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THE TALENT FOR LIVING PROJECT:
A REFLECTIVE NARRATIVE
OF A POPULAR THEATRE POJECT WITH SENIOR CITIZENS

BY

DAVID JOSEPH BURGESS

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF FINE ARTS

IN

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE TALENT FOR LIVING PROJECT: A REFLECTIVE NARRATIVE OF A POPULAR THEATRE PROJECT WITH SENIOR CITIZENS submitted by DAVID JOSEPH BURGESS in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF FINE ARTS in DIRECTING.

Janet Selman
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Dr. Paula A. Brook

This, the twentieth day of August, 1991.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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This thesis is dedicated to Katharine Creery, my wife, who has supported my belief that theatre is a means rather than an end, who has taught me so much, especially about learning, who drove through dawn to Hobbema and taught every day until sunset, and who has been my southern horizon, even when it's been forty below,

and to Anne Burgess, my mother, who warmed her hands over picket line fires, and to Leslie Burgess, my father, a teamster who has lately been through a renaissance,

and to Jane Heather who guided me through this project, and who teaches me that in vulnerability there lies strength,

and especially, to Leola Boechler, Beth Cameron, Venetia Chessor, Ian Chessor, Marion DeShield, Margaret Howey, Joe Leighton, Alice Lowe, Alec Messum, Margaret O'Brien, Audrey Peel, Sylvia Ryan, Rae Tompkins, and Vern Tomkins, The Second Edition Players, who generously welcomed me into their group and shared with me their talent for living.

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents the director's reflections on a popular theatre project with senior citizens that led to the collective creation of a play entitled Talent for Living. The play was written by Jane Heather of Edmonton, Alberta, in collaboration with the Second Edition Players.

This project evolved over sixteen months from January of 1990 to April of 1991 in Edmonton Alberta.

The Thesis includes an introduction to popular theatre in the first world context, a discussion of the evolution of the script of the play, a discussion of the process of rehearsing the play, conclusions about the roles of writer and director in a collective creation with senior citizens, and a discussion of this project in terms of popular theatre.

Preface

This is the written portion of a thesis project in the Master of Fine Arts programme in Directing at the University of Alberta, Department of Drama. The practical portion of the thesis involved directing a collective creation of a play with the Second Edition Players, a group of fourteen Edmonton-area senior citizens from diverse backgrounds. The project began in January of 1990 and culminated in a premiere performance of the play Talent for Living at the Thrust Theatre, the University of Alberta, on April 16, 1991.

Talent for Living was written by Jane Heather in collaboration with the Second Edition Players, directed by the author and performed by the Second Edition Players. The Second Edition Players are:

Leola Boechler

Beth Cameron

Ian Chessor

Venetia Chessor

Marion DeShield

Margaret Howey

Joe Leighton

Alice Lowe

Alec Messum

Margaret O'Brien

Audrey Peel

Sylvia Ryan

Rae Tompkins

and

Vern Tomkins.

Choreography was composed by Russel Kilde, and original music was composed by Darrin Hagen.

The project was made possible through the support of Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission and the University of Alberta Department of Drama. I would like to extend the company's thanks to Keith Walls, Alan Welch, and Luanne Currie.

In searching for a way to write about the process involved in the creation of Talent for Living, I became stuck several times. Because this writing is meant to accompany my thesis production, I gravitated toward a stereotype of an "academic" approach to the project. I

sought a way of dividing the process into discrete steps or phases, such as "research, writing, response, rehearsal, reflection -- a kind of 'five R's' idealized model of a popular theatre process. I wanted to begin by listing the project's initial objectives, tracing the carefully planned steps by which I pursued them, ending with a critique of the initial planning which highlighted the strengths of the project, including some comments on how it might have been improved, but mostly displaying my directorial wisdom.

The reason I became stuck again and again is simple. The process of creating Talent for Living was never as clean or formulaic as that sort of writing would have led a reader to believe. If a director of a popular theatre project can be likened to a backwoods guide, I was the sort of guide who knew something about canoeing, lighting fires in the rain, pitching tents in the dark, reading compasses and so on, but I had never been in this terrain before. While I did indeed 'direct' the project, the nature of that directing was most characterised by trying to figure out what had just gone on and

how to proceed.

I have chosen, therefore, to tell the 'story' of the process of creating Talent for Living from my point of view, a reflective narrative. I begin with an introduction to my understanding of popular theatre in the first world, focussing on the aspects of the area which were most germaine to my thinking at the beginning of the project. During the largest portion of the thesis, I trace the evolution of the project from my first meeting with the group up until, and slightly after, the premiere performance of the play. I will refer to my notes taken during and after meetings with Jane Heather and the group, but will tell the story in retrospect with all the benefits and limitations of hindsight. Finally, I draw some conclusions about the peculiarities of the roles played by a writer and a director on a community collective, with emphasis on the particular conditions of this project.

This is an admittedly subjective, non-scientific account (at least as far as an outdated stereotype of 'science' is concerned); a great deal of insight into the project could well be gained

from a similar account by other members of the collaboration, the Second Edition Players and Jane. I feel most comfortable with this approach because it recapitulates the subjective, nonscientific process we followed. I will argue that this subjectivity is inherent to the nature of popular theatre, a field where theory is useful, but formulae are not.

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I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the community in which the Talent For Living Project was made possible:

To Jan Selman, who patiently guided me through this project, and whose strength, generosity, knowledge and support bolstered me throughout the programme.

To my patient committee, David Barnet and Dr. Paula Brook, who asked hard questions and pushed me to clarify my thinking and my writing.

To the Clytemnestrans, Greg Nelson, Alexina Dalgetty, Patricia Badir, Lise Ann Johnson, Jean Greenidge, Jill Cross, and Steve Haff, who taught me that we could teach other.

To Alan Filewod, the University of Guelph, for encouraging me to come West, and for writing chapter 6 of Collective Encounters.

To Lindy, David, Walter and Dana, whose love and support made Edmonton seem less remote.

and to Kevin Burns and Anthony Hall, who extended a warm welcome at a point when I needed it most.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

The Popular Theatre

i. How I got here

I suppose I began attending theatre for the same reason most Canadian theatregoers do: it is (sometimes) entertaining, and (almost always) exclusive, rare and elitist (although, compared to the ballet and the opera, perhaps theatre is merely elitish). I suppose I began acting for the reasons most actors do: I found it fun, rewarding, attention-getting, and it was something I was comparatively good at. Furthermore, I was one of only three boys in my first drama class (there were sixteen girls).

At the same time as I began acting and attending plays, however, I was becoming conscious of politics and of which side I was on. It became

clear to me that things in the world were not just, and that I could not accept those injustices. This was not the sentiment of a missionary or a do-gooder; I wasn't choosing my side, I was born in the working class and grew up in it. The people I knew and loved, my family and my schoolmates, the guys I played hockey with, the girls I dated, either were, or were soon to be, victims of class, race and gender exploitation. My brother Patrick is mentally and physically disabled, my brother Peter and my father are illiterate, my father and mother sell their wage labour to capitalists who exploit them. "Which sacraments can be received only once? Your mother, your father, your brothers."[1] In the broader perspective, the country I lived in was and is a neo-colony and a colonizer of the First Nations and the Third World. So what could I do about it?

In grade thirteen drama class we each presented seminars on a playwright and a theatre company. I fortuitously chose as "my" playwright Bertolt Brecht and as "my" company Bread and Puppet. What I learned about those two subjects was certainly

superficial and 'high school', but what struck me as important was that theatre could be used as a weapon in political struggle. In the other students' seminars I learned that Passe Muraille and Toronto Workshop were using theatre in that way in my own city.

I was particularly charged up finding out that theatre might be used to bring people together in their community, to develop the sense of common goals the way parishes (not so much churches, but parishes) formerly had done. I began to imagine theatre companies operating in the Toronto neighbourhood I'd grown up in, companies with names like the "Weston Revolutionary Actors Council", "Norman Bethune Theatre Society", or "The Mackenzie/Papineau Theatre Centre".

At the same time I was graduating high school and coming to the point where I'd have to choose a career. Daunted by the risk of theatre, I took some time off, working for a year in a drug store and then travelling through Europe for three and a half months. Before I left for Europe I decided to go into theatre and change the world. And so I

auditioned for York and the National Theatre School. When I came back I began actor-training at York.

After leaving York I was at work on the beginnings of a career as a playwright, screen-writer, director, and political organizer. Most of my time was actually being spent as a procrastinating playwright and as a househusband. I was becoming increasingly dismayed with the notion of doing political theatre in Toronto because of the growing expense of freelance production and the increasing fossilization and liberalism of the Toronto theatre. Theatre was becoming just another cultural commodity and Toronto was becoming a greedy, cruel, megalopolis.

During this winter of discontent I excitedly read Alan Filewod's Collective Encounters[2] During the chapters on TWP, Passe Muraille, the Mummers, 25th Street House, and the Globe I was excited but never jolted. I know Alan well, and knew the content of many of those shows previously. I had seen anniversary productions of Ten Lost Years and The Farm Show and Alan had spoken to me about

the others. However, when I got to chapter six I was gripped, shocked, startled and spellbound. I had barely heard of Catalyst Theatre before this, and had no idea that this kind of work was going on.

This book, this chapter, quite literally changed my life. I read Boal[3], I read the CTR popular theatre issue[4], I telephoned Alan, I discovered that David Barnet, founder of Catalyst, was soon to become Chair of the Department of Drama at the University of Alberta, and that Jan Selman, the artistic director who built the company, was now on tenure track teaching in the directing area. I sent for an application to the University of Alberta. I discussed my future with Katharine, intimating that part of it lay in Alberta. I met with Carl Hare (then Chair of the University of Alberta Department of Drama) and asked could I learn what I wanted to learn in the M.F.A. programme. I wrote Jim DeFelice (then acting co-ordinator of the Directing area) asking the same thing. I applied and was accepted into the directing programme at the University of Alberta which I took as a yes to my questions, and my family migrated to Edmonton.

ii. The Theatre

> 'Theatre' consists in this: in making live representations of reported or invented happenings between human beings and doing so with a view to entertainment.
>
> Bertolt Brecht
>
> [1]

Theatre is demonstrably a superior medium of communication because it is more responsible and democratic than any other.

Firstly, it is a performed, live art. Unlike film, television, painting, sculpture, the novel, written poetry, or recorded music, all dramatic performance responds to a greater or lesser extent to its audience. While the reader, viewer or listener may interact with the text of any of those other media, the text itself is set and unalterable. The text of a live performance is never set, it exists in time, and is always influenced by the prescence of its specific audience. This includes the impact of audiences on the artists both during and after a given performance [i.e. before subsequent performance].

A positive or negative reaction to a film, record or book may prolong or shorten its shelf life, but it seldom alters its content. As any theatre worker knows, opening night is by no means the end of alteration to the performance text of any play.

Theatre is furthermore collaborative, another feature of democracy. The actors, writers, directors, designers, and technicians all inform the creation of a performance. Each collaborator brings with her the circle of human influences all of us have, all of our ties to the community. Unlike, say, fiction or painting then, theatre is an art produced by a group. It is also received by a group, the individual members of which respond simultaneously to the art and to the group's response to the art.

Finally, theatre holds the potential to combine elements of virtually all other forms of art, both the performed or 'lively' arts and the 'static' ones. Theatre can include dance, music, poetry, fiction, painting, sculpture and photography. It is therefore potentially the sum of all the other arts.

iii. The Culinary and the Popular Theatre

Not all kinds of theatre are equally responsive and democratic. There is the theatre which has been organized so as to thwart the responsive and democratic possibilities of the medium, so that the revolutionary possibilities of the medium are as contained as possible. In this kind of theatre, performers are encouraged to set their performances as much as humanly possible, they are sheltered from their audiences before and after performances, partly through the "star" status they can achieve. In this kind of theatre, role divisions and hierarchies are rigid, specialization is encouraged, the mysteries of the seperate theatre crafts are made as arcane as possible. There is much muttering of the mantras 'professionalism', 'world class', and 'excellence'. This is the theatre Brecht called "culinary"[1], because, like a gourmet meal, it is meant to please, divert, and soothe. It is arranged so as to be received uncritically, so as to startle as little as possible, and to provoke not at all.

In Canada this theatre is often sold in

subscription packages which read remarkably like menues. It is distinguished from "political" theatre by the tacit agreement between its patrons and its creators to pretend that everything is fine and that no crises are underway, that it is, in fact, the perfect evening for a farce, a love story, or a thriller.

Theatre workers who choose to use their efforts as part of a struggle for justice need to do all they can to emphasize the responsive and democratic possibilities of the theatre medium. They must strive to make theatre that responds as much as possible to the prescence of an audience. They need to create as much dialogue with their audience as they can, to the point, perhaps, where the audience is co-equal or even superior to the artists in determining the content and conclusions of the performance. The progressive theatre worker must strive to extend the sphere of collaborators in creation of theatre events. She must engage the community itself, and invite its participation at each stage of the work, checking to insure that the work is in solidarity with the community it is meant

to serve, even giving over ownership or creative control of the work to the community from which it springs. Here the trained artist's role is like that of a trained carpenter or health care worker, to bring expertise to the service of those requesting assistance.

The progressive theatre worker recognizes that theatre's potential in the service of revolutionary struggle goes beyond the role of communication medium, to become, as Ross Kidd[2] writes, a part of a process of struggle. This is a dialogical action which is not contained in a single performance event, but is part of a continuum united with other forms of struggle. This is the people's theatre, the popular theatre.

iv. The Scene of Operations

> Theater...
> ...3. any place where events take place; scene of operations [journalists in the S.E. Asian theater]...
> Webster's New World Dictionary, 2nd College Edition[1]

The career I have chosen involves work in the art form known as 'theatre', which we have seen is ideally a process as well as a medium of communication, and also to the theatre referred to directly above, "any place where events take place, a scene of operations". I believe these two kinds of theatre are inextricably linked. I think all action and inaction relates to the struggles between people for sanity and justice, so no art, no action is neutral. In order to do theatre that is engaged in the struggle on the side of the weak and the wronged, it is necessary to also engage in the broader struggles in the community.

Whether creating a positive list, of justices struggled for, or a negative list, of injustices struggled against, the specifics of the struggle are long and perhaps unending. The list of wrongs would

begin with poverty, imperialism, wage labour, environmental degradation, sexual and physical assault, discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, sexual orientation, and physical disability, and so on.

I think that there is a concept which underlies these ideas and unites the seemingly disparate aspects of the struggle: this is the concept of community. Of the names the Popular Theatre Movement goes under, "political theatre", "peoples' theatre", "theatre for social change", and so on, the name "Theatre for Community Development" resonates with particular power for me. It seems to me that people who lack money and arms and the means to get them are powerful only in numbers. People who feel part of a community stretching backwards and forwards in history seem to me less likely to damage the environment, less likely to exploit each other, more likely to co-operate, and to simplify the demands they place on the planet and its plants and animals. It also seems to me that human beings are smarter, kinder, more creative, and most human

in groups. While these communities can interact, I believe there is a critical mass to the size of any given community where it ceases to operate as a real community. That size is approximately the size of a small town, which is why people try to form their own "towns" within cities, made up of members of a neighbourhood, or a union, or a parish.

The citizens of the third world certainly need Community Development, to strengthen the community bonds that exist and that are being systematically undermined, I believe it is in the industrial world where communities need the most attention. This is partly because of the dual role most of us play. We are at once oppressed (as individuals) and oppressor (as nations). If the people of the third world are going to win their liberation struggle, the citizens of the first world must change so that we cease to oppress them. I believe that we can only achieve this change by beginning to revitalize our own communities.

We are actively discouraged from community participation by forces such as consumerism, urban sprawl, the breaking up of family farms, the

centralization and privatization of the modes of our public discourse, and the commodification of our culture. These forces clearly favour the rich and powerful at the expense of the rest of us because they implement the ancient strategy of oppressors called 'divide and conquer'.

Because I am of the first world, and because we in the first world are both oppressor and oppressed, I have chosen to focus my energies on doing popular theatre in the first world.

v. The Political Theatre and the Popular Theatre

A group of actors from Harare, Zimbabwe perform an agit-prop advocating liberation for the Blacks of Southern Africa. Tunooniq, from Pond Inlet, Baffin Island perform Changes and Search for a Friend, two evocative, subtle plays about the Inuit experience of colonization and the lure of substance abuse. Teenagers from Trepassey, Newfoundland sing and act a boxed-set ode to the men of the sea. The women of Puente Theatre from Victoria, B.C. carve indelible stage images depicting their experience as Latin American immigrants to Canada in I Wasn't Born Here. Second Look Theatre adopts Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre as a tool for its cast (comprising both professional actors and street kids acting for the first time) to facilitate audience participation in scenes teaching safer sex and needle-cleaning techniques and strategies. Vancouver's Headlines Theatre uses a similar format for its show about housing issues, but it is performed by a group of very inexperienced improvisors from the Guelph community 'who have experienced difficulties with

housing'. During the daytime, popular theatre workers and adult educators share stories of their work, argue theory and ethics, and struggle to come to consensus about the future of the Canadian Popular Theatre Alliance. These events take place in Guelph, Ontario June 9 to 17, 1989 at The Bread & Butter Festival/Du pain sur la planche.[1]

The range of discussion in Guelph clearly displayed that the popular theatre movement has no equivalent to the "Refus Globale", no "Dadaist Manifesto", no central defining document or manual which sets its limits, describes its tenets or principles. Rather, popular theatre is a diverse and evolving worldwide movement, including a great variety of ways of working, many different relationships between theatreworker and community members, and with goals and products which vary over a great spectrum of both theatre and drama. The large and expanding body of popular theatre theory and analysis has for the most part arisen as practitioners have attempted to come to grips with their own experiences and share them with others.

In the best known, and perhaps most widely

influential work on the subject, Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal views popular theatre as a return of the art form to its natural state:

> In the beginning the theater [sic] was the dithyrambic song: free people singing in the open air. The carnival. The feast.
>
> Later, the ruling classes took possession of the theater and built their dividing walls. First, they divided the people, separating actors from spectators: people who act and people who watch -- the party is over! Secondly, among the actors, they separated the protagonists from the mass. The coercive indoctrination began!
>
> Now the oppressed people are liberated and once more, are making the theater their own.
>
> 2

In this rather romantic view, one envisions a pre-feudal people living in a classless utopia, expressing themselves naturally through proto-theatrical means. As the political structures evolve, ownership of the means of expression are stolen from the people by the same classes who monopolize ownership of the means of production. Boal suggests that the time has come to reclaim the theatre for the oppressed thereby aiding in their reclaiming of the means of production, ushering in

an era of liberty and democracy.

The central idea is that through history the theatre and the other fine arts have most often served the ruling classes, and have been used as a tool of oppression and marginalization of the culturally and politically disenfranchised as part of a broader systematic exploitation of the poor and the weak by the rich and the strong. This idea is not new. Indeed, in his monograph Boal directly points to Bertolt Brecht as an important forebearer of his work. Brecht, of course, came to his own analysis of the relationship between theatre and politics as a member of the political theatre movement of the 1920's and '30's, which can quite properly be seen as a parent of the popular theatre movement of today.

The political theatre movement arose in the wake of the Great War and lasted through the Great Depression. Like the founders of Dadaism, Futurism, Cubism, and the many other contemporany movements in the plastic and the lively arts, the creators of the political theatre were disillusioned with the traditional cultural values and artifacts which they

felt had helped create the conditions leading to the unprecented horrors of the war. As captialism faced its greatest crisis, many theatreworkers looked to the ideology of Marx and Lenin for a critique of the existing structures, and for solutions to the brutality of life in post-war Europe and North America.

Of course this movement was by no means the birth of "political theatre". Theatre has always treated historical and contemporary political subjects, and is always created by artists who have a stated or unstated political point of view. The label "political theatre" has generally been ascribed to that which is critical of the dominant political structures in society, whereas that which supports the status quo, whether tacitly or explictly, is not called "political" by most of its critics or creators. The movement in the '20's and '30's was, however, the first widespread occurence of theatre activity which was labelled "political" by its creators.

Because the war took the greatest toll on Germany and Russia, and because the depression arose

in those countries first and most brutally, it is no coincidence that the earliest evidence of leftist political theatre are found there. In Russia, the Bolshevik revolution spawned Agit/Prop theatre, which saw companies of actors perform short didactic plays spreading the revolutionary message to the people. In Weimar Germany, Piscator and others followed suit, and went on to develop the Epic Theatre (a term borrowed and altered by Brecht, for whom Piscator was once a mentor and employer).[3]

Other Leftist theatre activity occurred in the U.K., the U.S.A. and Canada, often under the name of the theatre of action. In the U.S. the Federal Theatre Project, under the direction of Hallie Flanagan, created The Living Newspaper, which helped create the documentary theatre form, and was highly charged with left-of-centre politics, advocating such then radical measures as government subsidized housing (<u>One Third of A Nation</u>), a socialized electrical system (<u>Power</u>) and African-American Pride (<u>Haiti!</u>)[4]. Another American company, The Group Theatre, now more famous as the training ground for directors such as Harold Clurman and Elia Kazan, and

the acting teachers Lee Strassberg and Stella Adler, was home to a cell of the American Communist Party. The Group produced many politically engaged plays, and developed an American approach to Stanislavsky's system of acting which became known as The Method. The Group premiered the most widely heralded play of the movement, Clifford Odets' Waiting for Lefty.[5] In Canada the activity was hindered by the relatively undeveloped state of theatre at the time, though some political theatre did occur, including Oscar Ryan et al's Eight Men Speak which described the incarceration of the Canadian Communist leader Tim Buck.[6]

While the individuals and companies involved in the political theatre movement of the 'twenties and 'thirties exhibited many political and aesthetic differences, their close afiliation with leftist (especially communist) political parties, and the extent to which they were reacting to a common enemy (free enterprise capitalism and what Brecht dubbed the "culinary" theatre of liberal democracy) created an essential similarity. For the most part those engaged in the political theatre were creating work

which was meant to either win converts to the cause of socialist revolution, or to spur the converted to particular and/or immediate action, as Piscator wrote:

> It was not a question of a theatre that would provide the proletariat with art, but of conscious propaganda...
>
> 7

This attitude resulted in theatre which ranged from the very simple "advertisement" to much more complex and sophisticated art.

Still, we have a view of theatre as propaganda and education. The very term Agit/Prop, which derives from the Bolshevik ministry of Agitation and Propaganda, goes far in summing up the nature of most of the work of the political theatre of this period. Although Agit/Prop became associated with specific formal conventions invented to cope with performing in nontheatre settings, the idea of converting or spurring action by the audience was crucial to most of the other work, whatever the forms the work took.

Furthermore, the creator of theatre was seen as an artist/intellectual in sympathy with (though not necessarily a part of) the proletariat. The theatre worker was part of an informed, politicized vanguard performing for less-informed, less-politicized audiences who needed education in order to learn how to help themselves. This is not unlike the missionary's impulse, and herein lies the crucial difference between the political theatre movement of the twenties and thirties and the popular theatre movement.

The attitude expressed by Brecht, Piscator, and their contempories and manifested in the political theatre of their time is remarkably similar to the situation described by Paulo Freire in Pedagogy of the Oppressed:

> Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the

deposits.[8]

The common themes expressed by popular theatre workers gathered in Guelph place an emphasis on a different, more equal relationship between theatre worker and community member. The popular theatre movement stresses empowerment of the "oppressed" group, viewing the theatre worker not as one with a set of answers to a group's problems, but as one skilled in facilitating group analysis of its situation through dramatic or theatrical means. A popular theatre worker arms a group with theatre skills, which become a means to express or articulate the group's own understanding of its situation.

This may continue to result in a variety of methods of working, for the implications of this simple principle vary when faced with the practical challenges posed by a particular project, issue, group or process. However, the unifying thrust underlying popular theatre must be a recognition that groups of oppressed men and women only cease to be oppressed when they take control of their own process of education, articulate their own stories, create their own analysis of their situation, and determine their own action.

vi. Kinds of popular theatre.

That popular theatre processes should take different shapes and result in different end products is, therefore, a natural consequence of the underlying principles of popular theatre. If one begins with the assumption that each community is particular, that it members know more about their own situation than anyone else, and that they must set their own goals and be aided in realizing them, one can see that many different theatrical traces or artifacts may result from a popular theatre process.

Theatre work may, furthermore, be popular theatre in different ways. A professional artist or group of artists who are themselves members of an oppressed group, may create popular theatre that is produced in a similar way to the conventional or traditional theatre, but which, by virtue of the artist[s]'s own marginalization articulates the voice of the oppressed to his or her fellows, as well as the 'general' public. A piece of theatre created by professional artists acting as agents for a group, articulating its stories during perfor-

mance. This kind of popular theatre frequently relies on participatory research in a community and seeks to extend the process of community development to the performance event, either through the active participation of the audience, or by creating theatre which does not pose a "completed" view of a situation, but rather acts as a Freirian code, posing problems to an audience. In the case of the collective creation with a community, professional theatre workers facilitate the development of a play performed by members of a community sharing a common oppression. On the other end of the spectrum, a considerable amount of popular theatre results in no public presentation, but rather consists of dramatic (or perhaps 'pre-theatrical') exercises taking place without an audience per se.

This broad spectrum of popular theatre includes a good deal of overlapping between "kinds", for theatre is a collaborative, living medium existing in the world. The notion of taxonomy is a mental construct which assists us in seeing the world, though it must be understood that there are no more hard boundaries between species of popular theatre

than there are species of plants and animals.

I have experienced four main kinds of popular theatre, either directly or indirectly. I feel these categories include much of the spectrum of the work known as popular theatre in the first world.

a.) Theatre in sympathy with an oppressed group.

This includes any theatre event created by theatre artists which describes the oppression of a particular group and takes the point of view of the oppressed. It is most frequently performed for a general audience and created by artists who are not members of the group. The extent to which this kind of theatre can be called popular depends largely upon the extent to which the group being depicted accepts its depiction.

Thus, the 1960's productions of George Ryga's The Ecstasy of Rita Joe,[1] performed by professional (mostly non-Native) casts with professional non-Native directors, designers, composers, and producing theatres, can be seen as popular theatre to the extent to which the Native communities of

Canada at the time welcomed the productions. Given the current controversies over cultural appropriation, and the subsequent rise of a professional Native theatre, it is unlikely that similar productions of the same play would be as welcome today.

Floyd Favel's All My Relations,[2] produced by Catalyst Theatre in the Spring of 1990, is an example of a similar "kind" of play, with some notable differences. Although it also followed the traditional theatre hierarchies (writer, director, designer, producing company, cast and audience as discrete roles) the playwright and cast are members of the group whose story is depicted (i.e. Native people).

If the relationship between the artists and the community whose story is being presented is an important consideration in popular theatre, the relationship between the audience and the community is also important. Because a theatre text occurs while the performance in is interaction with the audience, All My Relations was 'more popular' when performed on tour to reserves than when it was

performed at the Chinook Theatre in Edmonton before mostly White audiences.

b.) Documentary theatre depicting an oppressed group created by non-members of the group.

This may be created in the traditional manner, where a playwright works on a script alone, and then a theatre company produces the resulting play, as in the case of the Globe Theatre's production of No. 1 Hard,[3] by Rex Deverell, or through collective creation as in the case of Theatre Passe Muraille's The Farm Show.[4] Both of these plays tell the story of farming communities struggling to survive the financial and emotional stresses placed upon them by the political and social upheavals they face.

In each case, the actors become agents, speaking on the behalf of the members of the farming community. Both plays derive directly from interaction with members of the community, and strive for authenticity in the depiction of farm issues, manners, and attitudes.

Again, the plays may be seen as 'more or less popular' depending upon the make-up of a particular audience: when No. 1 Hard toured rural Saskatchewan, and when The Farm Show played auction barns in Clinton and throughout South-Western Ontario, the shows were in direct contact with the communities depicted, and therefore were codifying the experience of the audience, so that an anlaysis could be made. When No.1 Hard played the Globe Theatre in Regina, or when The Farm Show played at 11 Trinity Square in Toronto, the plays were taking the stories to a broader public, arguing on the behalf of the community, but serving less as a tool for community development than as a tool for the community's voices to enter the public discourse.

The Mummers' production of Buchan's: A Mining Town is an even more obvious example of this phenomenon.[5] When it premiered in Buchans, Nfld., it served a direct part in facillitating a discussion that led to a community decision to strike. When it played in Toronto, under the name Company Town, the critics found it wanting, and Actor's Equity pressured its sponsors to withdraw

support because the actors (who had collectively created the show) were not being compensated according to scale. This lack of sympathy from a "foreign" audience clarifies the importance of the composition of the audience, the context for, any popular theatre project which includes public performance as part of its process.

c.) Participatory theatre.

The "Forum Theatre" described by Augusto Boal in Theatre of The Oppressed is one variety of theatre which is created with the intent of facillitating a discussion by the audience, during the performance itself. This usually includes both an opportunity for the audience members to verbally address the issues confronted by characters in a play, and to physically intervene, i.e. replace the actors to improvise a variant on the scene.

At the Bread and Butter Festival three companies presented "Forums" all of which adhered to the Boalian model, although each differed in important ways. Outouais Theatre of Ottawa

incorporated Forums in longer plays about the trials encountered by a stay-at-home mum, called Baby Buggy Blues (parts 1 and 2). This was performed by a professional cast, and was aimed, in its original context, at audiences sharing the situation of its main character. Second Look Theatre wrapped some didactic scenes teaching the use of condoms and techniques for cleaning needles around two Forums, collectively created and performed by a cast that combined professional actors and street kids in a show titled What's Wrong With This Picture?: More Than A Play About A.I.D.S.. It was originally aimed at street kids in Toronto's inner-city neighbourhoods. Headlines Theatre from Vancouver collaborated with Sheatre from Blyth, Ontario to devise a forum called Shelter Me in Guelph, performed and collectively created by local people who had experienced difficulties with housing issues. It was created especially for the festival, although it was performed both in the festival line-up and at a downtown Guelph bar.

Although the performances were formally quite similar, the differences in the composition of the

casts and the processes of creation alter their relationship to the communities in question. Baby-buggy Blues is 'popular theatre' in only one way: the performance itself facilitates an articulation and analysis of the oppressions faced by stay-at-home mums. Shelter Me is 'popular' in two ways: the performance accomplishes the same task as Baby-buggy Blues and the process of collectively creating the script allows the cast of people with direct experience of housing problems to form a more in-depth and thorough analysis of their situation.

Although superficially What's Wrong With This Picture?: More Than A Play About A.I.D.S. may seem to be a blend of the conditions of the other two plays, in fact, while granting that for the street kids in the cast a popular theatre process had occurred, I question whether the audience participation in that production was popular theatre at all. Because the goal of the project would seem to have been modification of audience behaviour (in other words, to encourage street kids to practice safer sex and clean their needles), it could more properly be seen as an Agit/Prop wolf in the sheep's

clothing of a popular theatre form.

Catalyst Theatre, under the artistic direction of Jan Selman, developed another form of participatory theatre which is exemplified by their shows It's About Time and Stand Up For Your Rights.[6] These shows were researched with the communities concerned (prisoners and mentally challenged adults, respectively), and performed before audiences comprising members of those communities. They were collectively created by a cast of professional actors.

The chief differences in the form developed by Catalyst and the form developed by Boal and his acolytes are:

1) Catalyst used no "Joker", opting instead for a system where-in actors animated audience discussion in role (although, in Stand Up For Your Rights Anthony Hall's "referee" character was in some ways similar to the Joker).

2) Forum scenes (at least the ones I witnessed in Guelph) tend to be played to a conclusion, allowing the audience to intervene in a scene afterwards. Following each intervention,

"successful" or otherwise, the actors return to the "unsuccessful" scenario and seek other interventions. This creates a "right or wrong" dynamic, as well what might be termed fictional fatalism. In the Catalyst shows scenes tended to be more genuinely 'open', that is the point at which the animations take place are lacunae in the script. The performers have no solutions to the problems their characters face, and so explore the audience intervention more thoroughly, and less fatalistically.

Although both forms are constructed with the objective of facillitating audience analysis within the Freirian mode, it would seem that the Catalyst methodology is strategically superior as a vehicle for accomplishing this goal.

d.) Collective theatre created by a community.

Shelter Me, while taking the Forum structure as its genre, was also typical of another kind of popular theatre, the collective creation devised by members of a community facing a common oppression.

Like Puente's I Wasn't Born Here, it was developed by community members with the assistance and direction of a professional theatre worker.

The Talent For Living Project is an example of a collective creation devised by a community with the assistance and direction of a professional theatre worker, written in collaboration with a professional theatre worker, Jane Heather.

In collective creations with communities, there are frequently three kinds of popular theatre processes occuring because of the different kinds of participants involved at different stages. The first 'kind' of participants are those involved in the collective itself. These participants naturally spend the greatest amount of time sharing experience, formulating analysis, and reflecting on the content and process. A second 'kind' of participants are the members of the same community as the creators, who witness a presentation of the collective's work as audience members. These participants receive the work in a different way from disinterested third parties (indeed, they might well be called "interested third parties"). Whether

the project directly includes audience participation in the manner of Shelter Me or not, these participants engage in an informed, creative (possibly silent) dialogue with the text of the performance. Disinterested third parties, which is to say audience members who are not members of the community, share in the popular theatre process to some degree, generating an analysis as they receive the text. These participants hear new voices, perhaps vicariously sharing in the experience of a community to which they do not belong, allowing them to reflect on their own lives and the lives of others in a new way.

vii. Towards a Definition of Popular Theatre

In the exploration of my attitudes toward theatre and the relationships between the popular theatre and other kinds of theatre, and by charting the spectrum of popular theatre, I have been working with and working out a tentative definition of popular theatre. I would now like to bring together some of the strands of that evolving definition.

1. Popular theatre is a means rather than an end. Popular theatre workers view theatre as a tool or as a weapon which can be used in pursuit of the liberation of oppressed men and women. It can also be used to further oppress them.

2. The popular theatre worker knows which side she is on. Popular theatre is created with an awareness that people have collective or community interests in a struggle, that people exist in groups and communities of different kinds. Increasingly popular theatre is aware that the oppression, and therefore the terms of the struggle of groups can be

particularized in many different ways: in terms of class, sex, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, geographic region, language, physical and mental ableness, etc.

3. Popular theatre occurs when theatre workers intend for their work to serve in the liberation struggles of a particular community of oppressed men and women. A valuable test for a popular theatre project is to ask, 'did this project actually serve in the struggles of this group?' and if so, 'how?'.

4. Popular theatre workers believe that members of groups know their particular situation better than anyone else, and can only be truly liberated when they are empowered to determine their own action, and take it of their own volition.

5. When a popular theatre worker is involved in a project with a group to which she does not belong, she sees herself as a facilitator or enabler. She strives to arm the community with tools and weapons which will allow it to examine and name its own

situation and determine its own action. A popular theatre worker strives to be sensitive to the particular needs of particular groups.

6. While the principles underlying popular theatre demand that popular theatre work will take many different forms, popular theatre always has at least one feature in common: it is an evolving and dialogical process wherein a group of men and women use theatre as a tool or a weapon in the struggle for their own liberation.

CHAPTER TWO

A Reflective Narrative of the Talent for Living Project

i. Creating the script.

During the autumn of 1989 I had begun work on a popular theatre project dealing with the impact of the residential school on the Native communities of Hobbema, Alberta. I was working in collaboration with Darrel and Laurie Wildcat and Rosa and Melvyn John of Four Winds Theatre. In September, 1989 we began a series of workshops with young people in the Ermineskin school and, by November of 1989, were planning workshops with former students of the residential school (people in their forties and fifties).

In early November, Darrel Wildcat attended a meeting of the Samson Band Council, where he presented an outline of our project, and requested the council's support. The elders agreed that this was an important topic, and a well thought-out

project, but objected to the involvement of the university because of the band's history with cultural appropriation. They said that they would co-operate with the drama project only if it were to be an all-Native endeavour. With that firm decision, I, with considerable regret, withdrew from the project.

So I was left, early in December of 1989, without a thesis project. I made some contacts with Marilyn McLean at Catalyst Theatre, and discussed two possible projects both of which seemed interesting, though tenuous. At around the same time the Second Edition Players approached my thesis supervisor, Jan Selman, requesting that she direct them in a new collective creation. Jan responded to them that she had a great number of other commitments in the upcoming months, but would be happy to help find another director for the project. Jan mentioned the project to me, and I responded that I would be interested in learning more about it.

Jan lent me a copy of a "process video" which documented some of the discussion and resulting scenes from No Time To Spare, Second Edition's

previous show which Jan had directed with Jane Heather working as writer. She also lent me a copy of the script of that play[1]. In mid-January, 1990, Jane, Jan, and I attended a meeting with the majority of the Second Edition Players at A.A.D.A.C.'s downtown office.

In my notes I record my first impression of the group, as I met them both on video-tape and in person. I describe them as "boisterous, energetic" and "very nice, polite, middle class." Although the group seemed to me quite old, they also seemed physically, mentally, and financially far better off than many people their age. They were well-dressed, articulate, and well-organized. The group obviously had a very warm rapport with Jane and Jan, and a jocular familiarity with each other.

At this meeting many members of the group were expecting Jan to direct. There was some palpable disappointment when they learned that she was declining their offer, and proposing me as a replacement. Of me Jan remarked, "I know he looks impossibly young, but I assure you he has lots of experience." The group regarded me with faces that

seemed less than convinced.

During this meeting the group discussed the terms of the project, and projected a time line. They suggested they would like a first draft of the new play to be ready by April 1, a second some time in the end of May or the first of June. They thought they would like to begin rehearsal in September of 1990. Jane tentatively agreed to these dates, and we set a date for the group to reconvene, including once again, Jane, Jan and I.

At the next meeting, on February 7, 1990, again at an A.A.D.A.C. office, we began the process of identifying themes. This workshop was planned by Jan, Jane and I, and facillitated primarily by Jan.

The first question to be discussed was "why do a new show?" The responses to this question included "we've done [No Time to Spare] too many times" meaning, that on the one hand some felt that that play, or the experience of acting in it, was becoming stale, and that they were getting requests to return to audiences who had already seen it. Another response was that No Time to Spare touched on only a few issues, that there were "many

unexplored issues". The overwhelming response concerned one important theme, that of wanting more "stimulation", more "learning", and "a new challenge". It was clear from this response that learning challenging material was a major reason that most of the members of the Second Edition Players were involved in the group.

Jan then led two sculpturing exercises. For the first sculpture, she asked the group to use their bodies to sculpt an image of "how seniors live today". This resulted in a mix of happy, optimistic pictures of hectic activity and glum, bored idle people. The second sculpture was to depict "less fortunate seniors". Here the group took on pained, fearful facial expressions, some transforming their posture to appear disabled, some pulling out empty pockets, some appearing to beg for spare change. The sculptures were quite powerful and communicative.

Jan also asked group members to identify some issues or ideas for stories that each would like to address in the new play. The group named the following issues (appearing in the order in which

they were recorded): Seniors' search for knowledge and continuing education, sharing homes with younger people (for financial reasons), alcohol abuse and use, financial problems faced by people on fixed incomes, the need for home-care (as opposed to hospital or institutional care), seniors with illnesses or handicaps, difficulties with transportation (especially safety when driving), Alzheimer's disease and its impact on the unaffected spouse of a victim, government forms and red tape, the gap in generations, multiple families, seniors' abuse, family problems, the medical profession (both the difficulties faced by and posed by the care of the elderly), prescription drugs and their impact on seniors who are taking and over-taking them, alienation and loneliness, and rent increases. Some of the group mentioned (more than once) that they wanted lots of "gags" and some music in the show, and that this time the music should be accompanied so that they could stay in key.

As the meeting wrapped up, fifteen or twenty minutes were spent going over the details of the group's schedule of performances and rehearsals of

No Time To Spare over the next couple of months. During this I learned, a) that many members of the group were extremely busy with other activities, b) the group itself seemed very busy with a show they had described only hours before as "stale", and c) getting the undivided attention of the group for schedule making purposes was a difficult task. All three of those lessons would be confirmed time and again during the following year and a half. Our next meeting was set for February 28 at a group member's house.

Without having been officially hired to direct, and without having Department of Drama's permission to do this project, I had begun to get to know the group a little, and was becoming emotionally and intellectually attached to the process that was beginning. I found the group's energy and thoughtfulness engaging, and was becoming excited by the themes they wanted to tackle.

This excitement grew when I attended a performance of No Time To Spare at Victoria Composite High School on February 27. I was favourably impressed by the show, which was quite

moving, funny and enthusiastically performed. It certainly showed the effects of being two years old, particularly in the transitions from scene to scene, and some actors' performances were stronger than others. My feelings about the play as a piece of theatre were somewhat mixed. Jane's script is quite funny, and occasionally poignant, but I found (and continue to find) it overly aphoristic, and lacking in overall coherence. I can perceive no organizing principle to the scene order, except that the funnier ones tend to come early and the sadder ones later. I wondered at the time whether one way to provide the challenge some of the group members sought was to provide a greater link between issues, to strive to develop a spine that informed all of the parts of the new show.

At this meeting, Jan and I shared the facilitating role in roughly equal parts. At the time I was unsure whether Jan's co-leadership role in these first meetings would be beneficial in the long run or not. I feared that Jan's prescence may increase the extent to which the group would compare me to her and their fond memories of the earlier

show. I wondered whether being left alone to try to cope as well as I could would in the end make the group's break from Jan easier, knowing that it would at the same time increase my anxiety and nervousness.

In retrospect, I think that Jan's prescence in the early workshops was extremely valuable. On the one hand it allowed me time to observe the group while I was not busy leading exercises or discussions. It also allowed the group to spend some time getting to gradually know a bit about me without having to decide immediately whether to hire me. Finally, it prevented an idealization of Jan as leader based on nostalgia for the earlier experience. During the following months people would occasionally mention bits of advice Jan had given them, or methods she used in rehearsal, but this was much less common than I had feared and anticipated. In the end I feel co-leading this workshop was an important step in taking on the mantle of leadership of this process.

During this meeting we played a simple name game, which was primarily useful for me (since I was

the only stranger).

We then played "medicine bag", a story-sharing exercise. Although none of these stories became scenes in the play (as far as my notes and memory tell me), they did allow the members of the group to (re-)begin a process of creatively sharing narratives, which became the main way of turning abstract issues into scene ideas.

The second part of this workshop consisted of a process of narrowing down the issues named in the previous meeting. I brought with me the long list (as above) written on chart paper. I read out the list, and asked if anyone wanted to add to it. We then looked for ways of combining some similar issues under a single heading, so, for instance, "granny shacks", "rent increases", and "sharing homes with younger people" were grouped under a heading entitled "housing". We then went through a process where each group member was asked to vote for three issues that were a priority for them. We did this one vote at a time, so that people could take note of how each issue was doing, and therefore vote with that in mind.

At the end of this meeting, the group again spent fifteen or twenty minutes clarifying their busy schedule. I added to their schedule by inviting them to a performance of Disappearing Women by Alexina Dalgetty on St. Patrick's week-end, which I was directing as the new play project in my directing programme. Five members of the group attended. I mention this only because it was a conscious decision to show the group an example of my directing work, in order to display to them that I had a degree of competence. Those attending seemed to enjoy the play, one of them had me sign her programme, and remarked, "if you're used to working with actors as good as those, you'll be in for a surprise working with amateurs like us." I think she not only underestimated the talent of her group, she overestimated the quality of the performance she'd seen. It was, however, encouraging to know they'd enjoyed the play.

Shortly thereafter the group told Jan that they would be willing to have me as director on the project, and we arranged a meeting of Jane, the group's executive, and me to sign a contract. This

is worthy of some attention, I think. It is not very common in the world of the theatre for a cast to hire a writer and director, and certainly affects the relationship between these normally hierarchical roles. Even in popular theatre, it is much more common for a third party, such as a governmental agency, to hire the theatre professionals to work with a community group. This reversal made it emminently clear that Jane and I were serving the group, and not the other way around. While this is the relationship popular theatre workers may generally strive for, having it legally confirmed was a helpful reminder.

Around this time I prepared a proposal which I submitted to the Directing Committee outlining the project, requesting that it be accepted as my thesis production. A revised draft of the proposal was submitted to the Graduate Committee on March 28, 1990[2]. Readers will note that a number of features of that proposal have not come to pass, including the expected timeline. The following pages will deal with some of the reasons that the project was altered.

David Barnet, Chair of the Department of Drama and member of my thesis committee, raised some interesting questions about the first draft of this proposal. He asked whether this project could really be considered popular theatre when, as far as he could tell, the group's primary purpose was "recreation". What, he asked, differentiated this group from an "amateur dramatic society?" He clarified the point by asking "in what way are they oppressed?" and "would they consider themselves oppressed?" These are important questions, and ones that I had been asking myself in various ways since my first meeting with the group, although I had never articulated them in that particular way.

Clearly, one of the group's main purposes was to come together in a relaxed, gregarious manner. This <u>was</u> (and is) a social enterprise. The members of the group would not spend so much time and energy on an activity they did not find enjoyable, and would not participate in a group where they did not find friendship and comradery. For a group of seniors who identify alienation and loneliness as one of the issues they would like to address, for

seniors generally, who have lost some of the networks of friends and family due to widowhood, sickness, retirement, and other causes, it seems appropriate that friendship and comradery be a benefit of a popular theatre project. Indeed, it may be the only justification the project needs.

I would (and did) argue that virtually any group of people who work together to create theatre do so partly (or even largely) because of the social aspect of the art form. I think that goes a long way to explain why professional theatre workers are willing to work for so little pay, in such obscurity.

But while the Second Edition Players recreate (amuse themselves) through drama, unlike the majority of amateur dramatic societies, they also re/create their lives. The work they do, while frequently light in tone, comes directly from their own experience of the world. They are forming a unique political, social, and artistic perspective, applying a degree of analysis, and articulating it for their peers and people in direct contact with their peers (doctors, nurses, gerontologists, etc.).

I have never heard a member of the Second Edition Players use the term "oppressed". It is a word that is not of their culture, a word that I don't think any of the group members would want applied to them. I think they would find it self-pitying and degrading to speak of their own "oppression". They do, however, recognize seniors as a discrete group with its own political agenda. This agenda includes a need for physical and financial accessibility to a wide range of cultural, medical and social services. Although the members of the group are in better health than many people their age, the frequency with which they visit doctors, have operations and tests, and their increasing age has made them very aware of their own mortality and the vulnerability of many of the people who make up their audiences. While they may have been middle class (for the most part) they are now on fixed incomes and are aware that financial wolves can come to the door at any time. They know that they are members of a marginalized group (although, again, this is not a word of theirs) and that they speak on the behalf of many worse off than

they are.

I was aware, too, that this group was culturally very different from me. When I earlier noted the first impression of the group being "very nice, polite, middle class" I was noting, more than anything else a difference from myself. I come from a working class inner city environment in Toronto. When the project began, I knew very few senior citizens. I am very political, opionated, and, while not rude, not all that "nice" either. I recognized that in working with this group I would be working with people as different from me as any group in North America. With this in mind, I was sure to dress neatly, shave, and mind my "p's and q's". In the autumn I brought the group photos of my wedding, because I knew that they would be of interest to the group members, and because my participation in a wedding would gain me status as a member of the same 'family-centred' culture the group belonged to.

After the thesis project was approved, and the contracting was done, Jane and I met again with the group for two sessions. In the first I brought the

group a list of the issues they had named and voted on. I had arranged the list according to the number of votes any issue had received[3]. I asked again whether there were any additional issues, and whether they agreed with the group and priorizing that I had done. We then spent the two sessions sharing stories about the issues, one by one. This was a simple matter of saying, for example, "are you reminded of any stories about housing?" The group members would then tell a story, reminding others of stories, which they'd tell and so on.

It is interesting to note that we used virtually no improvisation in creating these scenes. I had spoken to Jan and Jane about the process used in creating No Time To Spare, which I had assumed had used improvisation, since most collectives do. Both Jan and Jane told me they had used very little improv because the experience of the Spring Session classes had been that improvisation made most of the seniors uncomfortable and inhibited, and to some degree, physically at risk.

This was an important discovery for me. At the

time I noted: "for the popular theatre worker, improvisation has no intrinsic value. Like any device, it is only valuable if it helps the group. If it hinders the group, makes it less able to communicate, or makes the experience of working in drama less fun, then don't use it."

Coming from the background I do, with a B.F.A. in performance and an orientation toward professional theatre as a playwright and director this was not at all obvious. For the young actor, struggling through a difficult improvisation and getting past one's inhibitions is an important step in his or her education. I had to get over this preconception in order to work effectively with this group.

Rather than improvising scenes based on issues or situations, we sat at a round table and talked. Talking is one of the favourite activities of the Second Edition Players. I would raise a topic that had been chosen and ask if this reminded anyone of a story or a character. One person would share an anecdote concerning the topic, then the group would usually explode in a competive fury to "top" this

story, or, if it were known to others in the group, to rephrase it in a way that captured some nuance or detail the original teller left out.

For example, when I asked about "new technologies" someone told a story about an "old bird" who had gone down to a bank machine to use an automated teller machine. When the "old bird" made an error at the keyboard, money began to flood out. This was greeted with a rain of laughter by all, with many saying they had heard the same story. One of the group members scoffed that "that very thing happened to me, swear to god!" He proceeded to retell the identical story from a first person point of view, with himself as the butt of the joke.

In this case neither Jane Heather nor I probed this story to determine whether it was factually true. Although I cannot imagine how an A.T.M. could misfunction in this way, the truth lay in the fact that the group asserted that these 'mysterious machines' could do all sorts of things. That they chose a happy foul-up, where the mystified senior happens into a windfall rather than an unhappy foul-up, such as a senior being stranded somewhere

penniless because a machine wrongly confiscated her card, showed that the group was only a little frightened of the machines, not terrified by them. The group's enthusiasm told both Jane and I that this story should somehow find it's way into the show.

In these two sessions we also spoke to the group about whether they had any ideas for linking the issues together, or settling on a group of issues that were closely linked already, such as "the changing family". The group liked the idea of linking the scenes in a frame of some kind, although they didn't make any specific suggestions for a link. They did not want to limit their new show to one of the groupings on the list, however, as they felt this would limit its appeal to audiences. Some members of the group wanted a revue-style show that would be very much like No Time To Spare, and one member wanted a number of new scenes that could be mixed and matched with the earlier show as personnel, time, and venue would allow.

We also asked the group who they most wanted to speak to with this show. This provoked a somewhat

unexpected response. The group they most wanted to speak to were the people, such as doctors, nurses, chronic care workers, etc. who worked with seniors. Secondly, they wanted to speak to other seniors. They explained that this response was fueled by their experience of playing for seniors' audiences which comprised a large number of disabled or ill people. They had found that those audiences sometimes experienced difficulty in sustaining attention for the length of No Time To Spare, and that in some cases made disruptive noises or actions which made the task of playing the scenes difficult. On the other hand, the care-givers were "sharper" and tended "to get more of" No Time To Spare.

At the second of these two meetings, a significant event occurred. One of the women in the group brought with her a a hand-written story of her experience with con men. Jane dramatized this story, and it appears in the final draft of the play. Another member of the group brought in a puppet play she had written about the changing family, which she proposed to perform with her

husband. Because of the large number of other stories dealing with the generation gap, Jane eventually adapted this play to discuss a different issue, although the relationship between the two characters, Bert and May, remained the same.

After these two meetings in late April and early May, Jane and I met a couple of times to discuss the stories and the overall shape of the show. One of us, neither my notes nor my memory tell me which, suggested that a Talent Night at a senior's centre might be a way of allowing for a variety of styles, lots of music and 'gags', and a sampling of the diverse issues the group wanted to feature in their show. We also saw the opportunity to show the importance of the community of peers that seemed so crucial to the success of the Second Edition Players' own experience. Jane developed a partial first draft of the play based on this idea, more of an outline than a script. Although it is quite different from the eventual script, it included the song "Talent for Living", the technology poem, and some of the story ideas that became the basis for the characters of the women on

the committee.

We met with the seniors to suggest this outline. They generally thought that it sounded okay, though they rejected some of the suggestions for scenes. Notably they couldn't imagine playing a punk band (and especially being any good at it), or singing a rap song. Of the latter, neither Jane nor I could communicate what a rap song actually was; they had never heard of rap music. This was a clear message that it should be cut. Jane listed other scene suggestions, including a fairy tale told through story theatre, and a 'dance number'. We asked the group to tell us of any special skills they had. We came away with a list that included two dancers (one specialist in the Charleston, one in ball-room), two singers, two puppetteers, a woman willing to do a recitation, a woman interested in learning to juggle, and a couple of comedians.

During the summer we met with the Second Edition Players only once, in the first week of August. This was due, in part, to the busy summer vacation schedules of the group, partly due to the need for Jane to have time to write, and partly

because I was directing two other plays, Jane's High Stakes [4] in Grande Prairie, and Greg Nelson's Slow Zoom [5] for the Edmonton Fringe.

At this meeting Jane presented a draft that included versions of a number of the scenes that exist in the final draft. She also noted some scenes that would come on "housing issues", and "advantages for seniors in Canada". This was a Talent Night at a community centre, with the host, Roy Maynard. In response to this outline, I suggested to Jane that she consider the shape of Waiting for Lefty [6] as a model. In Odet's play, we see a number of disconnected scenes from the lives of a group of cab-drivers who are contemplating a strike. The union meeting frame appears only three times, but it is clear to the audience that the scenes are 'being told' as part of the meeting's debate.

The seniors gave the draft mixed reviews, saying that it wasn't very funny and that it was too heavy on issues. One woman commented "we don't want to be a bunch of whiners", a line that was incorporated into the final script. At this time

the play did not contain a "committee" although the stories involving the women of the committee (Veronica, Trudy, and Susan) were present in other ways. These three characters appeared at the talent show as a group of women helping out "in the kitchen" who shared stories of their lives prompted by the scenes in the play. At the play's finale they became reluctant dancers. In the final draft, these characters appear as a committee discussing the other scenes in the show, revealing their personal stories in response to the various 'acts' in the talent show.

About the dance the woman in the company who in real life dances with a Charleston group said, "I don't mind doing it, if you want me to, I just don't see what it has to do with the play. It just seems like suddenly I'm going to be doing this dance for no reason." This suggested to Jane and me that if a dance were to appear in the play, it must appear as a metaphor for something, i.e.: as a way of playing a scene. This notion resulted in one of the more inventive scenes in the play, "the con artists", in which the phoney roofing salesmen 'dance' a woman

into signing a contract.

This draft was quite choppy, with the gags and music working in one way, and the more serious scenes working in quite a different way. The latter seemed quite didactic and not very theatrical.

After this meeting Jane and I again discussed the draft and the response to it. We felt at this point we were onto an idea that could work, but the talent show conceit was overwhelming the content of the component scenes.

We also recognized, as several of the group members pointed out, that the change back and forth from a "stage" to a "kitchen" setting would present staging problems in many of the venues where the Second Edition Players performed. They frequently perform their shows at conferences and seniors' centres which do not contain fully equipped stages, and frequently must squeeze into tiny playing spaces. This problem was further complicated by the manner in which Susan's story about the con artists was conveyed. It appeared as a flashback (very much like Anne's scene, the "Con Artists", in the final draft) taking place in the 'more naturalistic'

kitchen.

At the time we did not know how either of these two problems could be solved, but Jane took that as her main task for the re-write which she planned to complete by the Labour Day week-end.

In early September, Jane telephoned me to say that she was stuck, and would have to postpone delivery of the new draft until at least the middle of September. On September 15, we spoke again, and she said she was still stuck. We agreed to meet and talk about the areas with which she was having difficulty.

At this meeting Jane was fairly unhappy with the script. She had come up with no solution to the problem of the two settings, and was having difficulty in making the talent show scenes integrate with the women's stories. She had one new scene, a version of "The Family Tree" which appears in the final draft.

I had three suggestions. First, I suggested we meet with the Seniors to get their input. Jane agreed to this, wanting to hear more about some of the issues, and to get some suggestions about the

frame. My other suggestions were to consider using the new scene as a different kind of frame, all about members of Kyla and Baba's family, or to consider turning the Talent Show frame into a rehearsal of a talent show with the women moving out from the kitchen to discuss the scenes being considered. Jane said she would consider both of these because "what we have now sure isn't working".

At this point I noted that my main task in this process at this stage was dramaturgy. I dramaturged the script both in the traditional way, through one-on-one meetings with the writer, and also by facillitating the feedback of the Second Edition Players. Whether one is directing a collective with or without a colleague who is designated the "writer", dramaturgy of both kinds are crucial to the success of the project.

At the next meeting with the group, in early October, Jane presented two new scenes for their consideration, "The Family Tree" and "Health Issues" (about Muffy, Griz, and Percy Golightly). The group liked both scenes a great deal. Jane then spoke about the problem of being stuck, explained my

suggestions, and asked for others.

Some members of the group wanted at this pointto abandon the frame altogether, suggesting that the show end up being a revue of the scenes already finished and maybe a couple of new ones. One of the members of the group reasserted an idea he had held from the first meeting, namely to forego the creation of a new play altogether, and to simply create more scenes to add to No Time To Spare.

I felt the reins of this discussion slipping away from me. I recognized that we were at a crisis in the history of this project. Jane, the group and I had put a lot of time and effort into the assembly of new material, and with what Jane and I had understood to be the group's consent Jane was attempting a very ambitious structure for the material. When the suggestion was made that we abandon that structure, and that we abandon the goal of creating a new play altogether, I felt it was necessary to check with the group to see whether this was an isolated opinion or whether this was the hitherto unspoken consensus. I asked each person in the circle to speak in turn to the question, "are we

agreed that we are working on a new play, and if so, why do we feel it necessary to do so?"

Every other member of the group strongly supported the choice to continue working on a new, discrete play. Some argued that the new material was more interesting than "the old one" because "at least it was something a little different" and that some scenes showed promise. One group member said that this was just "the same as the last time, we all bitch and complain but then Jane comes through with something real good."

It was important for Jane and me to get this vote of confidence, since neither of us knew whether this structure was going to work, or even what the structure would eventually become. It was also important that the group could speak about their confusion and apprehension about the structure. It forced me to clarify some of the options that were presenting themselves, for the group's benefit, but also for the benefit of Jane and me.

I went over the choices facing the author(s) of the play in greater detail. The "talent show scenes" as they existed could be revised to stand

alone, in a revue format very much like _Time To Spare_. Jane could work up a couple of more scenes that could fit that structure, and a couple of segments that had been cut from the current draft could be retrieved. On the other hand, Jane was attempting to find a way to link or join these disparate scenes so that they combine to form a coherent "story" or "argument". The device for linking these scenes, the "frame", Jane had been working with was a talent night at a senior's centre. In this model the various scenes would be interspersed with private moments between the three women, Trudy, Veronica, and Susan, who were working in the kitchen. The private moments would be thematically or emotionally linked to the public talent night routines that preceded or followed them.

I also explained that the frame might evolve in some way, restating the two suggestions I had made to Jane as examples of other ways that links could be made. In the first of my alternatives the private scenes would tell the same stories they currently did, although they would be less private,

and would be explicitly triggered by the talent night scenes. In the second alternative, taking the "Family Tree" scene and finding a way of making each scene connect to some member of Kyla's family, we might come up with a sort of mosaic structure.

I attempted to lead the group in a discussion resulting in a choice between these alternatives, but was fairly quickly told that this choice was too difficult to make without clearer examples of how these structures could actually be manifested in dramatic terms. The group explained that hearing a description of the structure was not enough, they would need to actually read a version of the script informed by one of the choices.

As a result, I suggested that we could put off a decision until Jane had a chance to mull over the frame and come up with enough of an example that a more informed choice could be made. At the same time Jane would continue to refine the talent night scenes, which could in any case always be detached and used on their own in a revue format. The group agreed to this suggestion.

At the next meeting, Jane had a script that

closely resembles the final draft. Some of the committee material was yet to be written, and anumber of cuts were subsequently made, but the basis was the same. She had chosen to explore the frame which made the talent show scenes a part of a rehearsal, changing the "women in the kitchen" into a committee in charge of coming up with the order the scenes would eventually play in and which scenes the talent night would include. Jane wanted to ensure that none of the actors felt they were being selected for a scene because they were inadequate, so she did not allow the committee to actually decide against any of the scenes.

While Veronica, Trudy and Susan's stories remained the same, they were now revealed as direct responses to the content of the talent show scenes. This served two purposes: first, it allowed an audience to easily follow the connection between the two kinds of scenes (as demonstrated by the first audience, the Second Edition Players themselves). It also provided a dramatic motivation for the women characters to reveal their painful and secret stories.

In the first reading of this draft I made two interventions which seem, in retrospect, to have been particularly helpful. I asked the women reading Veronica, Susan and Trudy to sit at a table apart from the other actors, and assigned those women no other parts. The casting at this point was still random, but separating the two kinds of parts, i.e. committee member and talent night performer, made the reception of the structure of the script much clearer for the members of the group.

The reaction to this version of the script was quite enthusiastic, with the common response being versions of "oh that's what you two have been on about." There was consensus that the chief problems posed by the talent night conceit were overcome by the shift to a rehearsal. All the action took place in one stage area, the audience was clearly told the relationship between the two kinds of scenes, and the women's stories were all told through the same theatrical convention.

The positive response to this draft meant that the struggle to find a structure for the play, which by now was called Talent for Living, was over. What

had seemed insoluble ten days before, was solved.

On the one hand this was Jane's private triumph. She had worked out the technical problems of linking disparate scenes together so that a complex organization could be easily perceived and decoded by an audience. On the other hand, it was a triumph of the whole group. On my part the chief contributions came in recognizing the difficulty the Second Edition Players were experiencing in making an informed choice about the structural alternatives, and in formatting the reading of the draft in such a way that this alternative was presented as clearly as possible. The Second Edition Players contributed by clearly naming their own confusion, and not letting the theatre experts (Jane and I) talk them into something they didn't understand on the basis of our authority. Furthermore they displayed a great deal of trust in Jane and me when asked to forestall a decision until Jane could bring them more material.

The group was agreed that the play they had read was a play they would be happy to perform. They suggested some minor changes, mostly where

"boring" or "slow" bits might be cut, and looked forward to the last additions. We arranged a meeting in a fortnight to hold a first read-through of the rehearsal draft of the script. Nearly eleven months from our first meeting we were finished the first phase of the process: we had created the script.

ii. Mounting the Show

Between the meeting where the group decided they had created their new script and the first reading, I arranged for each member of the collective to communicate to me the roles they would prefer to play. I provided for them a form[1] listing all of the parts in Talent for Living and asked them to indicate which they would play, if asked, which they would most like to play, and which they would not play under any circumstances. They filled in the forms at a rehearsal of No Time to Spare, and sent them back to me. This form appears unabridged in the notes to this chapter.

The majority of the group members selected two or three favourite parts, and a couple of others they would play if asked. One woman simply wrote a note saying "I'll help out in any of the small parts, but please don't give me too many lines. I have trouble learning them." One woman marked a single favourite (the part she ended up playing) with a note saying should would play anything else except the singer. Two of the women wrote notes

saying they would play anything. The most touching response came from a man in the group who had been receiving cancer therapy throughout the script creation process. His form said simply, "Don't cast me in anything major until I get results of my tests. I don't know if I'll be around."

I was able to accommodate all of the group members with at least one of the parts they had chosen as favourite (if they had made an indication) and did not need to ask any to play a part they had marked "not on your life."

At the same time I had some flexibility to cast people according to my own sense of their suitability. I felt that the three women on the committee had a much greater acting challenge than the other actors, and therefore cast three of the stronger actors in those parts. In two scenes, the "Bank Machine" and the "Technology Poem", the actors required a certain charm and charisma, and I was able to place women in those parts who I felt could bring that off. In the "Con Artists" scene, it was necessary to cast three actors fit enough to perform a dance number while playing a scene, and again,

given the responses to the casting questionaire I had the range to do that.

In the first week in December, we met to read the rehearsal draft. I assigned the parts, explained that I had done my very best to accommodate the wishes of the group as expressed on the questionaires. I asked that if anyone had problems with any of the parts I had assigned them, or had had their hearts set on a part I had assigned to someone else, for them to speak to me during the break or after the rehearsal. Again, I set up the room so that the women playing the members of the committee would be separate from the rest of the company. After the reading there were no complaints about casting.

Because Christmas was coming and many of the group members were very busy with choirs and family activities, we agreed to meet in the new year to begin rehearsals. I asked that the group try to read the script once or twice concentrating on the part(s) each was to play.

During this hiatus I was able to begin a director's analysis of Talent for Living. Although

I had obviously been thinking of the evolving script as a director to some degree, I had until this point been primarily concerned with dramaturgical issues and the extent to which the group understood and was comfortable with choices being made.

My first director's impressions of the play at this time are some scribbles I made on the margins of the script as I read through. The note that appears most frequently is "slow", or "cut", often accompanied by a circle around a piece of text. Each of these words are sometimes accompanied by a question mark. It should be noted that Jane had warned the group that she was looking to cut some material from the draft they had read, and she had asked me to help locate some repetitious or gratuitous material. I should also note that at this time I was working as the full-time dramaturge at Workshop West Theatre, and part of my duties included reading as many as ten unsolicited manuscripts per week. I had developed a mania for expediting dramatic action and ridding plays of boring, expositional chat.

In my journal I recorded other thoughts. I

mused that for someone who has frequently claimed to not be a 'real playwright', and who says she knows nothing about structure, Jane had devised a very complex, intricate play. I wrote, "so postmodern -- semioticists would have a heyday." Although I am not an expert on postmodern performance theory, I was referring to the many levels of auto-referentiality in the script. This is a company of senior citizens who come together to create theatre about their own lives and experiences. The chief conceit of the play is that a fictional group of senior citizens has come together to rehearse a play about their own lives and experiences. In the fictional group (as in the Second Edition Players) there are a range of opinions about the appropriate tone for their scenes to take, about whether theatre should be exclusively light and diverting, or whether it needs to tackle problems that plague seniors. In the fictional group, characters hold contradictory opinions on that point depending on the amount any particular issue touches them personally. In the Second Edition Players the contradictions are also

present, although they are much more subtle than in the fictional situation.

Auto-referentiality reaches its apogee in "Susan's" response to "Anne's" scene about the con artists[2]. Anne and two other "actor characters" have presented a scene about the horrors of being swindled. The theatrical convention of the scene is a flashback within a monologue. The highly stylized playing of the flashback, where "Mack Bluff" and "Jack Better", two theatricalized, vaudvillian characters 'physically dance' their victim into submission, is set off against an apparently documentary direct address. The contrast between the styles suggests that the monologue is based in actuality. The shock of Anne stepping out of the scene is a kind of Brechtian V-Effect[3].

Then Susan, the committee member who has hitherto been arguing on the behalf of glitz and entertainment, reveals that she has "personal experience" of con artists. She disputes the veracity of Anne's portrayal of the situation, giving both facts about the cost of rooves and the way the companies fold, and insight into the

personal, emotional cost of having been made to look "foolish", as evidence of the shallowness of the scene.

As a fourth layer, resonating beneath the surface of the play, consider that both stories, Anne's and Susan's, are based on the true story of another woman who is onstage playing another member of the company. This is the woman who passed Jane a handwritten prose memoir of the experience of being defrauded by roof salesmen. In Susan's version of the story she is helped by Roy, "the last true gentleman". In the real story the woman was helped by a male member of the group: an another actor on stage while the scene takes place.

As I examined the play more closely I asked myself about the connection between these layers of theatricality. I found that the organizing principle underlying the order of events was simpler than it first seems. Although the play includes many episodes which are in fact set pieces, they are not disconnected from the whole. The play is essentially an unusual kind of narrative, in many ways quite like Waiting for Lefty [5], the chief

difference being that in Odet's play the characters have intended the scenes to be part of the argument of the evening. In Talent for Living the characters who have 'created the scenes and poems' innocently contribute to the unfolding dramatic action. The story of the play occurs in the committee members' discussions of the scenes. Because it is their reflection on the scenes which provokes each unit of dramatic action, I came to think of the play as a "reflective narrative".

The chief challenge these layers of reality pose for the director of Talent for Living is in achieving clarity for the audience. Here, the "true stories" no longer matter very much since very few members of the audience will recognize the real world referents for any of the dramatic material. What matters a great deal, however, is in clarifying the tension between the talent show version of an event and the committee members' reflections upon it, what the postmodernist might call, respectively, the theatrical and the meta-theatrical treatment of material.

A major part of my response to that challenge

came in my floor-plan, in which I situated the committee members up-stage right with the talent show scenes to be played in front of them. The committee was to be in the stage picture at all times, being foregrounded during their dialogue, and partly screened during the talent show scenes. The idea is to provide a constant visual reminder that scenes in the talent show rehearsal are 'more theatrical', which is to say, 'less real', than the committee's discussions of them. Furthermore the members of the 'acting company' would remain in view as an audience for the scenes, again reminding the audience that this was a play within in a play.

The visual rhythm of the play then becomes a matter of shifting the committee from backgound to foreground, over and over again. I drew up a simple strategy to accomplish this which had the committee members draw focus at the start of each of their scenes, which is to say, at the end of each of the talent show scenes. This was generally accomplished in the actual staging through combinations of movement, level and plane. The acting company would support this focal shift through visual line.

Because the committee was "in charge" of both the fictional situation and the structure of the play, I planned to have them give focus up at the end of their scenes (rather than having the actor characters take it from them).

I attempted to keep both floorplan and staging as simple as possible because the Second Edition Players are invited to perform in a great variety of venues, and often must cope with very small playing areas. To this end, for an ideal stage the acting company would be situated stage left in chairs forming a diagonal line (again giving focus to the committe whenever these chairs were not screened by actors and props for a talent show scene), but this could be altered for smaller playing spaces. In those venues the acting company could sit in the front row of audience seating, facing the stage.

In my analysis of the play I discovered that the play was indeed still about what Jane and I had discussed in May and June of 1990. The message the Second Edition Players have for their target audience, people who work with seniors and other seniors, is that they (older adults) are less

vulnerable when we are in communication with each other, when they are a community. This message was never explicitly stated by the members of the group, but Jane and I inferred it from the stories they told.

I see this message percolating through every scene of Talent for Living. It is an argument for honesty and sharing, for support and joint struggle. If the difficulty is coping with mystifying machines, the solution comes from naming your confusion and asking for help. If the difficulty is con artists, tell someone you have been robbed and you might get your money back, and at the very least, you will make it harder for the thieves to dupe someone else. If wolves are at your door causing housing problems, look around, you are not the first or only one to experience those problems, and other seniors have the answers. If you are lonely because you have lost loved ones, open your eyes, there are other lonely people waiting to fill the void. If your grandchildren are being taken from you, speak to others in the same situation, and you will be better armed for the

fight. These are the stories the Second Edition Players told each other, these are the stories they chose to tell the public.

This realization helped me formulate a spine for the play, which became "To Forge Community". Realizing that all of the material in the play contributed to this spine helped me unify the production. In achieving a greater link between scenes in Talent for Living accomplished a goal that I noted early on in the development of the collective.

Rehearsals resumed with a second reading of the entire script, and a meeting to establish some initial rehearsals. I asked the members of the group to provide me with a list of times and dates when they were available to rehearse. I wanted to be sure to avoid overwhelming the actors with too much rehearsal time, while scheduling myself as intensively as possible. The maze of times when people were busy doing some other 'recreational' activity combined with the number of permutations and combinations of scene partners made the schedule-making extremely difficult, but we came up with appointments for at least the first rehearsal

of every scene grouping.

At the first reading I spoke briefly about the problems posed by the two layers of reality in the play. I suggested that we would need to strive to enhance the artificiality of the talent show scenes, by, for instance, wearing simple, emblematic costume-pieces rather than naturalistic wardrobes, and by clearly getting into and out of character in front of the audience's very eyes. I needed to explain this point many times during subsequent rehearsals, not so much because of disagreement with the concept, but because some members of the group had difficulty grasping the implications of that strategy in practical terms and some were unfamiliar with any kind of anti-naturalistic theatre (or at least thought they were, although No Time To Spare is anti-naturalistic, too).

While it seems foolish to admit it now, I proposed Reading Week, February 22 and 23 as a target date for the first performances of the play. After the first two or three meetings with each scene pairing I realized that this would be an impossible deadline to meet, in part because

arranging enough rehearsal time with each group could not be done, and partly because it was clear that the majority of the seniors could not learn their lines in that short a time, let alone learn blocking, order, and plumb the scenes to act them well.

During the small group rehearsals we proceeded to work on the scenes in roughly the same fashion as a professional rehearsal process would. Some scenes had more challenges than others, as did some parts, but for the most part the actors in the more difficult scenes were the stronger or more talented members of the group.

In late February I realized that the small group rehearsals had achieved about as much as they were going to achieve, and decided that it would be necessary to bring the entire group together so that we could run the talent show scenes and the committee's response to them in order. At this point I also postponed the show for a final time. We had been aiming at a March 17th premiere, but there was still too much work to do, especially since one group member was in hospital, two were on

Elder Hostel (a seniors' educational retreat programme), and the entire group had a fairly packed slate of No Time To Spare gigs to squeeze in around rehearsals.

I proposed that the entire group meet every Wednesday afternoon for four hours from the March 6th, 1991 until our new premiere date, "somewhere in the middle of April, before or after the trip to Saskatoon, and if at all possible before the trip to Toronto." In Saskatoon and Toronto (the latter of which of which fell through due to funding cuts) the Second Edition Players were to perform either No Time To Spare or Talent for Living, depending on whether the latter were ready. In addition to the regular Wednesday rehearsals, I asked some groups who had particularly complex scenes to meet on some other dates as well.

The benefits of the regular schedule were wonderful to behold. Not only were the group members pleased to be able to see each other altogether, each member seemed more keen to work and better prepared when the rehearsal happened at the same time each week. Furthermore, all of the actors

have a strong sense of personal pride, a dignity, which forced them to try harder and focus more in front of the audience of their peers.

In opting for the small group rehearsals earlier I was using a strategy that one would employ if one was paying professionals for their time. I was calling people to rehearsal only when their time would be fully used. I worked the play out of sequence so as to save actors trips to rehearsal, grouping scenes according to the combinations of actors.

Once I began working with the whole group together I realized that I should have been doing that from much earlier on. Whereas professional actors would have been bored attending rehearsals of scenes they didn't appear in, I found the Second Edition Players quite enjoyed watching others work, or visiting in the hall while they weren't needed.

In one of the additional rehearsals Russel Kilde choreographed the dance sequence in the "Con Artists" scene. The choreography he came up with is very simple, yet clear in conveying the metaphor of the scene, i.e. that the woman is swept off her feet

by their smooth routine. It took the actors a long time to learn this choreography, and to learn it well enough that they could repeat it flawlessly while playing the scene. They showed tremendous patience and discipline, running the sequence a number of times at every subsequent rehearsal.

Another of the added rehearsals came later in March, when Darrin Hagen, the composer of the music for the two versions of Talent for Living came in to teach the song to the actors playing Kathy and Arthur. The rehearsal worked quite well, and both actors learned the song quickly while Darren was present and playing it on piano. Both actors had difficulty with the tape he had made, however, and we asked that he make a new copy of the tape with a simpler orchestration (on his synthesizer) and in a lower key.

Darren provided us with a new tape at another rehearsal, where he taught the song to the whole group. The actor playing Arthur was still having difficulty with the taped version of the song. One of the other actors whispered to me that she thought it was just because he wouldn't admit that his

hearing was getting poor, and that the synthesized horns and percussion on the tape made it harder to hear. In any case because of Darrin's schedule, we were unable to get a third version of the tape, so the actors had to do their best with what we had.

This is one area where better planning could have greatly helped increase the comfort of the actors. I had first contacted Darrin about composing a song in November of 1990 and at that time he was quite available. I held off then, however, because the man who was the obvious choice to play Arthur was the same man who had given me the ominous reply to the casting questionaire, saying "I don't know if I'll be around." If this actor had been unable to participate in the show, I did not know whether the song, or at least the duet, would have stayed in the play.

After Christmas Darrin became extremely busy, scoring a show for the Phoenix Theatre and finishing a musical for the TeenFest at the Citadel. Arranging times for Darrin, Jane and I to get together became quite difficult. All that being true, however, I regret that I did not press harder

to work something out because the singers did not become sufficiently comfortable with the song to feel confident by the time of the opening. Darrin will correct this when the group resumes work in the autumn.

The other scene which suffered from insufficient time was the puppet scene, with Bert and May. I should have built the puppet stage for that scene earlier, so that the actors working with the marionettes would have felt greater ease working with it. The scene would have also benefitted from more expert coaching, since I have no experience as a puppetteer. The final result was still quite charming, because the text was strong, but the actual use of the puppets added very little to the communication.

By late March it was clear that we could open in mid April, the problems with the two sections mentioned above notwithstanding. The actors were on top of their scenes, we had worked out an opening, the transitions needed refinement but were in place, and a momentum was building. I confirmed a date for the Thrust Theatre at the university, and began to

work out the (modest) publicity.

To digress slightly, two similar events occurred in the last week of rehearsal which have profoundly affected my memory of this project. The first occurred at our last rehearsal outside the Thrust Theatre, in a voice and speech room on the second floor of the fine arts building. Just moments before a run-through was to begin, one of the women in the show was walking across the playing area when her foot lightly brushed a wire from one of the marionettes. Although she didn't become tangled up in the wire, she was startled, and went off balance. She began to slowly, invevitably crash sideways. Everyone in the room immediately became aware that she was falling, that she would soon hit her head, but we were all too far from her to help. Her face slapped against a sound baffle, which closed with a boom, and she slid to the ground. Immediately we rushed to her. Almost as immediately she said, "I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm alright, I just caught something...". She insisted that we start the run-through.

Four days later two of the actors arrived early

for the tech/dress rehearsal. While I stood in the house, speaking with the man who played Roy, his wife was placing her props for the puppet show. She began to say something to us as she rounded the puppet stage. Her foot brushed against the jack supporting the front wall of the puppet frame. She, too, began a slow, relentless fall. She reached out her hand to brace herself against the stage floor, but just before she reached it, her forehead smashed into the edge of a chair. Her husband and I finally inhaled, and rushed to her. She too insisted that she was fine, joking that if she started raving during rehearsal we should just ignore it and go on. In moments a huge purple bump swelled on her forehead.

I already had tremendous respect for the Second Edition Players. I already had discovered that they are remarkably unafraid to take emotional and intellectual risks, that they had the courage to place themselves in situations where they might seem foolish, or where others might think them foolish. I knew that they took on tasks where they might publicly fail, and that they did so at an age where

no one pressed them to, where they could relax, and avoid those situations without attracting any notice.

But when I witnessed those two women falling, helplessly falling, tripped by the most minor obstacle, when I think of that now, I cannot help but marvel at their bravery. I think of the entire group, and the extent to which they are all to some extent physically at risk, so much more at risk than I have ever been, and I am awed at their courage. Witnessing those two women falling I learned about the capacity of human beings to quietly and bravely face risk.

At eight o'clock in the evening on April 16, 1991 Talent for Living premiered in the Thrust Theatre at the University of Alberta. I watched this show as nervously as I have ever done anything.

I was nervous because of my recent lessons in the physical risk that some of the Second Edition Players are in at all times. I was nervous, too, because I desperately wanted the group that I had grown to love to experience success. Finally, I was nervous because I had learned to expect the

unexpected with this group.

The audience arrived in droves. We had printed one hundred and eighty tickets for the show. More than one hundred and eighty people crammed into the theatre. The audience ranged in age from teenagers to contemporaries of the actors. The actors' children and grandchildren attended, reversing the common situation where parents and grandparents watch their children perform.

My memory of the opening from this point on is not very clear. I experienced one wave of relief after another as the play moved from scene to scene. Hearing the audience laugh at the appropriate places filled me with joy. I saw the actors gain confidence and momentum as the show progressed. I was reminded of my fears of the unexpected when, during the last scene of the play, I heard an actor speak a line which had been cut from the script before Christmas. Amazingly his scene partner remembered her response (which had also been cut). They worked their way through four or five lines of ostensibly edited dialogue (as far as I could tell, verbatim) and carried on with the scene without

missing a beat. As the actors joined together to sing the reprise of the song, I finally relaxed.

As the audience rose to give the Second Edition Players a standing ovation, I felt so happy, so proud for them, I cannot articulate my emotions. I looked around at the audience, and I perceived (whether this is strictly true or not I cannot say) a genuine quality to this applause. The Second Edition Players were not being patronized or condescended to they were being thanked for their work, being congratulated on a job well done.

Talent for Living was performed twice more before the group took their summer hiatus. I was unable to attend the first of these performances (because of a dress rehearsal of a teens collective I was facilitating) but did attend the second. This took place at the Southeast Seniors' Centre on April 24.

I was able to view this performance with greater objectivity. I still felt that it was a good show, conveying the Second Edition Players' message clearly, but I recognized some areas where it might have been improved.

This venue posed problems for the audience's sight-lines, problems that were not solved by the staging we had devised. I feel, however, that short of presenting every moment of the play stage centre looking directly out at the house, the problems could not have been solved by other staging choices. The stage is approximately five feet high, and the audience sits in portable chairs on an unraked floor. If I were making the booking decisions for the Second Edition Players I would be tempted to refuse to play in spaces such as these. Of course, such a decision would need to weighed against the value of taking the show to this audience.

The chief staging problem that might have been solved through a better choice lies in the transitions between scenes. I felt that the transitions into the committee members' scenes generally occurred quickly enough, but the transitions out of the committee scenes tended to drag and become confused. I could have improved this to some degree by having the actors in the talent show scenes take focus, rather than waiting for it to be given to them, and by running the

transitions more often in rehearsal.

Through repetition the actors might have greater confidence in the order of scenes, which would have helped with the start of each scene and with the amount that the actors watching scenes they were not in could fill up the inner life of their characters when they were not in focus.

As I mentioned above, obtaining the music for the two versions of the song earlier would have increased the confidence of the singers, both in the duet and in the finale.

I also felt that the problem of pace could have been dealt with through further editing of the play. This was not done during the process because of the difficulty the actors have learning lines (which, as the incident of the retrieved cuts in the premiere demonstrates is also a difficulty in forgetting lines that have been cut). There came a point around Christmas when it was clear that the group wanted to begin rehearsing. After Christmas some last cuts were made, but this editing process could not, for practical reasons, continue very long into the rehearsal process.

Cutting individual lines would not, in any case, lead to a substantial change in the over all pace of the show since most of the slow spots occur in the transitions between scenes. By the end of rehearsals I had come to the conclusion that two scenes should have been eliminated from the rehearsal draft.

The first is the "Bert and May" scene, which presents two kinds of staging problems that I was unable to solve. It demands a puppet stage, which takes up valuable playing area during the rest of the show (especially in the postage stamp sized stages the Second Edition Players sometimes confront). Secondly I was not sufficiently skilled to direct a marionette scene at a level comparable to the rest of the play. This could not be eliminated, however, because the actors had placed a great deal of hard work into the scene (and had, through their efforts, managed to salvage a great deal from it). If this scene was to be cut or altered, that decision needed to have been made before rehearsal began. In weighing such a decision, one must keep in mind that in a popular

theatre process the aesthetic success of the play is not the only consideration, and the amount that the two performers benefitted from the inclusion of the scene far out-weighed any gains that would have been made from cutting it.

The other scene which I would argue could be cut without harming the play is the "Health Issues" scene, with Percy Golightly, Muff, and Griz. I say this even though the actors' work in the scene is among the strongest in the entire production, with a level of character and caricature development that is very sophisticated. I would argue that it could be cut because it relates the least to the spine of the play, it does not push forward the dramatic action of the committee members narrative, and it virtually repeats the point of two scenes in No Time To Spare.

Although I recognize those arguments in favour of cutting that scene, I would find them very difficult to make to the group because the group likes Muffy and Griz very much. I do not think it is my place (or Jane's) to make that kind of decision for the group, or even to persuade them to

change their minds.

Finally, while I think some things about the show could have been enhanced, I feel satisfied that the production is quite good, and that it does the company proud.

In my initial proposal I suggested that part of the project would include an evaluation of the audience response to the play and a study of the Second Edition Players' growth. I was unable to accomplish either of these goals.

In the first case, the play was performed just three times before the members of the group went their separate ways for the summer. With all of my directorial duties I was unable to set up any way of collecting data on the audience response. Because the audience attended the play in order to be entertained, rather than studied, any evaluation of their response might have proven difficult in any case.

As for evaluating the members of the Second Edition Players through interviews or questionaires, this never seemed appropriate. The members of the group view their participation in a drama group as a

recreational activity; a sociological or pedagogical study of the group would interefere with their recreation. Furthermore, if I would have carried out such a study (rather than a third party) it would have altered my relationship to the group in what I suspected would have been a negative fashion.

CHAPTER THREE

Conclusions

i. Roles

The various contributors to the Talent for Living Project filled different roles, which bear many similarities to the roles or occupations in typical theatre productions. The Second Edition Players, for instance, were actors. Like actors in most productions, they had lines to learn, characters to portray, blocking to execute. Jane Heather, as playwright, worked in many ways like any playwright. She did research, developed characters and stories, struggled to structure the events of the play, wrote lines and stage directions, and handed the play over to a producing company. As director I had many of the same tasks I encounter on any directing project. I analyzed the play, cast it (though in an unusual way), worked with the actors in rehearsal, composed stage pictures, attended to the visual and vocal rhythms, and tried to foster a

congenial, productive ensemble atmosphere.

In important ways, however, these roles were different in the Talent for Living Project. Priorities were altered, additional tasks were included, responsibilities were shifted. My hunch is that the ways in which these roles were different in the Talent for Living Project from most theatre producing situations are to some extent typical of popular theatre collectives with community groups. It is my hope that a record of some of these observed differences may help others beginning such projects, and may contribute to a discourse about a way of working that I feel quite passionate about.

1. The writer on a Community Collective Creation: Playwright as Ghostwriter/Playwright as Oral Historian

The majority of plays described as collective creations do not include a playwright as someone separate from the cast; the "writing" is done by actors with input from a director. When a writer is involved in a collective, she is often present to

record, shape, refine and order material created through improvisation. This was, for example, the nature of Rick Salutin's contribution to the creation of 1837: A Farmer's Revolt.[1]

In the development of Talent for Living Jane Heather made some of those contributions, but her job was also importantly different from that of a typical playwright, and also of that of a playwright on a (professional theatre) collective creation.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, improvisation was not a method for the creation of raw material for this play. Jane was recording, shaping, refining and ordering material, but the material was not yet dramatic or theatrical material (with the exception of the puppet play). A major part of her task involved converting stories, opinions, jokes, and feelings into dramatic material. Because of this, in one way her playwright's task was akin to that of the ghostwriter. Just as a ghostwriter of a celebrity auto-biography or memoir is charged with taking first person accounts of remembered events and making prose from them, Jane was charged with making drama from a

group of issues, stories, anecdotes and comments. Because Jane saw herself as a servant of the group, she then would invite feedback from the Second Edition Players who would vet all the material. Jane would then rewrite according to the desires of the group. She never privileged her own interpretation of a character over the group's, never argued against the consensus in terms of tone, structure, or any other dramaturgical matter.

Just as the celebrity promoting her ghost-written autobiography can, in good conscience, argue that the book is hers, and that the ghost only provided a service (of writing it out in acceptable prose), so too can the group argue that Talent for Living is a play created by them. I believe that Jane would agree with me that they would be correct.

A contrary aspect of Jane's relationship to the group (which may bear some similarity to that of a ghostwriter to a celebrity as well) is that to a large extent Jane was not only a servant of the group, the group was a subject of Jane's playwright's research. That is to say, Jane acted as an oral historian, recording not only the content

of the Second Edition Players' discussions, but how they speak and interact. Neither Jane or I are seniors, and neither of us did much outside research into seniors' issues, lifestyles, or attitudes. In writing a play about seniors Jane depended on the Second Edition Players for all of that material, and for most of the intangible cultural qualities a playwright needs to evoke a milieu. These qualities include the diction, rhythm and figures of speech, the kind and quantity of humour, the decorum and manners, the essence of a people. If the senior citizen characters in Talent for Living sound authentically like Edmonton-area seniors (and I would argue that they very much do), it is because Jane accomplished the oral historian's task very successfully.

Part of both the ghostwriter and the oral historian's tasks is to listen very closely to the themes and stories that are only hinted at, the aspects of a subject's communication which only become apparent in the linking together of different parts. When Jane inferred the connection between the stories she was hearing, linking them together

through a common spine, she was giving the Second Edition Players an opportunity to say something explicitly that they had only been hinting at. Because they were given ample opportunity to reject Jane's interpretation of their message and chose not to, she was able to lead the group to a greater self awareness through her writing.

2. The Director on a Community Collective

a.) The Director as Dramaturge

In English Canada there are two main kinds of dramaturge. A dramaturge on a script with a history of previous productions works in a manner similar to that of the German dramaturg, which is to say, she researches issues relevant to the production, helps select from variant versions (including translations) of the script, and aids in the preparation of a production draft (especially where cuts are being made).

On new plays a dramaturge works with the playwright in a manner similar to a literary editor. The dramaturge assists in making re-writes

by asking questions and making suggestions about structure, character, dramatic action, etc. If a play is to be workshopped before a production, a dramaturge will help plan the workshop, by identifying the objectives of the playwright and the company, and isolating aspects of the play that might be illuminated through a workshop process. During a workshop and rehearsal process, a dramaturge frequently becomes a defender of play and playwright, helping the playwright to articulate concerns about interpretation, and in some cases speaking those concerns to other members of the company on the writer's behalf.

In many cases new Canadian plays are produced by companies without the resources or inclination to appoint a dramaturge per se. In these cases, the tasks enumerated above generally fall to the director of the production (or workshop).

Therefore in my meetings with Jane Heather where we discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the script and mulled over the structure and the appropriateness of various kinds of choices, I worked as a dramaturge in the same sense that many

directors of new Canadian plays do. But because this project was a collective creation, with the special conditions in the relationship of writer and group described above, my dramaturgical task was significantly different from that of the typical director of a new play. I was a dramaturge to two (kinds of) playwrights at once; Jane Heather, the individual, and the Second Edition Players, her collective co-author.

As a director of the process, as well as the resulting production, I began to wear the dramaturge's hat at our very early meetings. As I led a discussion of issue and theme priorities, grouping similar themes under one heading, clarifying and echoing comments, setting the discussion agenda and steering the discussion to stay on the agreed-upon task, I was working as a dramaturge as surely as when I participated in the one-on-one discussions with Jane. During the entire first phase of the process, where we were assembling and revising the script, my chief task in meetings with the group was to act as their dramaturge.

When meeting with a playwright during early

stages in a play's creation, a dramaturge will attempt to ask questions that aid a playwright in making clear, specific choices. The dramaturge will point out aspects of the script where two (or more) alternatives exist, with the goal of assisting the writer in making a choice. A good dramaturge will recognize that her role is not to make the choice between the alternatives, but to nudge the writer to make a choice which helps her best realize her play. Similarly during the group meetings the director/dramaturge leads a process of decision-making designed to identify places or issues about which choices must be made, leading to greater clarity and specifity.

To lead such a process well, the director of a collective creation employs two sets of skills. In leading any discussion the director is a facillitator; in leading discussions about the shape and content of a play the director uses the skills of a dramaturge. Director/dramaturges will seldom find themselves animating a collective with a community of drama graduate students (although I have), so they must keep in mind that dramaturgy is

an area of technical expertise in which a director of a community collective is likely to be more experienced than the community with whom she is working. The task for the director is therefore to facillitate a discussion about the choices between a menu of dramaturgical options. Having said that, one must of course keep the menu as open as possible, so that the collective can select from all of the options that actually exist.

b.)Director as Marathoner

One of the main differences between working on a collective with a community of persons for whom drama is a part-time activity and working in the professional theatre in English Canada involves duration and pace. Talent for Living evolved over a course of nearly a year and a half, whereas the typical rehearsal period for a new Canadian play is from three to five weeks. Working in the professional theatre is typically takes the energy of a sprint, a sort of mad-dash to get through everything by opening night. Working on Talent for

Living required the endurance and pacing of a marathon.

Consider, by way of illustration, that during the course of the time I was in collaboration with Jane and the Second Edition Players I directed three other new Canadian plays (_Disappearing Women_, _High Stakes_, and _Slow Zoom_), I acted in a new play (_Patients, Priorities, and Power_ by Jane Heather), I co-facillitated a teen collective at Theatre Network, I wrote a one-act play (_Tiffany and Todd in the Land of Love_), I saw upwards of fifty productions, and read at least fifty other scripts (most of them unpublished manuscripts).

While engaged in all of those sprints, I found it very difficult to adjust to the much slower pace of the _Talent for Living_ marathon. It was quite trying to focus week after week on the same material, with individual scenes improving very slowly. Our rehearsals averaged only about twelve hours a week. In a given rehearsal, a substantial amount of the time would be spent getting back to the place where we had left off before. This was, partly due to the fact the performers spanned ages

sixty-five to eighty-five, although the sporadic nature of rehearsals would even make younger people tend to forget some of what had been accomplished from one meeting to the next.

In order to perform well in such a marathon a director must be able to put aside long indefinite periods of time. She must be prepared to go through spells where the work is difficult, where it becomes less interesting than other available work, and commit to sticking to it. She must be located in one place for a long time, even when work beckons in other cities. She must determine whether she is willing to work in this open-ended way with the particular group at hand.

c. The Director as Producing Company

A freelance director of a community collective will end up doing many tasks which are normally done by other people in a producing company unless the director has specifically contracted otherwise. For example, on Talent for Living I acted as stage manager, booking and setting up all rehearsal rooms,

recording blocking, prompting, etc. I was the designer and builder of the set pieces required. I was the publicist, writing the press release. I was the production manager, deciding the order of priorities for tasks, allocating budget, and seeing that I got all of the tasks done by the appointed time.

I chose to do all of those tasks of my own free will, and do not regret doing them. It was easier to do the work involved in each area myself than it would have been to recruit outside volunteers or teach members of the group to do it. For areas where I did not have the skills, e.g. choreography and music, I did find outside experts to do the work.

The reason I raise this point at all is that wearing many hats simultaneously complicates each task. It adds to the overall fatigue of the director, especially since many of those tasks tend to be done close to the end of the period of collaboration. As a production manager, one needs to try to be as strict with oneself as production managers tend to be with others. In this project the overall

comfort of the company would have greatly increased, for instance, if I had supplied actors with all of their props and set pieces earlier in rehearsals. Similarly my own comfort would have been enhanced if I had finished the press release and programmes three weeks before opening, rather than one.

d.) The Director as Educator

Since many members of the Second Edition Players spoke about education and stimulation being chief reasons they wanted to do a new play, and since it was the original impetus for all of them to sign up for the Spring Session drama course where they met one another, it is safe to assume that I took as one of my tasks that of educator.

A director of any play tends to do some amount of actor coaching, and in directing rehearsals of Talent for Living I certainly coached a fair amount. My approach was always to limit the coaching to the immediate needs of the scene at hand, rather than to try to impart a more widely applicable theory. For example, if an actor began a

scene lifelessly until her first line, I would ask, 'what might you be doing before Harry knocks on your door?' I would not talk about 'the moment before' in any general way, and I would not talk about the problem to actors whose scenes did not suffer the symptoms of an actor not having made a specific choice. I coached, in other words, in order to aid in the clarity of communication between actor and audience. I did not set out to teach the Second Edition Players to act better for the sake of acting better.

If acting was not the "subject" I was teaching, then what was? Or was I, in fact teaching much of anything?

I would argue that acting, and perhaps a tiny bit of dramaturgy was all that I taught the Second Edition Players. I firmly believe they learn a great deal more than that, however, by being members of the group and creating plays out of their own experience. I think <u>they learn</u>, but I don't think I, or for that matter, Jane and I, <u>teach</u>.

They learn from one another because as a group they have accomplished the spine of <u>Talent for</u>

Living, they have forged a community. Together they explore their continually changing experience of living in the world. By sharing their memories and new discoveries, by taking the risk to speak about their own vulnerability, they not only teach one another, they gain power over their world, and they transform it. The beauty of Talent for Living is that they are then able to take that lesson and show it to other seniors and people who will one day be seniors. As Susan says, "I mean really, darlings, where else?"

My part in that process was to simply do the job they hired me to do: facillitate discussions that allowed Jane to write a play that expressed their issues and stories, and direct them in a production of the play that allowed them to share that play with their audiences as clearly as possible.

e.) The Director as Learner

I have tended to learn in two main ways. On the one hand my way of learning about the world

tends to be to abstract principles from experience, and then to attempt to apply the principles to new experiences. I am a very verbal person, in part because I tend to learn and remember words as they relate to other words. I have a mania for etymology, and for the hidden relationships between words.

The other way in which I learn also fuels my love of (and some would say, overuse of) words, and that is that I learn through recognizing similarities between aspects of things, events or processes. One might call this learning through metaphor, or as my erstwhile creative writing teacher, bp Nichol, would say, learning through rhyme. When I speak of a director of a collective creation being like a dramaturge, for instance, Nichol would have said that I am recognizing a rhyme between the experience of facilitating a discussion about issues and chatting one on one with a playwright.

During the course of the Talent for Living Project I found myself learning in a different way, a way that I am predisposed to resist, a way that I

in fact successfully do resist in most of my life. I was learning by being awash in an experience. I was, as I wrote in the preface, in new terrain.

I had no experience on which to base expectations of the progress of seniors in a rehearsal, no knowledge of the manners or decorum observed in their large or small gatherings, no theory as to how to best lead a collective with this or any other group of seniors.

For example, if a professional actress came to a rehearsal where she had agreed to be off-book and she didn't know her lines, I would feel quite certain that she "should" have known them. I would make it clear that by the next rehearsal that she "must" know them. When a member of the Second Edition Players came to a rehearsal of a scene where she had agreed to be off-book and she nearly knew her lines, I was pleased. When she next week came to a rehearsal of the very same scene and knew fewer of the same lines, indeed, seemed now to know virtually none of them, I was completely at a loss. I did not think "she ought to know her lines" or that "she must know them next time." I had no idea

what it was like to be seventy-five years old and face such a clear demonstration that your memory isn't what it used to be. For that matter, I can't honestly remember what it's like to be an amateur actor. I thought, "this is really strange, I don't know how to help." Because I was so totally at a loss, I was not even in a position to bluff, all I could do was respond. My response was to ask, "What would help? Would you like to spend some time looking them over? Or would you rather just carry on with your script in hand?"

Being this awash in experience for which I had no theory and no rhymes was a nearly continual state in working on this project. I felt a little easier in the state because I had so many role models around, who were obviously comfortable with that state. The Second Edition Players had, in part, created a play about the need to accept and admit one's vulnerability, a play that argued people need to first admit that they don't know in order to learn.

This is then the lesson I have learned on this project which I most cherish. I have learned that

theories and principles for popular theatre work are of use, but acknowledging one's vulnerability, and directly responding to the needs of the group and the project at hand are of primary importance.

ii. The Talent for Living Project as Popular Theatre

In Chapter One, part vii., I suggested that as a test of a popular theatre project one can ask, "did this project serve in the struggles of this group?" and "if so, how?" I would like to now apply that test to the Talent for Living Project.

What, first of all, are the struggles of this group? The Second Edition Players are a fourteen Edmonton-area senior citizens who live on their own. Before they retired, they held a range of jobs most of which could be described either as middle class or as well-paying working class. The men worked in white-collar jobs, as a buyer for The Bay, as a bureaucrat for mining companies, as a manager of a railyard, as a middle executive. Many of the women were housewives, some worked, as teachers, secretaries, one was an executive.

While only two of the members of the group (to my knowledge) hold university degrees, they are, for their generation of Canadians fairly well-educated. They are well-read, concerned with topical events, and all attended the University of Alberta Spring

Session Courses for Seniors (some members continue to do so). Virtually every member of the group has attended Elder Hostel, a programme of educational retreats which allows seniors to study a wide range of subjects in locations throughout Alberta. They are, compared to many of their contemporaries, in very good health, as their busy schedules attest.

At the same time, they recognize that their health is not what it once was. Frequently rehearsal schedules needed to be adjusted because someone was going for a test or an operation. The man receiving chemo-therapy for cancer was the most extreme example, but several other members of the troupe received extensive medical treatment during the course of the project.

The incidents I recorded during chapter two, where one woman had entirely forgotten lines she had previously learned, where two others fell, were not the only times when the health of the group placed an element of closure on the activities of the group. Virtually all of the Second Edition Players have more difficulty learning lines and blocking than younger (amateur) actors do. All are aware

that during the time that they have been active in drama (at least seven years, in some cases more) they have lost some of their mental and physical agility.

To some extent, then, the Talent for Living Project served in the struggles of the Second Edition Players by presenting new challenges and stimulation. If learning new things and staying actively involved in activity is intrinsically good for seniors (and I believe that it must be), then the Talent for Living Project was useful if only because it delayed the atrophy of mental, physical, and social skills possessed by the members of the group. I would argue that that is by no means the total extent of the value of this project.

The Second Edition Players are also aware that there are social and political ramifications to the fact that they are physically and financially less well off than they have been. They tell stories of the treatment seniors receive from their children and from the public at large, that are charged with a sense that they are being condescended to and limited by stereotypes held by others which depict

them as weak or dependent. They speak of society's wont to make seniors feel more dependent than they are, by conditioning the elderly to aim low in their goals and expectations. They also recognize that their contributions to society have earned them certain privileges: they argue vehemently in favour of the protection of access to the health and social programmes that exist in Canada.

There is a sort of archetypal figure who appears in many of the Second Edition Players' stories. The figure takes the gender of the group member speaking. This character is often a widow or a widower, who is cut off from the networks of friends and family that she formerly took for granted. She is sometimes residing in a seniors home, often against her will. Sometimes she lives with one of her children who takes advantage of her or neglect her. She is the perfect mark for flatterers and con-men. She no longer works, she no longer participates in the activities in her community which once provided her purpose. Consequently, she is despondent, she feels she is a burden to those around her and life has become a

chore. She is nostalgic. I believe this figure resides in the group members' nightmares.

While the Second Edition Players do express regret about some of the changes that have occurred in their lives, I do not find them nostalgic at all. I find them quite properly critical of a society that has become increasingly fragmented and individualistic. They recognize that some things have changed for the worse, but others have changed for the better. As children of the depression they are deaply grateful for the material and social improvements they have witnessed. Furthermore, they recognize that they are far better off than many of their peers.

One crucial way in which they are better off than many of their peers is also the way in which the Second Edition Players differ from the nightmare figure. The contrasts are striking. The nightmare figure is alone, static (or moving retrogressively), and nostalgic for how things once were. The Second Edition Players are deeply involved in group activities (including the drama group, but also their other groups of dancers, singers, and

community and church associations), they are vital and changing, learning new skills (in addition to drama, some members study languages, computers, ballroom dancing, painting, and creative writing), all of them travel extensively, many engage in charitable work, and they are excited about how things are and how things can be.

Like the No Time To Spare Project, the Talent for Living Project served in the struggle of the Second Edition Players by providing a means for the members of the group to avoid becoming the figure of their nightmares. While working on both projects the Second Edition Players were engaged in learning new tasks, in sharing skills, and in a process that assisted in forging the bonds of community. Both projects can be seen as actions unto themselves: if part of the struggle faced by this group is to forge community, as the members of the Second Edition Players worked on both shows, they took an action which served in that struggle. Therefore, the Talent for Living Project can be seen as a continuation of the No Time To Spare Project; both intrinsically serve a part in the struggle of the group.

During the course of the creation of the Talent for Living script Jane Heather recognized that this fact, participation in a drama group is part of the struggle of seniors, is the chief message that the Second Edition Players have for their audiences. When the script evolved so that this was articulated during the course of the play, Jane took what was a virtual insight, and made it actual. This is why the auto-referentiality of the script is so important. When the play names the role that participation in a drama group plays in the lives of seniors, the Second Edition Players articulate their own situation, to themselves and to others.

Paulo Freire writes:

> Reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence: critical thinking by means of which men [sic] discover each other to be "in a situation". Only as this situation ceases to present itself as a dense, enveloping reality or a tormenting blind alley, and men can come to perceive it as an objective- problematic situation-- only then can commitment exist. Men emerge from their submersion and acquire the ability to intervene in reality as it is unveiled. Intervention in reality --historical awareness itself-- thus represents a step forward

> from emergence, and results from the conscientizacao of the situation.[1]

During the course of the Talent for Living Project, the Second Edition Players became conscious of their situation and during performances of the play, they fictionally recapitulate the process leading to that consciousness, sharing it with their audiences. This is the most important way in which the Talent for Living Project served in the struggle of the Second Edition Players.

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5. Odets, Clifford, "Waiting for Lefty", in Thirty Famous One-Act Plays, ed. by Cerf, Bennett, & Cartmell, Van. H. [Random House: New York] 1943.

6. Ryan, Oscar, et al, "Eight Men Speak" in Eight Men Speak and other plays, Wright, R. and Endres, R. (eds.) [:] 1976

for a memoir of the activities of the Canadian Left-Wing Theatre movement of this time, see also:

Ryan, Toby, Stage Left: Canadian Theatre in the Thirties [CTR Publications: Toronto] 1981.

7. Piscator, Erwin, Politische Theater, trans. by Hugh Rorrison, [Eyre Methuen: London] 1980. p.44.

8. Freire, Paulo, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, trans. by Myra Bergman Ramos [Continuum: New York] 1970. p. 58

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION
vi. Kinds of Popular Theatre

1. Ryga, George, The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, [Talonbooks: Vancouver] 1970.

2. Favel, Floyd All My Relations produced by Catalyst Theatre Society, Edmonton at the Chinook Theatre, Edmonton, March, 1990, and on a tour of Reserves, directed by Allen MacInnis, designed by David Skelton.

3. described in Filewod, ch. 4, "Documentary and Regionalism: No. 1 Hard and Paper Wheat, pp.80-111.

4. described in Filewod, ch. 2, Documentary and Collective Creation: The Farm Show, pp. 24-49.

also published:

Theatre Passe Muraille, The Farm Show, [Coach House Press: Toronto] 1976.

and documented in a film:

The Clinton Special, dir. by Michael Ondaatje, Mongrel Films, 1974.

5. described in Filewod, ch. 5, "The Political Doocumentary: Buchans: A Mining Town, pp.112-152.

and in a memoir by the director:

Brookes, Chris, A Public Nuisance; A History of the Mummers Troupe, Social and Economic Studies, no. 36 [Institute of Social and Economic Studies, Memorial University Newfoundland: St. John's, Newfoundland] 1988. pp. 111-128.

6. described in Filewod, ch. 6, "Documentary and Audience Intervention: It's About Time", pp.152-187.

and documented on video-tape:

Stand Up for Your Rights, Jack Emack producer, CBC-TV, "Catalyst Television", 1981.

2. A REFLECTIVE NARRATIVE OF THE TALENT FOR LIVING PROJECT

i. Creating the Script.

1. Heather, Jane, in collaboration with the Second Edition Players, No Time to Spare; A Theatre Project By Seniors [Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission: Edmonton].

2. the author submitted the following proposal:

Thesis Proposal

The Seniors' Project

This is a popular theatre project involving the development of a new collectively created show by an existing group of Seniors with some experience in drama. It will involve a process of generating themes and stories which will be developed into scenes by Jane Heather, workshops on the drafts of the scenes, and rehearsal and staging of the finished project.

The Group

The Second Edition Players are thirteen Seniors who all had some participation in U. of A. Faculty of Extension Spring Session Drama Courses taught by Kevin Burns and/or Jan Selman. Two years ago a number of the participants in one

such class decided to form a group that could evolve a project in greater depth. With the sponsorship of AADAC they hired Jan Selman as a director and Jane Heather as a writer to develop a collective creation that came to be known as No Time to Spare [published by AADAC]. This show's great success with audiences --it has been performed thirty-four times in many parts of Alberta and continues to be requested-- and the desire to continue to grow and keep stimulated by their drama work, has prompted the group to initiate a new show. They have a contract with AADAC which provides a budget [albeit a modest one] for the development of this project.

No Time to Spare

The group's first play is similar in form to many of the collective creations popular in Canada in the Seventies, such as The Farm Show or Paper Wheat, the structure Paul Thompson said resembled a "Christmas Concert". It comprises many scenes on a few related themes in various theatrical styles and tones, some songs, and a good deal of direct address. Although some

serious issues are raised, the overall tone is light, and the spirit is primarily good-natured and humorous. In a recent performance I saw [a long time since the last rehearsal with their director] , the acting varied from very strong, clear, and professional, to poor community theatre mugging. The impact of the show is strong however, stemming from the excellence of the script, and the degree of performer identification with the material. It is very clear in watching a performance that the company is speaking out about its own concerns in a manner that it fully endorses. In a show about living well as a senior, the players' connexion to their own work rhymes loudly with the play's themes of empowerment through personal responsibility, activity, and mutual support.

Objectives

A major dillemma faced by those working in popular theatre is the "One Shot Syndrome". If theatre is to be used as a tool for community development, theatre projects must be linked to other on-going activities in the communities, and

they must be followed up. Often a theatre project takes place which encourages a group to feel more powerful and independent, only to end, leaving little or no lasting impact because the lessons learned in the one shot project needed further development, deeper analysis or simply more time.

The objective of this project is to literally take up where the Second Edition Players first project left off. This will involve capitalizing on the group's confidence gained in the first project, to facilitate deeper analysis of the issues that concern the group while improving its theatrical skills.

In the first phase of the project the primary objective is isolating the issues of greatest interest to the group and facillitating analysis of those issues. This is a process of discussion and theatrical exploration.

In the second phase of the project, the objective is to facillitate honest group criticism of the scenes written by Jane Heather. While this is partly a matter of dramaturgy, it

is also furthering analysis and deepening the examination of the issues.

In the third stage, the rehearsal period leading to performance, the objective is to clearly produce the play, in a manner that serves the play's audiences while stretching the participants' theatrical skills.

Challenges

The challenges for a director/animator are many. There is the matter of gaining the respect and confidence of a group that has successfully worked with another more experienced director/ animator before. There is also the challenge of working within a generational [and therefore cultural] gap.

Like any director, the director of this project is charged with creating a rehearsal environment in which participants feel comfortable taking risks. In the early stages of developing material for the play, it is incumbent on the director to allow the group to speak of its own concerns, while pushing it to risk dealing with those issues that may be easier to

avoid. In the first meetings with the group, a tension has become apparent. Virtually all members of the group express a desire to deal with certain serious, unhappy issues, on the one hand, while strongly desiring that their new show be funny, entertertaining and "positive" on the other. It is necessary to assure that the entertaining, funny aspects of the show can still be present while not short-circuiting the examination of the serious aspects of their concerns. This requires a fine line between leading the group along an agenda other than its own, and creating a situation in which it dares to follow the agenda that its members want to follow but fear.

This need to "really hear the group" also has implications for the workshopping of the script, as the director must create a situation in which the group really hears the script, really speaks to its strengths and weaknesses, and is really heard by director and writer alike.

In staging the play, the director will be challenged to do all the normal directorial jobs,

while coaching the best possible performances out of actors with some limits on their physical and vocal abilities due both to age and limited theatre experience. It will also be necessary to create staging solutions which are flexible so as to adapt to a variety of playing conditions, because the groups' venues change and its numbers fluctuate. The final product must also rely on only those props and set pieces which can be easily transported by the company.

Evaluation

This project must be evaluated in terms of whether the process allows the participants to address and analyze issues that concern them. The journal of the process will describe the progress of the project, its flexibility and receptiveness to participant imput, and its day-to-day operation.

As part of my preparation for the directing of this project, I will interview the participants during the first phase of the project. In order to assess the project, I will also interview the particpants at the end of the

process. This will be one aspect of the internal evaluation of the process we undergo.

Because the Second Edition Players accept performance requests from various kinds of organizations, it will be possible to assess the show's success in terms of the animation of its issues for various kinds of audiences. The project will not be considered complete from the point of view of my thesis until a number of kinds of audiences have had a chance to see the play.

Written Thesis

In addition to a written directorial analysis of the final performance text, the academic portion of the thesis will include research on the group, its earlier project, and issues relating to Seniors in Canada today. It will also include a survey of other pertinent popular theatre models and theory and a detailed journal of the project from start to finish.

Timeline

The script will be developed and workshopped between now and July of this year. The play will

be rehearsed and mounted in the Fall of 1990, and the production aspect will be complete when the show has been performed a representative number of times for each of the kinds of audiences mentioned above. The written material will be completed shortly thereafter.

3. the following is the "issues hand-out" distributed to the Second Edition Players by the author:

The issues

The following is a list of issues named by the group in our two earlier meetings. I have grouped those issues that seemed to easily fit under one heading together, and ordered the major groupings according to their popularity. Obviously nothing is set in stone at this stage, as Jane and I are here to collaborate with you as a group on

creating your show.

I would like to mention that Jane and I have clearly heard that the group would like to explore these issues seriously, and create a show which is at times funny and is overall entertaining and uplifting for the audience. It seems to me possible to be both serious and funny [even seriously funny] in the same show, especially in the kind of structure the previous show had [i.e. a collection of loosely connected scenes in different styles and tones].

I am very pleased to have been given this opportunity to work with 2nd Edition and I am excited to at last begin.

1. The Changing Family
   multiple families
   blended families
   senior's abuse
   family break-ups
   the generation gap
   overly protective kids
   the need for attention

2. Housing
   rent increases [and fixed incomes]
   sharing homes with non-relatives
   senior's homes
   granny suites/granny shacks

3. Technological Change
   fear

4. Senior's search for knowledge
   elder hostels
   university spring session

5. Advantages for seniors in Canada
   as compared to other countries [and other eras?]

6. Government forms and red tape

7. Health
   over prescription of drugs
   alcohol/drug dependency
   seniors with illnesses and disabilities
   Alzheimer's disease

8. Con artists

4. Heather, Jane, High Stakes, A Play About Teens and Risk, unpublished typescript, written in collaboration with the Sexsmith Secondary School Drama Class, produced by the South Peace AIDS Council, July, 1990 in Grande Prairie Alberta.

5. Nelson, Greg, Slow Zoom, unpublished typescript, produced by Canadian Bison Co-op, Edmonton Fringe Festival, 1990.

6. Odets.

CHAPTER TWO: A REFLECTIVE NARRATIVE OF THE TALENT FOR LIVING PROJECT

ii. Mounting the Show

1. The following is the "casting questionaire" distributed to the Second Edition Players by the author:

Casting Questionaire

The following is a list of all of the "larger" parts in Talent for Living. Please look them over, and think about who you would like to play.

If you could place a mark beside the names of the character you would most like to play like this: FAV. (for favourite), beside ones you would enjoy playing, if no one else is dying to play them like this: O.K. and ones you would hate to play, or would really rather not play, like this: N.O.Y.L. (for not on your life).

I will be able to work out some tentative casting plans for our next meeting. Please mark as many as you like (the more the better), and any that you do not mark will only be assigned to you with your permission.

ROY (the M.C.)

VERONICA
TRUDY } the "selection committee"
SUSAN

KATHY
} (sing opening song)
ARTHUR
HANNAH (recites technology poem)

HENRIETTA HEADLINTON (bank machine "huntress")

BANK MANAGER (male or female)

READER (m. or f.)

PIG #1,

PIG #2,

PIG #3,

PIGLET

BIG BAD WOLF

ANNE (woman who gets c[illegible]d)

MACK BLUFF

JACK BETTER

MUFFY (Mrs. Jorgensen)

GRIZ (Mrs. Griswold)

PERCY GOLIGHTLY

KYLA (little girl)

BABA (her grandmother)

MRS. BELANGER (the teacher)

2. Talent for Living, beginning on p.27

3. the verfremdungseffekt, which has been translated most commonly as the "alienation-effect", it has also been rendered the "estrangement-effect" or the "strange-making-effect". See Brecht, Brecht on Theatre, especially pp.143-145.

4. Odets.

5. Heather, Jane, No Time To Spare, the scenes in question are #3, "Getting Involved" p.17, and #6, "Sam Gets Off His Duff", p.31.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCLUSIONS
i. Roles

1. Salutin, Rick, & Theatre Passe Muraille, 1837: William Lyon Mackenzie and the Canadian Revolution [James Lorimer & Co.: Toronto] 1976.

2. Talent for Living, p. 53.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCLUSIONS
ii. The Talent for Living Project as Popular Theatre

1. Freire, Paulo, p. 100.