say a sentence that begins with the words “I want...” and, as some people do sometimes, he started with “I want HER to...”...and, as I always do, I said that’s what you want HER to do – what do YOU want? This sometimes gives the person pause, but people have always taken the question in, understood, and responded with “I want...”

Why is this important? Because the actor, in order to play a scene, needs to know what s/he wants – for themselves. I also think it is important because of how activism operates; it is easy to know what we don’t want or what we want others to do – but *what do we want?*

This young guy froze. I watched him shut down in stages. I tried to gently coax a sentence out of him but it became excruciating, as the room waited and the “spotlight” on him got more and more intense. It was clear to me that he wanted to get offstage and, of course, I have no way to tell people on the stage what to say/do – I can give direction but the content has to come from them, I can’t force it. And so I asked him if he wanted to go back to his seat he immediately said yes and went. Such an uncomfortable moment for everyone...him, me, the audience...I navigated it the best I could in the moment but felt terrible for him. I had watched him go into a kind of panic. Maybe it was stage fright, maybe it triggered a memory, maybe he just went blank. And of course, how ironic that the fear was of being judged. The audience gave him a nice round of applause. (This may have been a good or bad thing.) I tried to check in with him after and couldn’t find him in the very crowded room, but friends of his at the table he was at assured me he was fine. He had been with a youth group and had a support person with him. It

was while doing this that the young anarchist came to talk with me (above), and then I got diverted into this other conversation.

There was also a lot of wonderful feedback. When I asked about what people might take away, a woman said she was thinking for the first time of how to really communicate with her difficult landlord – that this event had given her these insights; another had insights into her personal relationships and ways to navigate them, making more “space” for others. The organizer from YIC and I chatted and he thought it was wonderful – we agreed it was hard what had happened with the youth but he said that he thought I had done what could be done and people (age regardless) made choices, he said. The youth had chosen to leave the stage, instead of work through the moment. It was interesting (reassuring, perhaps) to hear this from a youth worker.

Thursday, November 25, 2010

Place: North Vancouver
 Host: North Shore Welcoming Action Committee (NSWAC)
 Venue: North Shore Neighbourhood House
 Capacity: 100
 Attendance: 35
 Percentage: 35%

NSWAC convenes a group of key community stakeholders to identify and address issues faced by immigrant and refugee newcomers as they integrate into the North Shore communities. NSWAC also builds organizational and community capacity as it relates to the development of communities and workplaces that are welcoming and inclusive.

We’ve had a heavy snow (for Vancouver) and driving warnings all day. North Vancouver is quite hilly. The weather really hurt attendance.

When we were performing *Meth*, the Forum Theatre play on addiction, there would sometimes be such huge silences in the audience that I would say:

“The silence in this room right now about this moment, is the silence ‘out there’ about this issue. They are the same silence. If we can’t imagine how to break the silence here, in the theatre, where there is no consequence, how can we possibly imagine how to break the silence in the real world?”

I haven’t had to say anything like this yet in the *Us and Them inquiries*, until tonight and interestingly, this same thing happened when we did *2° of Fear and Desire* in North Vancouver a few years ago. Coincidence? Maybe. Maybe not. I honestly don’t know.

The story:

An Iranian/Canadian man is crossing into the US in his car. He is going to do some shopping (and to do some other artistic work, while he is there, but won't be mentioning that at the border.) The Border Guard, after looking at the man and his passport, asks him when was the last time he was back in Iraq. 'I am not from Iraq', says the man, 'I am from Iran'. 'Yeah, yeah, well – one of those countries', says the Border Guard. The statement of the Guard is like a slap in the face. The man gets into the US, but not without being profiled and insulted. We freeze at the 'slap in the face'.

The Man

Desire: to punch the Border Guard
 Fear: of being turned away
 Fear: of being arrested

The Border Guard

Desire: to let the man in
 Fear: of being attacked
 Desire: to protect his country

One of the difficulties with this story is the mechanization of the border guard. But there have been other *Us and Them* events that have dealt with police, who could also be very mechanized, and they didn't get as "stuck" as tonight. Is the difference our perceptions/experiences of officials from the US vs Canada?

Of course the desire to punch the guard is something many of us understand and, we agreed, it will get us incarcerated. We see this even more so when that desire is put up against the guard's desire to protect his country. This is a very volatile combination.

The fear of being turned away, however, is just as 'dangerous' to the man as the desire to attack. It paralyzes him. The fear/paralysis makes the guard suspicious. We seem to be in a lose/lose situation at the border.

It is when we put the man's fear of being arrested together with the guard's fear of being attacked, that we actually start getting at least a conversation happening. These two fears recognize each other – each has a window through which the other can communicate. Why is this important?

It becomes important when I ask the room how many of them are the guard? Many. 70% or so. How? 'Because I am a teacher who sometimes has to fail a student'; 'because I am a parent'; 'because I am in a relationship that is distrustful'; 'because I am an employer'.

It is also fascinating to start to understand how facing our fear can be a way "in" to the difficult conversation. The normal impulse is, I think, to be paralyzed by our fears or to listen to their advice to run or fight. I am seeing that in the same way an effective massage therapist goes for the knots of muscle – the place that hurts – and digs in there...facing our fears (and doing so with others) is an effective way to build bridges between opposing people/forces. How do we do that in life?

The actual story at the border becomes very constricted over and over again (partly because the man playing the guard can't or won't delve into his humanity at all – he is portrayed throughout the evening as a kind of robot, no matter how hard I try to help him open up. Perhaps this is a result of not doing exactly what I have just written above – not having the courage to face the fear. This resistance is woven throughout the evening inside the room. The guard can't be a human being – he can only be a machine. Well, what does it mean to the guard if that is who 'we' also turn him into?

When I asked people what they would take away:

A tool (image theatre) to use inside their family situations;
A desire to try to understand what is inside 'the other' before judging.

Friday, November 26, 2010

Place: Vancouver
Host: Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House
Venue: Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House
Capacity: 80
Attendance: 62
Percentage: 78%

"It was a fantastic experience to sit and enjoy the unraveling of people's stories from 'my' to 'ours.' in *Us and Them (the inquiry)*. I deeply enjoyed every bit which took me to experience a range of emotions from anger, frustration and sorrow to joy, happiness and most importantly togetherness, collaboration and peace. Thank you for being at Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House."

Blanca Salvatierra, Building Welcoming and Inclusive Neighbourhood Program,
Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House, Vancouver BC, Nov. 26 and 27, 2010

Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House (MPNH) has been serving Mount Pleasant since 1976. We are a member of the Association of Neighbourhood Houses of British Columbia, an organization dedicated to providing programs and services

tailored to the needs of their respective communities. MPNH offers a range of programs and activities to people of all ages and cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. From childcare to seniors activities, youth programs to community development and multicultural events and more, the House is an active hub for Mount Pleasant.

Our only 2PM Matinee. A very, very diverse audience in both racial origins and ages – many of them the constituency of the Neighbourhood House (MPNH). We agreed to give MPNH vouchers to give to its constituency and many of them attended – along with general public. This audience was also deeply engaged with lots of comments, again from a real diversity in the room.

The story comes from an older Chinese woman. I am identifying her because the other character is a young Caucasian man and various members of the audience spoke at different times about how important both the race and age of the characters is to the story and life experience.

The woman is on a boat-ride with colleagues from the hospital in which she works. They have had a nice afternoon, although it is quite chilly. During the ride the younger man sees she is cold and offers her his jacket, which she accepts and wears. The young man is a student doctor. The woman is an assistant to the Anesthetist. In the world of the hospital, this creates a professional hierarchy between them, although as a human, she does not want this to exist – again – the audience comments it is important. After the ride she gives him back the jacket and thanks him. He puts the jacket on and his wallet is gone.

Man where's my wallet?
 Woman I don't know
 Man give me back my wallet
 Woman I didn't take your wallet – are you accusing me?
 Man give me back my wallet that you stole!

We freeze at a moment when the woman points at herself, filled with anger and embarrassment.

The woman

Desire: to punch the young man
 Fear: of being accused – creates a subservient, apologetic aspect
 Fear: of being accused – creates a desire to turn away/leave

The young man

Desire: to get the woman to engage about the wallet (that he believes she has)

Fear: of being wrong and then being attacked
 Desire: to punch the woman

One of the challenging aspects of today was that the woman titled the story "It doesn't matter" and went back and forth between telling us she didn't care about being accused – it was nothing to her – to showing us in facial and body expressions that she cared a lot. This made her complicated to work with because, well, if it doesn't matter to the Protagonist...why should it matter to us? She must care (she does) and so she must also be willing to share with us that she cares. Perhaps something cultural here that is outside my experience. In the end, *it is all theatre* and the "story" of course included the complexity of dissonance between what she said and what she did.

We had a rich investigation. As might be expected the desire to punch the young man escalated the confrontation rather quickly. Maybe surprisingly, so did the fear that wants to leave. The woman playing this fear ran away from the young man, which then meant he ran after her – more sure than ever she had stolen the wallet. The fear's inability to face him made matters worse, as did an extreme desire to not only face him, but attack back. Safety and a path leading to retaining one's dignity was somewhere in between these two.

Likewise, the young man's desire to punch the woman escalated matters. The woman had an interesting response to the man's fear. She wouldn't pay any attention to it. I asked her to play the scene, because she wouldn't say or do anything, and she said "I am!" This same thing happened with the desire to get the woman to engage, which turned into a very emotional scene of the woman playing the desire crying (true tears) on the stage about the picture of her mother that was in the wallet..."it is so important to me"...the woman would not see or hear either of them. Investigating, it became apparent that she was "stuck" on being accused and now unable to see or hear anything but her accuser.

How many of us have been the man somehow? About 60% of the room. How many of us have been the woman somehow? Also about 60% (not all the same) of the room. Can any of us explain how we do what the woman is doing right now, in our own lives?

A woman: when my son is really trying to do his homework and all I can see/hear is the boy who wants to play video games; I don't believe him.

A man: when my employer tries to do a nice and fair thing for me, but because of all the other unfair history, I don't recognize it.

A woman: when I am walking down the street and see any man coming the other way, I change sides of the street.

There were more....

Of course bringing the two desires to punch together was volatile. Where are we? North and South Korea; the Middle East; Afghanistan.

There was great appreciation for the work of the people on the stage. What are you able to take away?

To try to see/hear my kids more clearly;

To try not to be so certain of my assumptions;

To know that even the powerful character has some fear in them;

Knowing that “pushing back” isn’t always bad or wrong or impolite. Sometimes avoiding the confrontation is not helping – facing things doesn’t have to be violent or negative;

Saturday, November 27, 2010

Place: Vancouver

Host: Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House

Venue: Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House

Capacity: 80

Attendance: 75

Percentage: 94%

A lively and deep night, that also had complexity. Off the top – a woman was there who I recognized from other Headlines audiences. She was very drunk and speaking in riddles and, when I asked about how she was, what her riddles meant, was quickly belligerent. I chatted with a man who knew her and he cautioned me that when in this state, he knows she can become violent. I didn’t want to turn her away, and asked him if he’d sit with her and keep an eye/ear open. He agreed. She insisted on sitting in the front row and was being very loud and unruly, yelling, swearing. The organizers from the Neighbourhood House were concerned about her at the event. We agreed to try to get the two to move to the back (where the man had also suggested they go). When this request happened, she got very angry and louder ...the organizers wanted her to leave – I agreed. She then became fearful that we would call the police and the organizers assured her that this would not happen, but at the same time, they didn’t want her in the room in this intoxicated state, in what they wanted to be (and was) a family oriented event. (You could smell the alcohol.) She left, talked outside for some time with the man who knew her. He came back in on his own, once I had started and I didn’t get a chance to chat with him after.

So many questions this opens up. How much gets sacrificed to accommodate one person? There were families with children at the event; seniors...general public....the story (below) was very sensitive... at the same time, how could we have kept her in the room? Should we have? Real questions from me, in this event about "Us and Them".

On the flip side: a man who must be in his mid-60's, who was in the Rainbow yesterday afternoon, loved it so much he brought his mother tonight. A very elderly woman who came to me after and was very excited – she works with addicts (she must be in her late 80s/early 90s) and wants to find a way to bring this into her work. A couple came to me after, who have very little English. He owns an international trading company (he gave me his card). They were also so excited by what had happened in the evening and want more information, to be on the mail list.

The story

The son (16 years old) has just argued with his mother. She wants him to do something and he wants to be alone, in his room, on his phone. She has a history of violence towards him. He has left the argument, slammed the bedroom door. She comes into the room and says:

Mom How dare you slam the door on me!
 Son (silence)

The mother walks over to him and slaps him hard. He rises up, raises a fist at her (for the first time in his life)...grimaces, looks at the floor (we froze the scene here)...and then (in the story) puts his fist through the wall right near her.

Both the young guy (the son) and the woman who came to play the mother were great. The fears and desires:

The son

Desire: to push the mother away;
 Fear: of being alienated forever from the mother;
 Desire: to freeze the mother in her tracks and then crush her.

The mother

Desire: to have her "boy" back and not this difficult young man;
 Fear: of not being forgiven;
 Desire: to be obeyed.

I was proud of a moment tonight. I encountered something new and navigated it with transparency. Two people who are also workshop facilitators (strangers) came and thanked me for it after, because it was such a moment of learning for them. Initially, I froze the moment before the mother hit the son. I thought we “had it”...and had gone so far as to get the first desire onto the stage. As that was happening, though, I started to realize that this was an error. It wasn’t true to the heart of the story the son had told and the room had voted for overwhelmingly. We could do Rainbow, but I had ‘missed’ the moment. It was a big deal to stop, explain I had made an error, go back into the improvisation and refreeze, but it was the right thing to do.

This was a big deal for me and a learning moment, of being able to ‘own’ having made a large judgment error and to go back and fix it with 80+ people in the room.

Some other moments:

The son seems incapable/unwilling to “meet” the mother’s fear of not being forgiven. Initially, I thought it was because of the violence, but he says no – that isn’t what matters. Going onto his knees, which he must do in order to “meet” her, will make him seem weak and he is trying to be strong enough to break away. And so, although a part of him desires reconciliation, he will not come down to her lower power level, and if she cannot rise to his, he will walk away. So very honest of him. What does it mean in the world outside?

People comment on the failure of peace processes because of “pride” of one side or the other or both; of different definitions of “strong” and “weak” and what that means to men and women; (men who bend or acquiesce are named “weak”, when it demands great strength to do so). At this point in the son’s life (16) this idea is very challenging for him.

The mother’s desire to have her “boy” back is very lovingly oppressive and manipulative. It also does not play well with the son’s desire to push the mother away; in fact one reinforces the other in an ever escalating cycle. This circle mirrors world events and different forms of colonialism, and what happens when the colonized nation wants independence from the colonizer. Colonialism is structured on a kind of dysfunctional “parent/child” relationship. Battlefields are strewn with the casualties of this same story that was on the stage.

Somehow the desire to freeze the mother in her tracks (and crush her) and the fear of not being forgiven managed to reconcile into an embrace that got a lot of applause from the audience. How did this happen? Both shapes were down on the ground and in very vulnerable positions. Somehow, they both saw the other’s vulnerability. What came from this is the importance of being able to own and tell one’s intimate story. To explain how “I” have got “here” to “the other” and for the

other to have the ears to listen. Agreement is not necessary. Space to see and hear is. From this place of recognizing each other's true journey into "here" Journeying to some "there" (either alone or together) becomes possible. In the theatre tonight it was reconciliation. We agreed that in the world, it is not always so. This is connected, it seems to me, to the courage to confront our fears together from a few nights ago.

When I asked the audience what they would take away:

- that fighting back isn't wrong;
- that one can insist one's individuality be respected with ways other than violence;
- that our relationship with the other is connected to our relationship to our own fears and desires;
- new ways to navigate very personal partnerships – ways to see "the other".

Sunday, November 28, 2010

Place: Vancouver
 Host: Vancouver Coastal Health
 Venue: St. James Community Square
 Capacity: 150
 Attendance: 115
 Percentage: 77%

"(Us and Them [the inquiry]) What a trippy experience that all were to undertake. I say thanks to all in that room , it was so beautifully fake. That's the way I want the world to be, humans helping humans heal from all of our tragedies."

Kim, audience member and participant, Vancouver BC, Nov. 28, 2010

Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) has recently embarked on an Addiction Knowledge Exchange initiative in an effort to reduce the stigma faced both publicly and privately by people living with mental health and addiction issues. In 2001, the World Health Organization declared stigma associated with mental illness to be the "single most important barrier to overcome in the community". More information about VCH's Addiction Knowledge Exchange and anti-stigma initiative can be found at the resource table.

Vancouver Coastal Health's desire to do this evening was to bring out its constituency (along with general public) as part of an anti-stigmatization campaign around issues of mental health. They did a great job bringing out the sector of the community that engages in their mental health programs and as was their hope, this constituency played a central role in the evening.

The story came from a woman who was very open about her own struggles with mental health and an abusive family. This story focused on her relationship with her mother who has berated her all her life. The woman who played the mother was also very open about her own struggles with mental health. She knew ‘the mother’ very well, not as the mother, I believe, but also as the daughter.

The story: The daughter has come to her mother’s home, out of a sense of obligation, to visit. The daughter has recently had a nervous breakdown and is once again on medication, not working, hoping to take a training program. Mom starts to ask “the questions” ...what are you doing with your life? When will you have a job? Why are you such a failure? We freeze just as the undermining questions are about to happen, when the daughter is thinking “oh – here we go again...”

The Fears and Desires

The daughter

Desire: to be hugged by the mother;
 Fear: of disappearing, of always being isolated;
 Desire: to embrace the mother.

The mother

Desire: to embrace the daughter;
 Fear: of turning her back on her daughter and losing her forever;
 Desire: to be forgiven.

Obviously we were in very delicate territory all night. The daughter was in tears a great deal – not sobbing tears – but quiet tears, and I kept coming back to her, checking in, and she always wanted to continue, even though I think she found it very uncomfortable. I told her at one point I “wasn’t afraid of her tears” and she broke out into a big smile at me, through her tears.

Same with the mother – often playing scenes through tears. This is so much like “Out of the Silence”⁴ was years ago and many other projects that dealt with really core family issues. How many of us have been the daughter, somehow? More than half the audience. How many of us have been the mother somehow? The same.

A woman (an executive in the health sector) came to me after the event and was upset by the “danger” that she perceived people who offered stories and insights into characters, fears, desires were in. Ironic, this, as the whole evening was framed

⁴ A project on family violence in 1992 that changed the direction of my work.

in stigmatization of people in the mental health community and the fear stems, I believe, from a philosophy that the mental health ‘consumer’ cannot do this. The workers, on the ground at VCH were very happy with what happened – they made that plain to me after – and frustrated by the fear expressed by the executive.⁵

My own sense is that all the participants knew what they were doing and made choices all the time to continue to engage, and did so with great depth and honesty, and that this, in fact, is the opposite of being in danger.

The woman who was the daughter asked if she could sign up to be considered for the Rainbow of Desire training, but she didn’t want to go back into the crowded lobby. Why not, I asked? She was tired – and knew that people would want to talk with her, ask questions, congratulate her (they had given her a standing ovation at the end.) I suggested to her that she could stop the “probing questions” and enjoy the compliments, but she said it was too hard for her – especially the compliments. She gave me her email and I will enter her into the list.

Some moments:

The daughter’s desire to be hugged by the mother is also filled with fear. Her arms outstretched, exposing herself, she is so vulnerable to being hurt and this is the pattern – rejection over and over again....and yet here she still is, with arms outstretched. This resonated for many beyond this particular mother/daughter story into our struggles to remain open to affection and yet not so exposed that we have no boundaries.

The mother’s desire to be forgiven seemed very self-centred and just a different side of the abuse. This may have to do with the perspective of the woman who took on playing the mother – of course the ‘actor’ is always a filter. The desire never apologized or promised to change behaviour, it just wanted forgiveness. I’ll also say that there is insight here, about how we tunnel into a desire/need and this affects how we are seen and heard. Someone commented that the mother/daughter roles switched over and this was true in the improvisation and so true in families caught up in abuse; that the children sometimes start parenting their parents.

Having said this, the daughter’s fear of disappearing and the mother’s desire for forgiveness managed to reconcile on the stage. How? Neither could “see” the other in the shapes they were in and ironically this forced them into using other senses. Touch, for one, and truer emotions. They were also the only two rainbow fragments who were on the floor (together). So many other improvisations involved one character towering over another, often in judgment. These two didn’t fall into

⁵ Vancouver Coastal Health ended up booking Theatre for Living training workshops for their Staff – this collaborative event turned into a great ongoing relationship.

that. Judgment was a very big theme in the evening (including the judgment of the executive).

When I asked the audience what they'd take away:

- how important it is to set healthy boundaries;
- to not be so certain about what 'the other' is thinking/feeling and to create the space to find out from them;
- how complex the rainbow of fear and desire is in all of us;
- to be generous enough to embrace those we perceive as 'the other';
- to investigate our own reflection in those we perceive as 'the other'.

Appendix A (List of Orgs. in the *Us and Them (the inquiry)* Network)

Addiction Knowledge Exchange, Fraser Health
Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA)
Agriculture Workers Alliance, Surrey Support Centre
Amnesty International, Vancouver
Anti-stigma Program, VCH
Association of BC Drama Educators
Battered Womens Support Services
BC Conference- The United Church of Canada
BC Mental Health & Addiction Services PHSA Research & Networks
BC Teachers for Peace and Global Education
BC Teachers' Federation (sent to teachers with Social Studies, Social Justice, and Drama focus)
BCGEU- BC Government and Service Employees' Union
Black Dot Roots and Culture Collective
Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC)
Calabash Bistro
Canadian Mental Health Association
CANPAL Network
Capilano Students' Union
Carnegie Hall
Check Your Head (CYH)
China Creek South Community Garden
Collingwood Business Improvement Association
Collingwood Neighbourhood House
Coloured Collective
Community Education Program SFU
Communti Voice Mail @Lu'ma Native Housing Society
Compassion Club
Complex Mental Health and Addiction for Vancouver Coastal Health
Corpus Christi College
Cottonwood Community Garden
Council of Canadians
CUPE
David Suzuki Foundation
Delta Secondary School

Department of Political Science, Langara College
Dialogue Program, SFU
Dialogues Program (Native, Non-Native and Immigrant Communities) City of Vancouver
Douglas College, Social Service Program
Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival
Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House [DTES NH]
Emily Carr University (Faculty of Design and Dynamic Media)
Engaged Immigrant Youth Program, District Reception and Placement Center
First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC)
First Nations House of Learning UBC
First Nations Longhouse UBC
First United Church
Flex Program, Van Tech.
Foundation Radio
Fraser Basin Council
Fraser Health Authority, Drug Treatment Funding Project (DTFP)
Fraser Valley Peace Council (A member organization of Canadian Peace Congress)
Gab Youth, QMUNITY
Good Company Communications
Goodman House
GVJCCA Bulletin
Haiti Solidarity BC / Canada Haiti Action Network
In the House Festival
Interurban Galley
Jews for a Just Peace
KAYA - Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association
Killarney Secondary School (English 10, Drama Department, Social Justice)
Kindred Palce / More Than A Roof Housing Society
Kiwassa Neighbourhood House
Kwantlen Polytechnic University
Langara College
Langley United Church
Leave Out the Violence (LOVE) BC
Little Mountain Neighbourhood House
Mission Restorative Resolutions
MOSAIC
Mount Pleasant Community Garden

Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House
<i>Multicultural Helping House Society</i>
MY Circle, ISS
National Nikkei Museum & Heritage Centre
Native Courtworker Counsellors
Native Education Center
Neighbourhood Care
Nelson Park Community Garden
Neworld Theatre
Newton Advocacy Group - Project Comeback
North Shore Multicultural Society
North Shore Neighbourhood House
North Shore Welcoming Action Committee (NSWAC)
North Vancouver City Library
Out on Campus
OXFAM - BC Regional Office
Pacific Community Resources Society
Peace Poppies Vancouver
PEERS
Phoenix Society Transitional Housing Program
Portland Hotel Society
Powell River Diversity Initiative
Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA)
QMUNITY
Quirk-e (the Queer Imaging & Riting Kollektive for Elders)
Raging Grannies
Renfrew Collingwood Multicultural Artist Network
Rhizome Café
Safe Harbour AMSSA (Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC)
Scandinavian Community Centre
SCOPE
SFPIRG
SFU Community Education
SFU Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
SFU Dialogue Program
SFU Institute for the Humanities
SFU Muslim Student Association
SFU School of Communication

SFU School of Contemporary Arts
SFU, Faculty of Education
SHARE Family and Community Services
Social Planning and Research Council (SPARC)
St. Alban Anglican Church
Stanley Park Ecology Society
Tea Swamp Community Garden
The FREDA Centre (for research on violence against women and children)
The Kettle Friendship Society
The PHS Community Services Society
Three Bridges
Tradeworks / DTESNH pathways
Transformative Communities Project Society (formerly the Surrey Urban Youth Project)
Trinity Western Seminary
UBC Social Justice Centre
Unitarian Church of Vancouver
Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA)
Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre (VACPC)
Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre (VAFCS)
Vancouver Coastal Health
Vancouver Community Centres
Vancouver Community College
Vancouver Film School (Student Services)
Vancouver Moving Theatre
Vancouver Public Libraries
Vancouver Queer Film Festival
Vancouver School Board
Vancouver Secondary Teachers' Association
Vancouver-Burrard Presbytery (United Church)
VCC Student Union
VCW (Vancouver Catholic Worker)
War Resisters Support Campaign
Westminster Presbytery (United Church)
Windermere Community Highschool / Fine Arts Program
Woodward's Community Choir
www.ihath.com
YMCA Connections
Youth Initiative Canada
YouthCo AIDS Society

Appendix B (publicity report)

Kei Baritugo, from BoldLove Communications, took over the publicity late in the process.



Client:

Headlines Theatre

Campaign:

Us and Them (the inquiry), October 22 to November 29

Project:

- To help raise awareness about Headlines Theatre's latest project, *Us and Them (the inquiry)*, by securing local media coverage.
- To assist the Outreach Coordinator with promoting different shows to relevant target audiences.

Challenges:

- 1.) Previous publicist only took care of media ad buys so there was no media kit prepared for the project.
- 2.) Missed deadlines for community calendars with important local television channels.
- 3.) Insufficient lead time for mainstream media outlets including print dailies/weeklies/magazines, and TV.
- 4.) The conceptual nature of the project made it difficult to pitch to journalists who were looking for concrete details such as plotline, and a consistent venue/schedule.
- 5.) Difficult to come up with story angles because there was no guarantee that a specific performance will tackle community partner's issues.
- 6.) Highly intimate engagement and sensitive stories made video or photo coverage impossible. Photos from opening night were virtually unusable.
- 7.) Website is hard to manoeuvre, and information on the project was not easily accessible to visitors.
- 8.) Weak social media infrastructure left by previous publicist meant that the Facebook and Twitter page of Headlines Theatre did not have a large following. A strong social media presence could have helped get the word out instantly to target audiences and build buzz on shows.

Strategies and Solutions:

Headlines Theatre's work has traditionally appealed to a politically astute, well-educated demographic who engage in social and environmental activism. The project's partnerships with various community and non-profit organizations provided an opportunity for an intimate community engagement strategy, where target audiences received information on the project through organizations they were affiliated with, and word-of-mouth.

Since there was insufficient lead time to pitch to mainstream media outlets, focus was directed towards pitching stories to community, student, online, and independent media. This outreach effectively reached target audiences who were already aware of/supported Headlines Theatre or were interested in the community partner's issue and area of work.

Results:

Over a 10 week period, *Us and Them (the inquiry)* was featured in 47 unique media outlets, 21 of which are feature articles/interviews. All features were written in a highly favourable, positive tone with strong recommendations for readers to attend the shows. Radio interviews were also positive with long audience exposure, with interviews lasting from 30 minutes to 1 hour. Online event listings were also positive, with 75% of entries containing two to three paragraphs on the show written like an article. All media outlets that featured *Us and Them (the inquiry)* targeted relevant audiences effectively due to the nature of their readership, distribution, and reach.

Recommendations:

- Plan features in magazines, TV, and Radio before and during the 2011 show run 6 months in advance
- Purchase radio ads and announcements
- Purchase a weekly ad run in the Georgia Straight
- Approach widely circulated free dailies for media sponsorship (e.g. Metro or 24Hrs)
- Send entries to TV community calendar listings 2 months before 2011 show run
- Produce a 3 minute EPK, and a 1 minute online video for the play
- Professional photos for Headlines Theatre staff and board
- Website re-design and re-branding for 30th year anniversary – this will help improve and expand Headlines Theatre's fan and follower base
- Professional photos for *Us and Them (the play)*
- Host activities that will drive traffic to website and increase Facebook and Twitter followers (e.g. contest, give-aways, etc.)
- Improve audience engagement with student population both on the high school and university levels
- Try to get bus shelter ads to run a week before the show opens