

**Plays That Make Policy
A Debwewin Journey Through Legislative Theatre**

By

Heather Majaury

**A Thesis
Presented to
The University of Guelph**

**In partial fulfilment of requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts
In
Theatre Studies**

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

© Heather Majaury, August, 2013

ABSTRACT

PLAYS THAT MAKE POLICY A DEBWEWIN JOURNEY THROUGH LEGISLATIVE THEATRE

Heather Majaury
University of Guelph, 2013

Advisor:
Professor Alan Filewod

Answering Augusto Boal’s call for further explorations of Legislative Theatre, this thesis asks how Canadian Legislative projects have contributed to our understanding of “theatre as politics” over and above the original Rio mandate. Utilizing a distinctly Anishinabe research methodology, I reflect upon my own practice as a Theatre of the Oppressed Joker from an Indigenous epistemological perspective. This thesis searches for how Legislative Theatre could be useful within the public education system, First Nations and Canadian state/settler relationships and negotiations, within municipal government, community-based organizations, and grassroots social justice initiatives. I conclude that Legislative Theatre is an innovative think tank methodology that potentially balances expert knowledge and experiential knowledge in respectful partnership. “Plays that make Policy” counter hegemonic forces using the performing arts. For Legislative Theatre to intervene successfully in law making it must empower citizenry to work with listening government. Therefore it requires cross-sectorial institutionalization to thrive.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to say *chi miigwetch* to my supervisor Alan Filewod who was both patient and enthusiastic about my work. I feel very privileged to have been nurtured and empowered to take on the challenge of scholarship and academic study of my artistic practice under his supervision. Thank you to Pat Flood for taking on second reading my work in the final hour. This thesis would not have been written without the generosity of time given by David Diamond, Simon Malbogot, Darren Thomas, and Joan Chandler who are all artists I respect because of their commitment to community well-being. I wish to thank the participants of the *Housing Project* who gave of their time so generously and who were willing to “play” with me to discover a deeper understanding of *Plays that Make Policy*: Talena Duplessis, Hope Engel, Michael Heitmann, Nada Humsi, D. Morton, Susan St. John, Tanya Williams, and Anneliese Kraehling. I am deeply indebted to Lynn Gehl who was able, through her scholarly work in Native Studies, to light a pathway for me to find a distinctly Indigenous methodology rooted in an Anishinabe epistemology. At this time in my *Jokering* practice this was of particular importance. I must thank my daughter Myrriah Xochilt Gomez-Majaury who has been the most patient person of all. It is never easy living with a graduate student just imagine if that student is your mother. Sacrifice has taken on new meaning for both of us I am certain. I would also like to thank my parents who have steadily given me encouragement all the way along. And finally to my dearest friends and community Elders and medicine people who believe in me when I don’t believe in myself. They offer good role-modeling, precious time, unconditional love, and practical assistance whenever possible. I am eternally grateful. I honour you. Without you I would never have made it this far: Christine Lefebvre, Melissa Ireland, Jill Lynch, Shandra Spears, Miroki Tong, Valerey Lavergne, Jean Becker, and Rob Baldwin. In professional circles I have to say *chi meegwetch* to both *MT Space* and *Pat the Dog Playwright Development Centre* for infusing Kitchener-Waterloo with artistic infrastructure that inspires. There are others too numerous to mention. It takes a village to raise an academic and mine is extraordinary.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
Hypothesis.....	11
CHAPTER ONE Methodology.....	17
CHAPTER TWO The Rio Experiment.....	30
CHAPTER THREE Canadian Projects	46
Headlines Theatre.....	47
Mixed Company.....	57
Sheatre.....	62
New Orators Youth Project.....	63
CHAPTER FOUR My Story.....	72
CHAPTER FIVE Reflecting Upon Experience.....	87
The Ride Is Right.....	88
Hey, Where’s Carley.....	90
Michel McDonald Defence Hearing.....	93
The Housing Project.....	97
CHAPTER SIX Conclusions – My Truths.....	109
Works Cited.....	115

Introduction

In 1992, Augusto Boal created a complex theatre devising system in Rio de Janeiro that built upon his well-known and well-used Theatre of the Oppressed method for creating interactive plays. This system developed new theatrical tools using the Forum theatre anti-model in conjunction with “specifically parliamentary applications” (*Legislative Theatre* 5). This new system was named Legislative Theatre because it generated discourse through theatrical means, which proposed and created municipal law. Early in Boal’s theoretical discussions of the Theatre of the Oppressed we can see the germination of his ideas about theatrical practice intervening directly in the legislative process. He discusses the legislator’s *virtue* as being the ability to make perfect laws. He proclaims that “the highest good is the political one, and the political good is justice!” (*Theatre of the Oppressed* 21).

This thesis answers Boal's call for further explorations of Legislative Theatre. It asks how Canadian Legislative projects have contributed to our understanding of the use of “theatre as politics” over and above the original Rio mandate from 1992 to 1996. I also explore questions around practice through my own experiments as a *Joker* as part of my research methodology. A Joker is an artist that provides a specific hybrid function, when creating a forum anti-model. This function includes dramaturgy, direction, and forum facilitation between stage and audience. My reflections communicate a specifically *Anishinaabe* way of knowing described as the *Debwewin* Journey which I will explain further when I describe the methodology used to shape and inform my investigations.

In these experiments I have attempted to understand how creating the Forum itself facilitates empowered knowledge sharing and more truthful dialogue. I discuss the theatre as embodying a holistic approach to data gathering that innovates the law-making process. I then ask what can be done from here.

For a brief time, the Rio experiment using “theatre as politics” flourished, in a large Brazilian metropolitan centre as a creative response to the need for more effective and democratic governance. It

promoted the concept of “transitive or practiced/performed” democracy by devising Forum “anti-models” within several different neighbourhoods. The Forum anti-model is a specific play structure that represents a social problem where the protagonist of the play falters and fails to reach his/her goal. Audience members, who feel compelled, take the stage to replace the role of the protagonist. They then improvise other strategies for potential success. The Forums, in conjunction with law-crafting sessions called “Chamber in the Square”, facilitated citizens to draft laws. The Chamber in the Square is a specific form of consultation tied to the Legislative Forum where new laws are drafted and can be as Boal describes, a way to resolve local problems (*Legislative Theatre* 92). Boal states that these sessions can happen “anywhere at anytime” and it is that process that creates a synthesis for recommendation (92–94). These sessions were advertised and supported by an information dissemination system called the Interactive Mailing List. This list enabled more inclusive democratic participation of the general citizenry. These lists are easily facilitated today through various applications of email and social media.

Boal exclaims,

THEATRE cannot be imprisoned inside theatrical buildings, just as religion cannot be imprisoned inside churches; the language of theatre and its forms of expression cannot be the private property of actors, just as religious practice cannot be appropriated by priests and theirs alone! (*Legislative Theatre* 19).

To further extend Boal’s hyperbole, this thesis affirms that the LEGISLATURE should not be imprisoned inside municipal or government buildings either. Its procedures should not be hidden behind closed doors. Access or understanding, by the general public, should not be obfuscated by the practices or jargon of experts. Think tanks that inform legislatures are not balanced in their advice if they only consider and disseminate the musings and speculations of exclusive round tables with no platform created for dialogue or contact with the wisdom of lived experience, especially experience

shared by those living and working at the point of impact of any law or policy.

All forms of communication have their limitations. The written form does not always express emotions. I can tell you something has impacted me in a negative way but if I show you *how* it has done so there is a higher opportunity for mutual understanding. If you are given an opportunity to actually physically embody what I have shown you, your sensitivity to the impact of my circumstances is increased significantly because you are now sharing a sensory experience of a specific location in social and physical space.

There is a popular Native American proverb that speaks to the ethics of experiential knowing. It warns “Walk a mile in another man’s moccasins before you criticize him” (Krznaric). This kind of understanding is crucial to building a more empathetic and humble society capable of greater inclusion when conducting its law-making rituals. Forum theatre allows the body to speak, as much as the word or the written report. It does not replace these other ways of communicating: it simply augments them. Thus challenging their superiority as the only valid source information illuminating decision-making. The presence of the physical body, carrying emotional weight and energetic drive, can sometimes provide crystal clarity about cause, impact, and location that is simply lost in either oral or written forms of the same information.

When considering how we all learn and retain knowledge, whether we are street cleaners or board CEO’s, consider the wisdom of Confucius: “I hear I forget, I see I remember, I do I understand” (*Brainy Quote*). The Forum takes knowledge gathering into the realm of doing. therefore increasing our mutual capacity for better understanding across difference. The body holds knowledge not easily articulated by the word alone, which is just as revealing and just as important.

Coming into play, as a function of a democratized social structure, is the concept of the “rule of

law.”¹ Legislative Theatre seeks to intervene directly into the designing of our agreements that structure our relationships. The assumption underlying this impetus is that obeying the rule of law is more likely if those ruled by it have created it.

The Theatre of the Oppressed, therefore, transforms itself from functioning as only a “rehearsal for revolution”² to becoming an actual technology of transformation. The Legislative Theatre is concerned with engaging citizenry in law-making, and/or legal reform, through using aesthetic space and theatrical language to transmit perceptions of injustice, messages of impact, and assertions of desire. The Legislative Theatre is not just informing lawmakers of a community’s desires: it elevates citizens to “experiential experts” crucial to the process of researching and making laws. Attending or creating a Legislative Theatre session is explicitly about learning the laws and systems that oppress us. A Legislative Theatre project takes this process further by suggesting that we each hold the power to reform or create the law itself. What we must discover is how to do that successfully and in tandem with others. Legal change is rarely the outcome of one individual’s efforts.

The goal for such a process can be one of achieving justice where justice does not yet exist. Or it can simply be to achieve standards of social regulation that are deemed fair, constructive, and are therefore not punitive but restorative in their goals. This stems from a moral belief that law should be made and grounded in the realities of those most effected. The law should not be a dehumanizing force in governance but a means by which our humanity is protected and realized. Legislative Theatre is a humanizing force in the pursuit of that ideal. Understanding the impact of a crime, unjust law, or a negligent system on its victim and discovering what a law could have done to prevent dehumanization

¹ Aristotle explained the rule of law as a function of securing democratic practice by stating, “It is more proper that law should govern than any one of the citizens: upon the same principle, if it is advantageous to place the supreme power in some particular persons, they should be appointed to be only guardians, and the servants of the laws (“Rule of Law” *Wikipedia*. Web).

² Boal has claimed ever since the creation of the Forum theatre that Forum functions as a rehearsal for revolution in that it allows *spectators* to try out strategies for actions they might take in real life in the safe arena of the stage as if it is a rehearsal for the real thing.

is important fiscally as well as morally. The economic liabilities that are the result of dehumanizing vulnerable people often exceed the costs of humane treatment.

The rule of law and the systems that enforce it are insufficient when they fail to protect the most vulnerable members of the society being regulated from abuse or exploitation. Quite often laws are created by those who have been empowered to make them and not necessarily in adequate or respectful consultation with those who must live with their outcomes. Such outcomes include social exclusion with harsh penalties for non-compliance. Therefore, the “rule of law” itself can become a system of oppression for some groups while for others it provides a means to achieve further privileges. Moreover, the legal system runs a real risk of perpetuating an unjust social order that violates fundamental human rights. Any groups, including municipal corporations, can create unjust circumstances when they create by-laws, policies, and procedures that lack adequate and thorough consultation. This is often the case where social orders have been formed through colonial contexts. Therefore, Legislative Theatre may be employed as a means to assist in the on-going process of decolonization, cultural restoration, and the realization of self-determination. Facilitated embodied learning and expression should be an operating principal of democratized social design and decision-making.

After Boal's four-year experiment in Rio de Janeiro, other Legislative Theatre projects, with the caveat distinction “without the legislature”, emerged in other Brazilian communities, as well as in Europe and Canada. I have focused my research and analysis on specifically Canadian contexts. These Canadian projects do not replicate the original Rio experiment. The original experiment is distinguished because it employed “Jokers” and deployed them as cultural animators throughout the city of Rio de Janeiro. This to my knowledge has never occurred within a Canadian municipality. Although Canada does not experience the same widespread violence and abject poverty to the same scale as Brazil, generally there can still be found situations of inequity that reveal an unjust society. Lib

Spry supports this by articulating her view of Canadian power structures.

All the power structures that allow the third-world reality to be maintained so that the first world may enjoy its standard of living can be found in our society. The “isms” abound in Canada; sexism, racism, chauvinism, heterosexism, ageism, classism; they all exist in our daily relationships. While most of us can and do exercise some choice in our lives, we are all part of power relationships that allow dominating and exploitative structures to maintain the status quo (173).

Therefore, Theatre of the Oppressed is as valid a liberation research technology within Canadian borders as it is within Latin America or other countries that are deemed Third World.

A Legislative Theatre project embedded within a Canadian Municipality could prove very fruitful in transforming the *way* we expect and desire laws to be created in our own communities. As is demonstrated by science’s Chaos theory, a small change in initial conditions can result in vast differences in final outcomes. There is no way to predict the outcome of any Legislative Theatre project but that does not mean it is not worth doing. The possibility for participation to inspire active citizen engagement that confronts chronic apathy is justification enough.

The Canadian projects I am including in this thesis approach goals and outcomes related in some way to Boal’s original objectives. However, they do not achieve the same structures that were woven directly into wider municipal management. My personal ability to conduct comprehensive community outreach was very limited. However, by simply inviting participants to workshops via email, various doors began to open and my expectations were exceeded. The project did however predictably not maintain enough stamina to create an adapted version of the Chamber in the Square compatible with the deadlines for this thesis. The assembled group overcame several obstacles and are still committed to completion of the project beyond the scope of this research. This will to continue indicates the power of the work to constitute and develop community.

The original Rio mandate deployed Jokers as government sanctioned cultural workers. All of the projects I include in this thesis are the result of Jokers acting independently with associated theatre companies often drawing their financial support from cultural funding schemes and their own entrepreneurial tenacity. One project I have included actually pre-dates the Brazilian experiment so it is technically not a Legislative Theatre project proper. The name had not been coined yet so it was not adequately theorized into existence. This early show in Canada demonstrates that independent Jokers were making the necessary and logical links between the power of the Forum and its relationship to law-making. Two of the theatre production companies cultivated relationships of cooperation with large metropolitan government. Both of these cities are comparable to Rio de Janeiro as large urban centres but they did not achieve multiple nuclei. Nor was support for either project embraced as their city council's mandates. Thus they remained characterized as primarily alternative theatre anomalies rather than instituted social planning innovations.

The final case study included in this thesis discusses a mentoring project with First Nations that utilized drama to train and encourage youth leadership. These performances fostered a direct communication between citizenry and elected officials but these interventions were not consciously or structurally Forums: however, the process did set up dialogue for change with some tangible results because it asked participants to communicate to reserve leadership what change they wanted to see in their communities. The participants were empowered through performance training to express their heartfelt desires to both their band councils and service agencies in their communities. They were themselves constructed, through the act of performance, as live proposals.

As part of my research I created my own micro-inquiries by conducting laboratories in the community where I live. I also accepted invitations to work with other groups on two different occasions. Not all of these experiments were Legislative in focus but they elucidated questions of process and politics within the devising process of Forum theatre and how it relates to the more

complex Legislative form. From these experiments I was able to ask *what* would need to occur for any of these projects to become Legislative.

The projects ranged from organizational and educational to a strictly grass roots workshop exploration. The first project used Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to build scenes for a fundraising event that brought the staff and residents of an independent living complex together to raise money for a mobility van. This project contained certain scenes that could have been transformed into and performed and facilitated as Forum anti-models. Through discussions linked to these scenes casual observations about policy constraints and contradictions did happen. These casual conversations suggested that the scenes were one step away from being effective Forums.

I then worked on a commissioned educational project that used Forums to explore teen sexting/bullying. While the project achieved a Forum anti-model that was very successful in its ability to incite intervention it did not make law. I did see the potential for a full legislative project if teachers, principals, and enough practical resources could support taking this project one step further into a legislative context. I could vision a cross-curriculum design linking dramatic arts, social studies, and law classes together where a Forum could be presented in a school-wide Chamber in the Square session prepped in advance by creating and maintaining an interactive mailing list that could easily be set up with blogging software to prepare students for the session.

The purpose of the Theatre of the Oppressed is to take what we learn through role-play into our real lives. During my work on this thesis I was confronted with a legal hearing concerning my family's enrolment in a land claim where we were required to defend our place on the voters list. Through my continuing understanding of the power of live performance we defended our family's oral tradition as a legitimate way of knowing. Inside this legal proceeding I was able to put my Jokering and performance skills to use in the service of my family. This I found to be very satisfying. Through performance and other devising techniques we successfully defended our claim and called into question prevailing legal

biases that have historically obfuscated our legal Indigenous identity in Canada. Kelly Britt Howe, when referring to the Legislative Forum, suggests “each production differently constructs performance as a ‘think tank’ epistemology – an embodied way of building and transferring knowledge about legislation” (x). This occurred during this hearing subtly and implicitly. Our family prepared our materials and our testimonials in the same way you would prepare for a Forum. I took on the role of presenter and called family members to speak and share relevant oral history. The presentation was dynamic enough that it encouraged others to also speak on our behalf. There was a spirit of intervention in the room that resulted in a successful outcome for us. But much larger questions remain regarding comprehensive land claims and how that process needs to be democratized in a manner that is truly respectful to all Algonquin people.

Finally, I culminated this study with a once a week laboratory called *The Housing Project* where I assembled community volunteers to create a Forum play that would make a policy using the specific elements that constitute Legislative theatre. These included the creation of a Forum that was intended to evolve into a community-based equivalent of a Chamber in the Square session. The goal was to invite an audience through our collective networks and support their participation using an interactive mailing list. This was not achieved, but the group agreed to continue beyond the first six sessions, which was their official obligation, to see how far we could get. We were able to construct a Forum anti-model from those sessions that set up several possible focuses on various laws at three levels of government. Where the project ended is also its possible beginning.

I did build relationships with discipline experts that are curious to experience a Chamber in the Square session. I remain hopeful that we will get there. My experiments attempted to answer the following questions. Can individual curiosity, or a feeling of urgency, be enough to activate theatrical inquiry? Can such inquiry lead to a legislative project that will make a difference and be taken seriously beyond the single nucleus that is formed and the specific nature of one Forum presentation?

How does a Joker ensure that a project *makes* a difference? Is that even a Joker's responsibility? How do we define success? What does making a difference mean? Augusto Boal, quoted by scholar Britt Howe warns, "the subjunctive will only take political organizing so far. Believing that changes in law can happen is important, yet so is figuring out how to turn potential into reality..." (195).

Must there always be an *invitation* that brings the Joker in or can the Joker be a project initiator inviting others? How do you keep the work generating possibilities beyond the confines of Canada's professionalized theatre community while asserting that Theatre of the Oppressed is a legitimate theatre practice as well as a ground-breaking innovation in think tank methodology? Is Legislative Theatre *for* the Oppressed or *of* the Oppressed? It is possible that the practice itself holds both locations simultaneously like a subatomic particle inhabiting two locations inside its quantum universe. Boal himself clarified that his theatre has been inaccurately named and if he had the opportunity he would have renamed it the "Theatre of Liberation" (qtd. in *Playing Boal* Spry 174). This active principal of liberation is a much preferred framing. This framing releases it from the confines of superficial identity politics, which is important to consider if the practice is to be taken seriously outside of its own disciplinary confines. Otherwise, the practice itself is stigmatized before you even start.

As Boal aptly states when explaining the history of Theatre of the Oppressed in his book *Legislative Theatre*, "sometimes the oppression is actually rooted within the law. In the latter case, to bring about the desired change would require a transformation or redrafting of the law: legislation" (10). *Ergo*, the Legislative Theatre takes the impetus toward changing practical reality and through the collective drafting of laws redrafts the boundary of the performance beyond the performance.

Devising Forum theatre can help any group identify oppression that is manifesting systemically through the legal regimes of practice that uphold hegemonic ideological state apparatuses as first described by Louis Althusser, and find the gaps in policy that might make a difference. Althusser describes the need for such social orders or systems to reproduce submission to the rules of the

established order (88). Forum Theatre identifies specific people operating as antagonists or oppressors in our social relationships and helps us to identify those who may become potential allies to our cause. These people themselves do not function outside of the structures of ideological state apparatuses but are themselves agents of these operating systems of social control. These apparatuses function inside a larger organic system of human relationships that enact the living organism metaphor associated with systems theory and well described in David Diamond's Theatre for Living, where he talks about the "patterns of relationships that creates the structures" (46).

Boal also challenges the authority of the law-maker by stating that "the legislator should not be the person who makes the law, but the person through whom the law is made (by the citizens, of course!)" (Legislative Theatre 10). Augusto encouraged the Forum theatre spectator to exercise his/her "theatrical citizenship" (10). Therefore my inquiries ask how does Legislative Theatre function without the legislature and how do we perform "theatrical citizenship?" Should it function without the legislature? What do we mean by the legislature? What is a theatrical citizen? According to the Theatre and Citizenship scholar David Wiles, "citizenship addresses the fundamental problem of cohabitation" (2). What is considered democratic? Wiles states "in a world of media manipulation and personality politics there is no space for any serious public engagement with moral issues" (2). It is therefore left to each citizen or citizen group to create that space and assert such dialogue. Legislative Theatre is one way to take back public space as a space for engagement of deliberate self-governance. And to what extent could practicing Legislative Theatre transform ideological state apparatuses? How does Legislative Theatre tap into political power and use it?

Hypothesis

Legislative Theatre is "Forum Theatre +". It innovates law-making through creating various performance "nuclei" (Boal's terms for theatre troupes) in conjunction with a legislative system. As a more complex community animating system, based upon the Theatre of the Oppressed arsenal of

games, exercises, and performance structures, it uses the Forum as the core tool for community consultation. There are two important components of the Legislative Theatre that move its practice out of the realm of theatre and into the realm of making law. These two additions to the Forum event are “The Chamber in the Square” and the “Interactive Mailing List.” The Chamber in the Square also requires the participation of certain discipline experts. These experts include lawyers and scribes. A lawyer advises on proper language and definitions while the scribe transcribes the key interventions of the Forum during the Chamber event. S/he produces the written material that informs and justifies the final legal proposal.

Paulo Freire states, “Our historical inclination is not fate, but rather possibility” (*Pedagogy of the Heart* 100). This democratizing of both the theatre workshop space and the law-making chamber creates a consciously constructed hybrid arena that emphasizes a Freirian impetus toward hopeful action that generates possibility. Such emphasis inspires innovation in the way we structure and regulate our social relationships. It counters the phenomenon of fatalism that is the fallout of experienced repression. This democratized space is designed to research actual circumstances of injustice, or voids in adequate governing policy, not to reaffirm oppression as a natural state but to call its existence into question as acceptable reality. The process taps into the power of a community’s true desire for social change.

Moreover the Forum play extends beyond the established Canadian theatre’s focus and support of commercial and high art traditions. The Forum play refuses to propagate mindless capitalist ideology or reaffirm an inherent rule of colonial upper classes. The Forum establishes a creative mode for social planning that engages effective and dynamic cross-sectorial communication. It utilizes the dramatic arts as a community animator to clarify our understanding of circumstances as they exist for people who are experiencing the impact of various social policies or lack thereof.

Forum theatre enacts meaningful ritual that engages citizens in collective social design where feeling, doing, and thinking are valued in tandem to create a research methodology that is greater than

its sum parts. In this way it is a wholistic approach to decision making. This wholism is related to both Indigenous epistemologies and radical theories of critical pedagogy and I borrow from both to elucidate my own practice and thinking. The Forum travels out of the theatre realm into other systems of social organizing. It is informed by and informs systems theory. Systems theory describes complex human relationships beyond the political analysis of power elucidated by social theorists such as Gramsci, Althusser, and Foucault, who are decidedly Marxist in origin, taking discussions into the realm of physics and biology – hard sciences that affirm that chaos theory allows for the reality that potential large outcomes, that are for the most part unpredictable, can come from seemingly small actions.

Legislative Theatre, if adapted for circumstances beyond large metropolitan governing structures, can be an effective and innovative way to affect legal changes in organizations, institutions, or municipalities with the adequate supports in place to allow Jokers to do their jobs, not as gurus that deploy the magical fairy dust of theatre, but as trained cultural workers committed to the tools of dramatic arts that forge pragmatic tangible social change. I am focusing my conjecture on the potential for Legislative Theatre to be embedded in small municipalities or organizational bureaucracies as a social innovation to law-making. With the appropriate community outreach there is no need for such an initiative to be marginalized or discounted as simply “activist” or “positional”. It can be introduced as social innovation.

The work itself needs to be informed, however, by a moral acumen of achieving just and healthy relationships between human beings. Good decision making is supported by engagement with and respect for all knowledges. To genuinely practice committed democracy lawmakers must engage expert knowledge and experiential knowledge intellectually, physically, emotionally, and socially. Legislative Theatre, unlike other Theatre of the Oppressed modalities, is not effective as a one-off performance. It is itself a system that thrives on exchange. It is complex, cross-disciplinary, and its benefits are cumulative over time. This is why it needs institutionalized support. If Legislative Forums

are not embraced by the municipal system, they are reduced to being perceived as simply a quirky, albeit creative, lobbying effort. Therefore, they have not adequately penetrated the ideological state apparatus and transformed it in anyway. The Legislative Theatre assumes that all people, if and when given skills of the theatre, which are in essence the skills of being and acting human, can participate effectively in their own self-governance.

I do not think that setting up such an experiment needs to depend upon the election of an advocate into council office. It worked once. But it is agreed that it was an accident arising from a particular moment in the history of Rio de Janeiro where it is acknowledged that winning was not the intent. It became a great opportunity to take Forum theatre to a different level of interaction with organized society but it was also an event dependent upon the cult of personality that helped bring Augusto Boal to power in City Council. The critical incident itself is responsible for the subjunctive moods present in that particular state apparatus. Therefore, it is worth further study and experimentation to see if a Legislative Theatre project could be embedded in a municipal government without a council election being required as the precursor for the relationship to be solidified.

What is important about Legislative Theatre, versus other Theatre of the Oppressed processes, is that it must be the means by which “the citizen makes the law through the legislator” (Boal, *Legislative Theatre Cover*): therefore, it must relate with legislators and gain a form of working trust. If it is defined by partisan affiliations it cannot effectively bring the widest range of experience to any think tank. It must achieve a true arm’s-length position within the legal apparatus of an organization or community. It fills a gap in think tank methodologies because it is committed to embodied research that values experiential knowledge that advocates human rights first.

This hypothesis asserts that Theatre of the Oppressed, as a methodology in community-based research achieves consultation with integrity. Under supportive circumstances it can do more than simply provide a report. It ensures equality of participation by privileging orality and getting beyond

limiting spoken or written language when deeper perspectives are sought. It frames expertise beyond the boundaries of disciplines to include lived experience. Democratizing research also means liberating the body and the senses to make them equal to the mind. Valuing all intelligences does not devalue the intellect: it simply augments its capability to make good decisions.

Legislative Theatre acts as a community development catalyst by bringing divergent groups in a problem-solving context. The commitment to democratic practice incorporates instantaneous feedback loops. Its roots in critical pedagogy mean cultivating sharing flow between participants as equals. This challenges paternalism. The complete exercise of Legislative Theatre is informed by a holistic understanding of human relationships as complex and multi-faceted. *Ergo* the creation of laws that guide our relationships and behavior must also be explored and researched from a multitude of angles, lenses, and impacts before being instituted if our society is committed to being democratic. In light of these circumstances I posit that the best opportunity for an experiment that replicates the Rio experiment most fully would likely be reached in a small municipality where the distance between elected office, civic bureaucracy, and grass roots citizenry is much shorter than in larger metropolises where layers of systems create significant distance between government and people.

As discussed in Augusto Boal's book by the same name, Legislative Theatre was first and foremost an experiment in the potential of theatre to affect social change (Introduction). Using theatre as politics is still, for the most part, theoretical. Sporadic experiments emerge from time to time but there does not seem to be any initiative that is sustainable, or integrated within local governments, on an ongoing basis. There is no doubt the Legislative Theatre experiment needs to be adapted to serve Canadian communities and our diverse populations. Although participation in Legislative Theatre seems to offer benefits to individuals who participate regardless of larger law-making outcomes there are barriers that need to be overcome to develop effective Legislative Theatre initiatives in Canada. I posit that a Legislative Theatre project has the best possibility of sustained success if carried out in a smaller Canadian municipality, like a town of 10,000 people or less, or perhaps a reserve village under

the Indian Act. This hypothesis remains a theory informed by experience gained from *The Housing Project* experiment, the Canadian Case Studies, my literature review, and personal reflection of my own journey as a Theatre of the Oppressed Joker, single parent and arts worker herself grappling with issues associated with poverty and as an Aboriginal woman involved in ongoing land claim negotiations.

Legislative Theatre is the antithesis of the rational, detached model of knowledge production. By its very nature, Legislative Theatre attaches the breathing, emotionally rich (far from detached) body to the function of the think tank. It suggests people's everyday lives install expertise in their bodies even as it also deconstructs hegemonic notions of expertise (Britt Howe 21).

Chapter One

Methodology

Gabaadate Eey Wassiuk ndisinikaaz. Addik ndodem. Algonquin Omamawinini Anishinabekwe ndaaw. Ompah doonjaba. Kitchener-Waterloo endaayon nongwa. I have just told you in *Anishinabemowin* that my spirit name is Bringer of Light. I am an Algonquin woman and I am related to the Reindeer. My Anishinabe family originally comes from the country around Ompah: a small village in the Ottawa Valley. Ompah means “long portage” in the Algonquin language. I grew up outside of Perth Ontario. I now live outside my traditional territory in Kitchener-Waterloo. It is important that you know who I am so we can build trust in whatever initiatives or projects we are called to work together on. Part of my methodology includes asserting the spiritual power of the *dibajimowinan* (the telling of our personal stories as a means of gathering relevant background and knowledge).

We gotta humble ourselves in the eyes of our children, we gotta bend down low. We gotta humble ourselves in the eyes of our children. We gotta know what they know. We can raise each other up, higher and higher. We can raise each other up.

This is a Hand Drum song, sung in English, that I first learned when I started picking up my Indigenous culture. I was taught the song in Algonquin Territory at Elder William Commanda’s home at a large healing gathering he generously held for all people called the “Circle of All Nations.” The song was taught to me by a woman who conducted sweat lodges for other women. She described herself as a Mohawk woman with Algonquin teachings. I was an Algonquin woman with English teachings. I was on a long journey home. It seems that no matter what nation I am visiting or what social gathering I attend sooner or later I hear this song and I still sing along.

I owe much of my own insights to Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg epistemology. It definitely informs my world-view and many of the choices I make in how I choose to work with Theatre. I

struggle with Western separations of disciplines. My choices are not always as explicit as my colleagues who have taken a direct route of learning within the newly formed academic disciplines of native studies. Most of my academic learning has taken place within mainstream western traditions but my commitment to showing respect for traditional ways of knowing that guide me in the pursuit of what is called the *mino bimaadiwizin* (good life) is strong. My own continuing life journey as a woman seeking decolonizing strategies informed my choice of topic for this thesis, the inquiries I have made, and the good things I think should be shared. It is easy to become lost inside western institutions of academia. It is easy to become lost in the western estate of theatre. It is easy to become lost inside the structures of colonial state apparatuses whether they are repressive or ideological. I am sharing these stories in an attempt to not become lost in the study of a western form of theatre that I believe is however an Indigenous theatre creator's and social justice activist's best friend.

Prior to attending the "Circle of All Nations" I had worked for the Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn comprehensive claim negotiations. I worked as the communications officer with the Chief Negotiator for the Algonquin side of the negotiations. It was a devastating experience confronting what I would come to learn are ideological state apparatuses fulfilling the unfinished work of previous colonizers. Feeling the dis-ease from the contradictions that exist inside these negotiations, I needed to heal. It was during this time that I heard about Victoria Island. As the years have gone by I have come to understand its location in Algonquin Territory and in Canada. There is an ongoing proposal for a Healing and Peace Building Centre there. Preliminary ideas for the focus of such a centre include anti-racism and nation-to-nation peace building. (Commanda, *A Vision for Victoria Island*). It is an inspiring vision. It motivates my ongoing search for how justice is achieved and peace made in a complex world of unequal relationships. Therefore, I have this niggling curiosity about the potential of Legislative Theatre to re-humanize the ways we make laws and to positively inform the ways we make

our agreements between people, communities, and nations throughout the world.

The hopeful vision that pulses through the spirit of the Victoria Island initiative awaits concrete manifestation. This waiting motivates my academic work on the topic of Legislative Theatre. If ever that building is built and its programs realized I want to be ready with the most well thought-out Legislative Theatre program imaginable. But there is no need to wait. Social transformation is not contained in buildings: it is born inside the hearts and minds of people. Opportunities for the exploration of this way of doing theatre and using it to make law are everywhere and multiple. Each inquiry, each experiment, each project builds upon the last. Something new is learned and something new is brought into the world each time. But should Victoria Island be realized and should I ever have the privilege to conduct a Chamber in the Square session at that location I will truly feel that I have come home.

William Commanda, like Augusto Boal, has now passed away and I feel this ongoing need to continue what these men started. I respected them both as great peace-makers who continue to light the way for my own continuing discovery and hope. What that really means remains to be revealed. It is my starting point for articulating my choices of methodology in my search for further understanding of Legislative Theatre and its potential as a social law-making innovation.

The methodology I am employing for this thesis is the devising process of Forum theatre itself and the use of actual experiments with the process. I have been keeping a journal of observations and reflections that constitute the recording of my own Debwewin Journey that will yield a synthesized theoretical and personal truth about this journey as it evolved. The concept of the Debwewin Journey is an Indigenous research methodology articulated by Anishinabeg scholar Lynn Gehl. She describes the Debwewin Journey as a “wholistic way of knowing that involves both heart-knowledge and mind-knowledge working together” (ii). There have been several occasions in my past where I simply knew in my heart that Legislative Theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed should work as an alliance

technology facilitating state and community desires to decolonize in a constructive and healthy manner.

In my heart of hearts I truly believe that animating communities through theatre to inform think tank processes can help create legal relationships between communities and the state that are more humane and just. Legislative Theatre is an innovation to law-making that re-humanizes the dehumanized as its core ethic. It opens doors to ideas rather than closing them. It asks “Why not?” when others ask “Why?”

I am an Aboriginal woman of Algonquin-metis and British/Scottish/Irish ancestry. Therefore, when I reflect upon my own experiences as a practicing Theatre of the Oppressed Joker, I am not able to separate my minoritized social location, cultural identity and heritage from my choices as a Theatre of the Oppressed “difficultator.” (Difficultator being Boal’s preferred term for the role of the Joker over the often and popularly used “facilitator.”) I bring with me my personal and professional history, my social and political location, which also defines my material circumstances, and my own challenges and biases. My location informs the way I perceive my experience. My subjective experience constitutes a form of knowing that works with other ways of knowing to generate as complete a picture as possible of what I may contribute to this conversation about Legislative Theatre.

The act of performance is not solely a western invention born inside a Greek amphitheatre. Boal himself attributes the birth of the theatre to a pre-human entity created by the Chinese. Her name is Xua Xua. The story of Xua Xua shared in Games for Actors and Non-Actors extends perceptions of theatre to be much broader than the traditions that have evolved through European practice. From my own Anishinabe teachings I understand that dramatic performances were an intricate part of our society well before explorer’s ships deposited western theatre onto our river banks, of course culminating in a tent stage in the small town of Stratford, Ontario as the pinnacle of Canada’s high performing art scene. Basil Johnson’s story of Pukawiss, a travelling dancer and entertainer who is also Nanabush’s brother, confirms what I already know: that the tools of drama, and the right to play belong to everyone. They

are as connected to the knowledge of the Manitous as they are to the Gods of the Greeks. The technology of drama itself adapts, migrates, and mutates. It is as informed by non-western traditions as it is by the proscenium stage and its fourth wall that Boal happened to obliterate with his invention of the spectator.

Being Anishinabekwe I am informed by a moral code known as the Seven Grandfather Teachings. These teachings have been written down and published by Edward Benton-Banai but they exist throughout Anishinabe society as a set of teachings about human conduct. These teachings form an ethical code to live by. This is comparable to the Ten Commandments or the seven laws of Noah in the Judeo-Christian tradition. These principals to live by as reflected in Benton-Banai's writing are as follows,

To cherish knowledge is to know wisdom. To know love is to know peace. To honour all of the creation is to have respect. Bravery is to face the foe with integrity. Honesty in facing a situation is to be brave. Humility is to know yourself as a sacred part of creation. Truth is know all of these things (64).

I employ this code within my analysis of process and within my own practice of experimentation as a Theatre of the Oppressed Joker.

As a descendent of original peoples who did not historically register with the Canadian state as colonized Indians I know that the law is not a fixed concept nor is it my friend. The law is not synonymous with truth. It is a means of social control that reflects and forms relationships. Sometimes these relationships are brokered through respectful and honourable means and the law reflects solid agreements that reach compromise and are fair to all parties. At other times laws are forged through colonial and patriarchal domination that serve purely capitalistic exploitive goals. They are gender, race, and class biased and they ignore or actually target and harm the most vulnerable members of our society. Within this context the law is a tool used for hegemonic purposes.

It is however not a force to be ignored as it wields much impact on our lives. It is in facing the law from an empowered place of creativity that hope is restored as a possibility. Ignorance of or denial of the laws that are used to exploit or to dominate also often keep Canadian settlers and Indigenous people from understanding and accepting the reality of the actual circumstances of how they have achieved their privilege or marginalization within contemporary society. It does not allow them the opportunity to change the way they do things. Without this knowledge, misinformation abounds and unequal relationships are maintained that allow for further exploitations of all.

According to the cultural and language website Noongwa e-Anishinaabemjig “each Grandfather Teaching is a gift the Anishinaabeg carry....Our understanding is that as we use these gifts our experience of living improves. Using these gifts in our lives is an ongoing challenge for each of us, requiring attention, discipline and perseverance” (Sheldon). If there were opportunities for creating Legislative Theatre within the context of Anishinabeg relationships to the Canadian State, the Seven Grandfather Teachings can play a central role in guiding both play devising processes and the facilitation of the Forums that inform Chamber in the Square sessions. As a Theatre of the Oppressed Joker who is myself a First Nations woman, the Seven Grandfathers act as a culturally-based framework for analysis of outcomes that empower me in a culturally specific way when I contemplate my process of Joker facilitation.

The Seven Grandfathers teachings are composed of seven key words. These words are adverbs, not nouns. They describe actions to be performed, not nouns that label sedentary objects. I apply them to my “Joking” praxis as a means to move myself and the work forward to reach new goals that are consistent with the achievement of *mino bimaadiwizin*, not just for myself but for all of the people I work with. They form benchmarks that allow me to accurately assess my own motives and establish what I consider to be worthy goals. I can then ask myself did this workshop or process achieve these goals, and if so, how? Did my actions and choices reflect commitments to these adverbs and if so were

the results consistent with these ways of approaching life and the work? If not what can be done the next time to be more consistent with the teachings? The words that form the Seven Grandfather teachings are truth, love, bravery, humility, wisdom, honesty, and respect. When considering these words within the context of building theatre that is a “rehearsal for revolution,” *ergo* a means by which to change the social circumstances we are living in that could impact the laws we interact with, I am asking what is my truth about Legislative Theatre overall? What knowledge will lead to wisdom that can be shared about this process? How do we achieve humility and respect within our praxis? What constitutes bravery in what circumstances and by whom? How do we make the action of creating Legislative Theatre truly an action of love?

I use particular social and performance theories to investigate both the past projects and my own experiments comparing and contrasting these efforts with the original Rio Experiment. I am drawing from several theoretical frameworks in my analysis of my experiences and the experiences of other Jokers. These theories include materialism, modernism, post-modernism, liberation theology, critical pedagogy, systems theory, chaos theory, contemporary performance theory and participatory community research. I have drawn from disciplines outside of theatre studies to make links between Indigenous epistemology and critical pedagogy to assess my own learning journey. All of these worldviews inform various choices in dramaturgy, facilitation, and analysis.

From performance and theatre studies I am drawing from the scholarly work of Alan Filewod, Julie Salverson, Kelly Britt Howe, Jan Cohen-Cruz, and Philip Auslander, and I am particularly focused on the work of Theatre of the Oppressed practitioners including Lib Spry, Simon Malbogot, David Diamond, Joan Chandler, and community psychologist Darren Thomas who are also the specific artists who created the projects that are case studies in this research.

I am a theatre creator who was inspired by Boal’s recollections of his term in office as a “vereador” – the equivalent to a city councillor in Canada – and his application of Forum theatre as a

tool for consultation in the law-making process. I sat in the audience of a presentation at the Council Chambers in Toronto in June of 1997 during *The Ripple Effect: International Festival of Theatre of the Oppressed* and I was simply transfixed by the possibility he was describing and what he had achieved in Rio. I had experienced the transformational power of Forum as a rehearsal for revolution in my own life. Theatre of the Oppressed served as a validating process that helped me connect to and create community.

At the time I was also a new single mother battling through the economic pressures and social stigma of my gender and class location. This precarious circumstance was further compromising because of the election of Mike Harris and his “common sense revolution” which proved to be a neo-conservative attack on single mothers. According to “A Litmus Test for Democracy: The Impact of Ontario Welfare Changes on Single Mothers,” “The one unique feature of the Ontario case is the rapidity with which Ontario welfare changed from one of the most generous and encompassing policies in the country to one of the most punitive and demeaning” (9-10). Sitting in the audience the day Boal told us the Legislative Experiment in Rio I was deeply inspired. As one of Harris’ newly policed single mothers the accomplishments in Rio provided a true epiphany of hope. This provided me with a lingering sense of possibility that never left me. It is since that time that I see opportunities for such experiments everywhere.

I have also worked as a public educator and the use of Forum theatre to make law appealed to my desire for more democratized processes of learning and community engagement. I have since gained an undergraduate degree in Aboriginal Adult Education with a professional background in alternative media which is itself concerned with democratic government and achieving a more just society. Such circumstances inform my privileges, disadvantages, and perceptions of agency (juxtaposed with actual agency) within Canadian Society generally, and the particular communities I engage with.

I believe that Theatre of the Oppressed can exist simultaneously in many worlds legitimately but should not be devalued in any. Legislative Theatre is truly an innovation to governance as much as it is an innovation to theatre. Therefore, it has not as of yet, found its disciplinary home. Nor am I convinced that it should. Its ability to travel between boundaries and facilitate communication is similar to the traditional role of the runner in Algonquin society. Runners brought messages between communities and were integral to the treaty process of 1764 which completes the Proclamation of 1763 on Indigenous terms but is rarely ever acknowledged or respected in the Canada of today. Legislative Theatre functions in a similar capacity between the grassroots citizenry and the governing community. Its players, who are its artists, operate as runners between disciplinary villages. It is simultaneously a post-modern genre of theatre and a potentially post-colonial process of innovation for governance.

Theatre of the Oppressed is a “theatre founded on local rather than foreign experience” (Cohen-Cruz, Schutzman 2). I am inspired by Lila Watson’s quote that I first heard when I worked with Lib Spry with Windsor Feminist Theatre in the early 1990s. Watson is an Aboriginal woman from Australia who is credited with the following statement that defines alliance as a respectful action with boundaries and equity: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting our time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together” (qtd. in Spry 184). This statement informs the ideals of my own practice. It is a litmus test for respect providing an ethical standard from which to plan. It suggests a moral framework that leads to a more stringent practice of self-examination as a Joker. It begins to address an ongoing question of the role of the Joker as a community animator with his/her own defined social location and agency. The ethical question for practice of the art form that emerges is whether the Joker is facilitating a “Theatre ‘of’ or ‘for’ the Oppressed” and what does that mean.

It does not surprise me that each company I have chosen to study has worked with

Indigenous communities and derive some of their processes from Indigenous philosophies and methodologies independent of Boal's western-based theories. The Theatre of the Oppressed is the product of the western tradition of theatrical performance even if it critiques and transforms that tradition. Since it also derives its purpose from giving voice to the voiceless and by empowering marginalized populations it is not surprising that it has been useful to colonized peoples experiencing the challenges of decolonization and re-emergence to create a more hopeful future. Indigenous scholars and researchers Brant, Castellano, Davis, and Lahache clearly state that "Education is at the heart and the struggle of Aboriginal peoples to regain control over their lives as communities and nations" (xi). They articulate that there has been "uneven progress towards transforming the contemporary experience of education from one of assimilation to one of self-expression and self-determination" (xi).

This inquiry asks what social change was actually achieved by past projects. Were changes concrete and measurable and did they result in any changes to actual policy and law? Were the outcomes subtler when changing policy or law was not realized? These subtler objectives might include improved inter-sectorial communication, strides moving forward in community building, and personal empowerment realized amongst participants. I chose to interview the participants of *The Housing Project* as well as collect written feedback in the form of questionnaires during the project to get a sense of these benefits if there were any. I am holding Boal's own words as a guide post to my methods of inquiry, "From practice, we must arrive at a theory, in order to understand what we are doing, so we can do it better, and so that we may be able to apply the experiment to other places..." (*Legislative Theatre* 88).

I have chosen to structure some of my workshop designs using the paradigm of the Medicine Wheel. According to Marlene Brant Castellano, Lynn Davis, and Louise Lahache in their introduction to Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise, the Medicine Wheel is a teaching device that originated among the First Nations of the Plains. It "has gained broad acceptance as a means of

maintaining awareness of the interrelatedness of all life while we deepen our understanding by focusing on segments of the whole” (xiii). They explain that “the Medicine Wheel brings divergent elements into balance within the circle of life” (xiii). Therefore, using the Medicine Wheel as a tool for learning and organizing can be extremely powerful within a play development or rehearsal process that is focused on community animation and empowerment. It is an organizing tool I use for analysis, planning, and dramaturgy.

Kelly Britt Howe claims that Legislative Theatre dismantles “traditional discourses of ‘detached’ expertise.” However, another possible perspective is that it builds respectful alliance between expert knowledge and grassroots experience. Its revolutionary impetus is not in its dismantling of expertise as valuable and valid but in its forming of discursive partnerships between discipline experts and experience experts. Such partnerships can then be framed by mutual respect, thus replacing the separation caused by hegemonic binaries in ongoing partisan dispute. Such hegemony privileges disciplines of academic study over the knowledge of lived experiences.

“Mimesis means rather a “re-creation.” And nature is not the whole of created things but rather the creative principal itself... Art re-creates the creative principle of created things” (Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* 1). Forum theatre embodies this theory. It does not simply mimic reality: it sparks the act of re-creating. Within Boal’s ideological framework, mimesis is the fulfilling of an active generative creating drive within human beings individually and socially, whether it makes a play or a law. In the case of Legislative Theatre it makes both. Copying what already exists is not entirely wrong. It is necessary as we train to master our crafts within any discipline. But only copying leaves our creative striving incomplete. To only copy disregards the relevance of evolving circumstances that synthesize all we are learning. These evolving circumstances are the creative principal itself perpetually unfolding.

Alchemical space is generated where “discipline-specialists” and “experience-specialists”

engage in actual Boalian mimesis, liberating themselves from ideologies that cause social dis-ease and human alienation. Such dis-eases, like poverty, exploitation, racism, sexism, and a myriad of power abuses are often symptomatic of the chronic economic and social problems plaguing our late capitalistic and globalized world. But we have all been hailed into its ideology as solid, unmoveable, and “just the way it is.”

These dis-eases are complex. They demand creative responses beyond access to capital. I liken our requirement for capital to be similar to our emphasis on the drugs of western medicine. Although helpful for eliminating symptoms in the short term, they do not diagnose cause; they only mask it. Therefore, we become adept at denial through our addiction to the quick economic fix and the enabling of institutionalized Ponzi schemes masquerading as business which in the case of the globalized body is the simple movement of money between elite traders and the depletion of valuable local material resources needed for our collective survival.

The Anishinabeg have a well-known prophecy about a time of choice where if people make good choices, an “eternal fire of peace love brotherhood and sisterhood will be lit. Wrong choices will mean that the destruction they [colonizers] brought with them in coming to this country will come back to them and cause much suffering and death to all the worlds people” (Benton-Banai 93). Ongoing social innovations in community planning that are deemed wholistic by considering material and spiritual well-being are crucial in our search for viable and just transitions for communities, countries, and a world managing decreased access to fossil fuels. This is a material reality that is very out of step with the capitalist ideologies that inform so much of our decision-making and law-making currently. These creative solutions can be found and implemented humanely and sustainably but only through dialogues and planning that facilitate cross-sectorial communication and that frame lived experience as valid knowledge equal to discipline expert input. David Wiles states, “The problem of the future is how we can live together in a world of diminishing environmental resources, where communication

technologies have made the boundaries of the nation-state increasingly porous” (2).

My choice to make Legislative Theatre the subject of a master’s thesis is my way of connecting what I know in my heart to be true, but balanced with the experiential knowledge I hold as a trained and practicing Joker, in creative discourse with the mind knowledge that comes from academic sources on the topic. In this way I am functioning like a grass dancer tramping down enough tall grass to make a pathway for a future community coming together. I belong to many different communities all of which I think could benefit from using Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to help guide and inform the ways they self-govern. This is only a first stage glimpse at the potential of Legislative Theatre to make real social change. It offers personal reflections about the art, craft, and discipline of Joking and what it means to make “plays that make policy.”³

³ David Diamond Artistic Director of Headlines Theatre Company in Vancouver has coined the title “Plays that Make Policy” in an effort to make the language of the process and its purpose more accessible.

Chapter Two

“The role of theatre in creating communal memories is often an important one” (Wiles 7).

The Original Rio Experiment

During the Legislative Theatre experiments in Rio, nineteen permanent theatre groups of organized citizens were formed. Thirteen laws were promulgated including an amendment to the constitution of the city. This was accomplished through the establishment of theatre groups that drafted legal proposals and submitted these proposals to city council through Augusto Boal as their elected council representative. These troupes were called nuclei and were brought together through common geography or shared interest in a public concern.

The original Rio de Janeiro experiment lasted for four years. Thirteen laws were promulgated while twenty-two were proposed. The laws ranged in scope from legislation governing medical practice that affected geriatrics, practical guidelines for the installation of public phones to serve blind members of the community, the handling of waste in public areas, symbolic declarations of support and solidarity with human rights struggles in other countries, equity and access concerns, and a witness protection program that was an amendment to the city’s constitution. (Boal, *Legislative Theatre* 102–104). The sheer diversity of the types of laws promulgated suggests that the work held true to its commitment of giving voice first and foremost to the populace while enacting their desires.

What remains unknown is the nature of the remaining nine laws that were not promulgated. Why were they not successful and what stopped them from being passed? It is also unknown how many laws were passed outside of the Legislative Theatre mechanism and of what subject and nature, during the same time period of Boal’s mandate. With this knowledge it might be ascertained that certain types of laws are better created through the Legislative Theatre process than others. Regardless of these gaps in information, I maintain that this meaningful innovation to law-making became valid

with the first law promulgated. Then it was repeated twelve more times! This string of success is a strong indicator of a sustainable innovation. Consequently it was likely worth continuing the initiative beyond the original four years. However this was a system installed under the umbrella of a political party's mandate leaving power thus it succumbed to the fickleness of the electorate's partisanship. The allocation of budget line items and human resources are as political as any election. Such decisions often reflect the ideologies of those in power. Hence institutionalization of a practice like Legislative Theatre requires ongoing lobbying for the practice itself to be institutionalized as much as any of the laws it may bring forward.

A practice in theatre, that is inherently democratic and that espouses a fundamental commitment to just practices, can be created no matter the official political system that governs the larger society. I do acknowledge that practicing any sort of theatre, as political social intervention, can be a very dangerous activity within certain contexts. This is especially true where any repressive oligarchy is expressing itself as a military dictatorship. This describes the political landscape of Brazil prior to Boal's Legislative Theatre experiment in Rio.

Transition to a multi-party democratic system was restored after 1985. But from 1964 until that time Legislative Theatre would not have had an opportunity to be realized. Boal states, "The dictatorship dressed its savagery in the livery of legality. It called its sordid coup a 'Revolution'. We, the legalists, were called subversives. They justified censorship by calling it law. It had to be obeyed, just or iniquitous" (*Hamlet and the Baker's Son* 267). When the opportunity arose it was a logical evolution of the work of Theatre of the Oppressed to transform itself from a theatre devising technology to a political think tank methodology to support more democratic law-making.

Boal's Rio in 1992, just prior to his election, was by no means a free society devoid of oppressions. The Rio that Boal served as a vereador for was a city very much dealing with serious poverty and epidemic violence as the country transitioned from an extremely repressive military regime

to a multi-party electoral system. The country was facing massive debt for which the neo-liberal elected officials according to Boal surrendered themselves subserviently to the IMF (Boal, *Hamlet and the Bakers Son* 269). Boal describes the Chamber of Deputies in Rio de Janeiro, where he was elected, as a place where “you got to fight on behalf of personal or corporate appetites, not on the people’s behalf” (334). He lists bankers, members of death squads, drug barons and even classifies some people as saints who were his co-vereadors. As within the structure of the Forum anti-model itself the political landscape of the system he was now participating in had its oppressors, antagonists, potential allies, and what Lib Spry coins in her dramaturgy – “agents of power-over” (175).

Is this really any different in Canadian chambers of parliament? Perhaps our city councillors and Members of Parliament are sanitized from direct affiliation with death squads but indirect relationships might very well exist implicating them in the same power dynamics that Boal describes in his chamber of vereadores. Consider this information from Canadian Dimension (2010) about Canadian Mining.

Last year alone, at least five opponents of Canadian mining projects were assassinated in Latin America: three in El Salvador, one in Guatemala, and one in Mexico. Critics of mining operations there and elsewhere were wounded and maimed in attacks while many, along with their family members, were threatened. Canadian mining corporations were not necessarily directly responsible for the deaths and acts of intimidation and violence, but some of them were carried out by company security personnel and current or former employees. So it may be the case that the implicated companies are not legally liable, but alongside the local elite and states that license and promote extractive activities, they at the least bear a moral responsibility for creating the situations of conflict in which assassinations and other acts of violence take place (North).

The article goes on to say

Most Canadians are not used to thinking of their investors as human rights violators or of Canada as a “bad neighbour.” Sadly, since the early 1990s and especially over the past decade, the activities of our miners are earning us that reputation. The corporations themselves, of course, argue that they are bringing much needed employment and even “sustainable development” to the poor regions where they operate. If they are doing this, it appears to be a form of development that many do not wish to see in their communities (North).

To confirm the significant Canadian interest in mining economically consider these statistics from the Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada website,

Extractive industries (mining and oil and gas) make a major contribution to Canadian prosperity. Building on this domestic strength, Canada has also become a major player in the international extractive sector. At about \$79.3 billion in 2007, mining and energy investment is the third-largest component of Canadian direct investment abroad (stocks), generating significant additional exports from Canada....In 2008, over 75 percent of the world’s exploration and mining companies were headquartered in Canada. These 1293 companies had an interest in some 7809 properties in Canada and in over 100 countries around the world (“Building the Canadian Advantage” *Foreign Affairs Trade and Development Canada*).

For these reasons I am certain the hegemonic and repressive forces that resist more democratized systems of government exist both in Brazil and in Canada.

Nevertheless it was a hopeful Brazil emerging from blatant repression that provided an opportunity for Boal’s experiment to even occur. To gain a greater understanding of the Brazil that Augusto Boal served as a vereador within I have accessed a description from his contemporary, Paulo Freire,

The political-pedagogical practice of progressive Brazilian educators takes place in a society challenged by economic globalization, hunger, poverty, traditionalism, modernity, and even postmodernity, by authoritarianism, by democracy, by violence, by impunity, by cynicism, by apathy, by hopelessness, but also by hope. It is a society where the majority of voters reveal an undeniable inclination toward change. (*Pedagogy of the Heart* 76)

The official Legislative Theatre project died when Boal left office thus the stable employment of his Jokers as mandate staff also ceased. The original experiment, therefore, to some degree, relied upon the cult of Boal's personality. It did not catch the interest of other government officials after Boal's term of office. The mandate was not institutionalized and remained affiliated with the Worker's Party mandate solely. It is unfortunate that the examples of the Legislative Theatre that actually promulgated laws could not have captivated legislators in Rio as a viable innovation to law-making regardless of party affiliations; but then considering who was populating the Chamber, if Boal's subjective impressions can be trusted, it is even more amazing that the project had a full term shelf-life and was as successful as it was. Within neo-liberal capitalism the protection of human rights and a commitment to embodied democratic practice is not likely perceived as an apolitical practice although it should be.

Freire goes on to say that the public error when voting in Brazil has been their "choice in partisan forces" (*Pedagogy of the Heart* 76). It is the partisan fickleness of elections that seems to limit the Legislative experiment while simultaneously giving it life in the first place. The same would happen in Canada if this think tank technology were only advanced through the electoral game of politics, I am sure. But the original project did leave its mark in Brazil in very tangible ways. As of 2001 when Boal published *Hamlet and the Baker's Son*, the municipal government of Santo André had a Theatre of the Oppressed group institutionalized and the CTO [Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed

was continuing its work with a non-government organization called the “Forum on Municipal Budget” (Boal, *Hamlet* 337).

Both Legislative Theater and Participatory Budgeting seek to harness public creativity and energy, break down barriers between government and citizen, and challenge traditional notions of expertise and authority. Having evolved side by side from similar Freirean origins they emphasize different aspects of critical pedagogy. Participatory Budgeting emphasizes connecting critical problem-solving to tangible outcomes while Legislative Theatre places greater emphasis on the process of problem-solving itself and is more attentive to the ways in which participants become actors in the discussions. Legislative Theatre is by its very nature more open-ended, inviting questions about what problems are on the table for discussion.” (Biacchi 86)

Unless there is pervasive political will to support the most marginalized members of any society to actively participate in governance, Legislative Theatre projects cannot be realized to their full potential. This should not become the rationalization to *not* start an initiative. Systemic barriers can be overwhelming and chronic but the process of doing the work can open doors unexpectedly. Legislative Theatre is an ongoing process. It is a system in constant evolution.

In a conversation with Alan Filewod, while I confronted my own doubts about even attempting my own experiment, I realized that the political theatre ecology itself in Canada was acting as a cop in my own head. Alan aptly pointed out “Boal creates a theatre technology (or method) that can be used by anyone – it’s free, it’s easy to learn and it works but in Canada it’s almost impossible to sustain without a solid infrastructure of resources supporting the effort” (Personal Communication, February, 2013). There are very few funded professional theatre companies that only do Theatre of the Oppressed work or, at least privilege it in their programming, and there are no current Legislative Theatre initiatives of any scale that I am currently aware of at all in the Canadian theatre landscape or within a

legislative state apparatus of any sort. It falls between disciplinary criteria, thus evoking the syndrome of “buck-passing” when it comes to finding a sustainable or permanent home within a governing system, or a professionalized cultural ecology, to allow for continuing in-depth experimentation.

Boal himself implemented a program that did not live past his own privilege as an elected official. While he held office he employed a staff. This staff included lawyers as well as theatre Jokers. These lawyers “metabolized” the laws being suggested by the nuclei formed throughout the city. The lawyers were responsible for turning expressed desires into bills of law. Boal proudly states that they achieved more than thirty of these bills (*Hamlet* 335).

I am only one person, albeit trained in the Theatre of the Oppressed methodology to some extent, so I function as a single Joker when my time and resources allow me – which is not all that often. The “cops in my head” rammed my own arms behind my back, cuffed me, and were ducking my entire body into their police cruiser as I contemplated how to design my own experiment. I thought, “I am still only a single mother, now with student loans to repay, approaching my middle age. What am I thinking!/? This system will not sustain efforts by one person to establish some sort of institutionalized Legislative Theatre practice where I live!” So many cops in my own head were shouting, “Don’t even try! Who do you think you are! This is NOT going to work! You’re going to fail!”

A return to Boal’s account of his own failure provides a mirror of inspiration to “act.” He writes, “...we had intensely fought against all sorts of injustices, economical, social, political, sexual, etc. We had made good theatre! We were happy and proud with ourselves and with our work, and...and we failed (*Legislative Theatre* 115). I had to draw from my own cultural teachings of the “great teacher” Nanabush who through his failures learns his most important lessons. Pedagogically experiential knowledge is gained from both success and failure and both provide wisdom upon reflection.

It is important to remember that Augusto Boal won an election he had not expected to win. He

describes the competition, “1,200 candidates from 22 parties, for only 42 seats” (*Legislative Theatre* 12). Therefore Legislative Theatre was born as much from opportunity than any strategic or planned evolution of the work for these specific purposes. When you read his accounts of the election he was firmly planted in the role of the alternative choice. In fact Boal didn’t expect to win and neither did his sponsors, The Worker’s Party. Of course one of the strengths of theatre is its ability to invoke image. Boal noticed, “Photographers and cameramen love images. And so do newspapers – they have an enormous appetite for pictures” (*Legislative Theatre* 13). Theatre of the Oppressed is a dramaturgy adept at creating the image.

I was beginning to understand that a commitment to the process is a worthy goal in and of itself. That commitment operates in the field of community. If no community exists it must be created. According to theatre scholar David Wiles “...inner freedom is a function of public freedom. Freedom should be understood by analogy with the performing arts as a performance which requires a certain ‘virtuosity’, and it must constantly be acted out if it is to be preserved” (12).

Wiles, quoting political theorist Hannah Arendt, states “citizenship is not an abstract moral ideal sustained by an atomized individual, but is performance practice” (qtd. in Wiles 12). Taking this into consideration I came to understand that my consciousness of my own value had been interpolated into a capitalistic definition of worthiness. To hold worth anything I produced had to be commodifiable and consumable. If the process did not yield a product that could be bought or sold where was its worth? To the Worker’s Party simply running for office was an end in itself. For me, I had to learn that simply attempting a Forum theatre anti-model, with the goal of inciting an awareness of a law-making desire in those who participated was a worthy goal. Worthy because of the knowledge-sharing that was inevitable which would generate a space of shared wisdom between participants. This kind of cultural production has value beyond a price tag.

Boal’s win was the result of a consciousness tipping point. Tipping points according to

Malcolm Gladwell mimic diseases (qtd. in “Getting to Maybe” 140). This is further described by Westley, Zimmerman and Patton,

Flu viruses are omnipresent, and yet for much of the year flu’s spread is quite slow and usually geographically limited. But during flu season it often reaches a tipping point where the spread switches from normal to epidemic rates. There is a non-linear aspect to this—one more case of flu and the system tips to a new level (140).

To borrow the description of an internet phenomenon as a metaphor, Forum theatre “went viral” in Rio de Janeiro during Boal’s campaign. Boal’s account explains

Our campaign grew much larger than expected...Everyday we were appearing more in the papers. On the television, we were talking on the radio stations. Everyday more people were coming into our campaign, more people wanted to participate, to practice The Theater of the Oppressed...(*Legislative Theatre* 14).

This phenomenon proved, through tangible examples, that theatre intervenes upon society and doesn’t just reflect it. The work of the theatre itself won an election and informed the mandate of the candidate! While Boal himself had achieved a certain celebrity status in his hometown I believe it was also his slogan that was infectious. “Have the courage to be happy” (14). The Legislative Theatre experiment of Rio De Janeiro infused Freirian pedagogical spirit into the workings of government bureaucracy because the election campaign itself was dynamic, hopeful, and used the Forum to promote the Forum. It promoted the idea that experiential learning is powerful!

Winning this election also suggested there may be some truth to chaos theory and the butterfly effect not just in weather patterns but in human relationships and political movements as well.

If history shows us anything, it’s that the obdurate world *does* yield Change – surprising and sometimes radical change – *does* happen. The world does turn its head every once in a while. And what seemed almost impossible looking forward seems almost inevitable

looking back (Patton, Westley, Zimmerman viii)

When opportunity arises, or the revolution happens, even in small scale scenarios, plans become moot and we roll with the wave of new endeavours, birthing innovation whether intended or not. The Legislative Theatre is a vehicle itself for democratic participation and not just a blow horn for utopia. The more it is experienced by more and more people, the more people become accustomed to and expect relationships of mutual respect, empowered voices that are genuinely heard, and visibility in the realm of public affairs. Such expectations become expressed as tangible movements of alliance and solidarity. If Legislative Theatre is to achieve any form of sustained institutionalized power in any country, including Canada, it will rise from the diversity of its population asserting its desires, and not from a charitable notion, of helping the poor and worker become more bourgeoisie, the Indigenous more colonial, the person of colour more white, or woman more male, simply to participate in their own humanity, a humanity that is inherently a political process of negotiating with other human beings and asserting basic human rights. The Legislative Theatre must be practiced to become institutionalized one small experiment at a time.

Boal was so afraid of winning he almost stood down when the party became aware that there was actually a chance he might win. He was afraid of not being able to continue his theatrical work. My question turned to “What am I afraid of?” For a Joker to be effective in his/her work one must be willing to take a fearless inventory of ones own fears and desires. I contemplated, “If only there was a Cops in the Head and a Rainbow of Desires session for the working Joker I could afford and was close by.” There is a reason why some social work training programs require social workers to put themselves into their own counselling or therapeutic regime before graduating. Self-awareness is a part of the art of democratic decision-making and practice at the most microcosmic level of community. Realizing and cultivating your own power within while bringing to light the internalized oppressions that stop you from acting and cultivating is each Joker’s ethical responsibility if s/he desires to work

effectively within a community or if s/he is going to create a community via Theatre of the Oppressed.

The Forums that were used to inform the process of law-making in Rio de Janeiro addressed real tangible and experienced problems of Rio residents. The Chamber in the Square mechanism created the space where the laws were collectively drafted. The drafts were inspired by gaps in policy that were revealed by the Forum's intervention process. The interactive mailing list further widened the scope of participation and facilitated communication feedback loops. Dissemination of information is much easier now because we are less reliant on the physical transportation of paper than in the mid-1990s. Information can be sent digitally through blogs, Facebook, Twitter feeds, list serves, and several other social media platforms on the internet, as well as through smart phone applications. We have YouTube channels! We have cell phone video cameras that you can edit on! These mediums can instantaneously track and publish feedback loops. Audiences can discuss the content that is uploaded via comment boards. Related dialogue can be facilitated in several mediums supporting the live event of the Forum. Therefore the infrastructure that Boal needed in 1995 to inform citizens of an event, with the salient information that would empower them to participate, can be mobilized at lightening speed with much less reliance on the resources of the bureaucracy of a city council. It does however require the privilege of technology and the knowledge of how to use it. I might suggest that while partnership with a legal advisor is very important, today's Legislative Theatre experiment also needs the support of IT and social media expertise. With this sort of collaboration the cost of physical mailing is reduced significantly and the time needed for the functioning of dialogic feedback loops is almost non-existent. Feedback can be almost simultaneous across significant distance. The use of multi-media pathways can augment the Chamber in the Square session with the right planning and networking.

According to Boal, "the shows are the moment of social communion, in which the other members of the community are invited to participate in the debates, still using the same theatrical language" (*Legislative Theatre* 88). These shows provided a concrete social and physical nexus point

to actually embody the practice of democracy. The critical catalyst is an environment of invitation. Boal also emphasized that inter-community dialogues were extremely important during the Rio experiment. These took the form of mini festivals where groups would come together to show each other their work and members of one nucleus would intervene on the other. Boal emphasized the value of outsiders who could see situations clearer than those who staged the particular anti-model.

(Legislative Theatre 87–89).

The Forum that is going to be used to make policy and law must gather a multiplicity of perspectives so that the best thought out desires and strategic planning are included in the legal drafts. Lessening misinformation, assumption, and ignorance in all communities collaborating is a key reason to engage with the practice. The festivals that Boal describes were integral to the project in Rio. They have never been realized in Canada. Festivals of Theatre of the Oppressed yes, but not Festivals of Legislative Theatre.

Another way of extrapolating experience was to generate parables from multiple groups. A topic would be chosen and then various groups would be asked to make a show on their understanding of the subject. According to Boal they preferred parables, without text, “shown by means of fable, action, images, movements, sounds etc.” *(Legislative Theatre 89)*. The various groups then came together and share what they had created. Boal claimed this practice “enhanced the debate around chosen subject-matters”(89).

As Kelly Britt Howe explains in her dissertation on the subject, Legislative Theatre “constructs citizenship as a process of collective knowledge-building” (x). The use of drama as the methodological framework for consultation and research on social policy is distinctly participatory and collaborative and not just affective. For a brief time, in a real city, theatre cultural workers used the tools of dramatic devising to participate in the everyday politics of their community. They performed a vital and dynamic bridging function between localized experience and broad expert knowledge to change and create new

socio-political relationships through law-making. They did not however, transform actual power relationships. The laws that were created by ordinary citizens still needed to be approved by a hierarchy of legislators. The process did not negate expertise: it simply widened the criteria of whom might be considered an expert and why. It equalized different ways of knowing. This did not tear down operating hegemonic structures but it did infuse them with democratic pedagogy.

Due to the success of the Rio experiment there is an argument that can be put forth that actors, dramaturges, and directors who have already trained for professions in the theatre, with some further training in the skills of the Theatre of the Oppressed arsenal, could become Jokers that literally work for their communities to help make law. According to Boal he

...systematized TO in such a way that the Oppressed might make their own theatre— not I talking on *behalf* of the oppressed nor I talking *about* them. Paternalism is on its way out. However, we artists are necessary. Without paternalism but, in some way, as parents. Our relationship with the oppressed artist is not paternalistic, but continues to be paternal (*Hamlet and the Baker's Son* 338).

Take a moment and envision a creative thinking and problem solving process facilitated by gainfully employed artists. These artists are constantly instigating flash points of active and hopeful imagination promoting creativity throughout an entire community. What might that look like? As Einstein points out, “The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination.” (*Creative Creativity*). The truly intelligent community is nurtured through the cultivation of its collective imagination. These Jokers are not mere facilitators: they are scribes responsible for generating summaries that theorize on the subjects and recommendations reached at the Forums that inform the Chamber in the Square sessions. They are consultants that steward vital communication between City Hall and the streets.

Hiring Jokers as cultural workers allowed multiple nuclei to form and generated a conscious

practice that was professional. But the experiment, being only four years old, did not fully transform the legal apparatus. It was not in the end adopted as essential. It was cut from the city's operating budget as soon as Boal and his mandate were no longer present to keep it alive.

Boal also describes serious obstacles that stopped various nuclei from being realized. These limitations were due to the real systemic barriers plaguing the grassroots populace of the city. Scheduling, workshop space, and access to resources, meant not every nucleus was realizable in a way that got the project to "Festival" or "Chamber in the Square" realization. The irony that presents itself is that the very groups needing voice for, and visibility of their circumstances, are the very groups struggling with the resources to participate in the first place.

Herein lays the paradox of Theatre of the Oppressed. The need for change must be the most urgent need for the group assembled if they are going to participate without some form of remuneration for the cultural work they are performing. The ethical dilemma then becomes distinguishing what is participatory coercion or an act of free consent? Is there equality or exploitation driving the relationships being formed? If poverty is the problem being studied should the participants not be paid for their time? Their time is precious and one of the few assets they have that can be put to their own use for their survival? If I am hungry my time is spent finding food not attempting to change laws that *might* guarantee me a meal.

By critiquing our current systems I am not suggesting that totalitarianism is a viable option for government and that elections are obsolete. However it is important to ascertain where totalitarian tendencies exist as micro-cells inside macro-social organisms. These mini-dictatorships can hide behind masks of the expert and expertise can be marginalized due to prejudiced political affiliations. It is important to understand when elections are the best democratic process for supporting innovation and when they are not. Elections can uphold the tyranny of the majority and further marginalize minority groups inside a larger structure.

Electoral structures can also cause instability within social infrastructure if they are not well-managed, corrupt, or misapplied. Can you imagine what would happen if every time the government changed leadership your hospitals were completely dismantled – I don't mean budget crunches or some beds removed or added – I mean completely shut down and restarted to the whim and design of the new power in civil office? This is what happened to the fledgling Legislative Theatre system. It was simply defunded and dismantled before it was fully integrated and institutionalized as a part of the legislating apparatus of Rio. It was not given a stable foundation to continue beyond its first four years. It was not constructed as an essential service.

Chapter Three

Canadian Projects

In this chapter I focus on three theatre companies operating within a Canadian context, as well as a First Nations youth empowerment project that used theatre techniques within its leadership training practice. The four companies are Headlines Theatre based in Vancouver, British Columbia; Mixed Company working out of Toronto, Ontario; Sheatre in Owen Sound, Ontario; and New Orators Youth Project operating out of Six Nations Reserve in Southwestern Ontario. I derived information from artists and Jokers David Diamond, Simon Malbogot, Joan Chandler, and Darren Thomas about each of these companies and their specific projects. Each project related to, or emulated, the original Legislative Theatre experiment in Rio de Janeiro in some relevant way. I accessed critiques and analysis by other academics who have written extensively about Headlines Theatre and I utilized published material about particular projects such as articles, press releases, reports, and materials available on their websites.

Three projects were explicitly Legislative Theatre projects but they were not institutionalized within a support system serving the Legislature, as was the original Rio experiment. Headlines Theatre in Vancouver and Mixed Company in Toronto both made links with city councillors that forged formal relationships with the government. Neither of them embedded their projects within the cities' legal apparatus as consultation tools or official think tank methodologies institutionalized within government. They operated from an outsider position as theatre practitioners.

Sheatre's project in Owen Sound predates Boal's experiment. It was an early project in the history of Canadian Forum Theatre that directly presented to a legislative body. *Images of Birth* contributed to the legalization of midwifery in Ontario movement.

The New Orators Youth Project was not a Theatre of the Oppressed Forum at all. However it

presented its work most directly to government leadership and community service providers. It successfully empowered citizenship at the grassroots social stratum. Therefore its ability to structure the space between government and citizen as a productive dialogic encounter suggests the potential efficacy of theatre to enact political relationships in smaller communities that change policy or law. It also suggests that the particular legal circumstances of First Nations communities could benefit from processes that empower more effective communication between grass roots citizenry and local band councils.

Headlines Theatre

Headlines has a 27-year, multi-award-winning history of creating work derived from Boal's system of the Theatre of the Oppressed. Its system for devising has mutated into a methodology that Artistic Director David Diamond names "A Theatre for Living." Diamond explains "Theatre for Living" as an outgrowth of Theatre of the Oppressed. Headlines Theatre is a company that has accumulated the kind of social capital and material resources that facilitate a larger scale mobilization of community than would be possible for a single Joker or a small alternative company starting out to even consider. Certainly their efforts were larger than anything I could attempt in my own experimentation. The projects I am focusing on include Practicing Democracy and After Homelessness...

The two Legislative Theatre projects that inform this study are fairly large-scale endeavours requiring significant resources. This standard of large-scale production value keeps the work supported by theatre's major funding bodies. This criteria for funding is defined by a fairly standard business model for operations. This observation is not included to disparage Headlines' work as I have much respect for their continued commitment to both aesthetic standards and organizational development. But it must be observed that their projects are as large as they are due to years of accumulated relationships and resources focused on building both the institution of Headlines and the system of

creation they forge from that structure. While I am certain every accolade is well deserved I wonder how much the gold standard inhibits other possible models from emerging because the example is not realistically replicated without developing similar infrastructures that take years to cultivate and maintain. The Headlines website quotes the Canada Arts Council as part of their promotions. The tag line reads “in terms of Forum Theatre practice, Headlines sets the standard in Canada” (“Theatre for Living” *Headlines Theatre*). This standard includes a week-long fully funded workshopped research process with a two to three week rehearsal and play development process. For *Practicing Democracy* “the week-long workshop involved thirty participants whom Diamond selected through interviews. Each workshop participant received a \$500 honorarium, divided into two payments (to avoid rendering any welfare system participants ineligible for their state checks)” (Britt Howe 72). There is an obvious production budget that allows for lighting, sound, and projection that helps shape the mise en scene into something pleasingly theatrical. Finally there is an innovative partnership with cable television where their Forums are broadcast live in studio and they have actors prepared to take instructions from participants calling in interventions from home. This is an innovative way to expand a project’s reach into communities that otherwise would not likely attend a Forum event.

Headlines accomplished what it did because of its ongoing attention to a complex funding strategy that draws financial support and in-kind contributions from many sources. Sources for the two projects studied in this thesis included government cultural funders, civic funding, private foundations, corporate contributors, in-kind donors of space and media, and other community-based partners. Within this list of funders and supporters it is very apparent that Headlines Theatre has accomplished its successes thus far through a complex deployment of community outreach and fundraising that only comes with a theatre company that is well established and has achieved operational funding where it can build upon a solid structural foundation. This kind of infrastructure takes years to build.

Kelly Britt Howe in her dissertation discusses funding of the Headlines *Practicing Democracy* project

which was their first attempt at a Legislative Theatre initiative,

Conceptually and (in some respects) practically, Headlines positioned the council as collaborators, but Diamond still bore signs of the anxiety about think tank independence that Stone describes. In his interview with me, Diamond insisted that, though Vancouver contributes to Headlines Theatre's general operating budget, no city monies were used toward Practicing Democracy. He wanted to establish that Practicing Democracy did not feel beholden to the city and therefore did not censor the participants' contributions. He said project money was fundraised through a variety of other grants, organizations, and individuals (66).

Britt Howe explains that Diamond asserts from his experiences that "for Legislative Theatre to be successful, a legislative body needs to agree to participate early, preferably at the project's inception"(67). This indicates to me a real need for buy-in by the legislative body: otherwise, there is an ongoing hierarchical barrier to true respect for the value of the work.

The question that is generated from this comment is: How successful were the two projects that Headlines created and by what criteria is that success being judged? Headlines was able to secure the endorsement of the legislative body in *Practicing Democracy* but I would question if they achieved participation of the council. It seems to me through the comments of the councilors themselves that there was tolerance for the project but not the kind of buy-in that would give the project's recommendations more weight or equal weight to other expert sources of information. Responses from Vancouver's city council included the excuse of the actual law being addressed was not in their jurisdiction. However this should not stop a Legislative Theatre project from asking a legislating body to announce support for the legal change in a different jurisdiction through a declaration or an agreement in principal. In fact one of the laws promulgated in Rio's city council during Boal's experiment did just that.

Diamond readily offers the knowledge that while the council unanimously endorsed the project, having received detailed written proposals and then voting unanimously in the Council chamber, he was not convinced that they were actually aware of what they were agreeing to (Personal communication, April 3, 2013). Not all of the councilors attended the Forum either. Although this did not happen in Rio either, it is important for all decision-makers to experience the Forum before they simply read a report. I realize given these leaders' time constraints, and potential disrespect for theatre as an intellectual or practical pursuit, making this desire happen may be unrealistic in the short term. It is a compelling argument for a council-born initiative versus just acquiring council symbolic support. Positioning "plays that make policy" as an innovation to law-making embedded within the legislative bureaucracy of a city council makes the city government a vested stakeholder versus being a passive and polite supporter of the arts.

The Theatre for Living (Headlines Theatre) model according to Diamond, at least in its first attempt at Legislative Theatre, was too broad. It was not focused enough to zero in on one or a few particular legal concerns (Personal communication, April 3, 2013). Their first project yielded over 90 recommendations that Diamond explains "simply overwhelmed the city staff" (Personal communication, April 3, 2013). According to Diamond they cultivated a good relationship with council staff who were very committed to analyzing the report thoroughly to forward recommendations to council. But the sheer volume of material and its lack of focus on one or a few specific laws or bylaws dissipated its potential impact (Personal communication, April 3, 2013). Headlines accumulated certain accolades as an experiment within the discipline of theatre and it generated interest but the legal results were negligible due to there being no concrete vestment on the part of the City Council to truly follow through on what was learned. There was tolerance. Tolerance is not the same as real institutional buy-in of the innovation. This observation does not minimize the problems of the 90 page report which is significant but it was not the only barrier to the project's success in promulgating laws.

While the Practicing Democracy recommendations “paralyzed city hall for days” according to Diamond, he also stated that they tried to condense everything down to one motion. This motion was presented to a City Hall council session. The motion asked for a paid position for an advocate. It never went through because City Council changed. They did learn a great deal about structuring the report for *After Homelessness...* from *Practicing Democracy*. *After Homelessness...* yielded no more than six suggestions at a city level, a provincial level, and at a federal level and part of the task was to sort through what jurisdiction each recommendation fell under and what jurisdictions in which cases overlapped.

What is apparent and also supported by David Diamond’s comments to me in our interview is that it is disingenuous to suggest that a Legislative Theatre project is singularly responsible for any change in law (Personal communication, April 3, 2013). There are always other groups working on the same or similar topics and change is a complex synergy of efforts. Therefore Legislative Theatre is an alliance effort that is progressive and its efficacy cannot be reduced to the outcome of singular event.

The Headlines model does produce aesthetically satisfying theatre. The amount of time they have to rehearse the nuances of the scripts they create does allow the work to stand on its own as dramatically sophisticated in its mise en scene. Performance skills are transferred to the participants with no prior performance training by the accumulated expertise of the theatre artists that are facilitating the experience. And for the most part the acting was very solid in terms of craft and what was required.

Diamond states that since 1992 they have worked to find ways to create theatre that “does not polarize the living community into ‘good guys’ and ‘bad guys,’ but rather recognizes that the community is an integrated, and perhaps dysfunctional organism that is struggling to resolve difficult issues” (24). Theatre, like education, as Diamond points out either reinforces the status quo or it helps break the rules (25). In the case of Legislative Theatre it also helps create the rules.

The company's commitment to paying their chosen participants is admirable. It also supports the wider struggle for artistic practice to be seen as valuable cultural work that contributes to the society at large beyond only entertainment. Although I expect an evening spent at Headlines is also entertaining as can be seen from the many testimonials that populate their website and the *Practicing Democracy* DVD. Theatre is not effective if it does not evoke a pleasure response that focuses our attention and keeps us interested.

Practicing Democracy

Britt Howe in her research on *Practicing Democracy* states “Many of the participants felt empowered and engaged; to others the workshop felt ‘sensationalizing, undemocratic and exploitative’” (5). Some thought the workshop privileged subjects like “public violence, drug addiction and prostitution” over “more ‘mundane’ or everyday experiences of poverty” (74). One woman referred to Headlines as “poverty pimps” (74). Britt Howe describes other critiques and reflections,

Another participant (who acted in the play) wondered if the benefits were worth the cost of the emotional excavation it required for many workshop attendees. Several of these concerns were aired to the whole workshop group and to Diamond as well, while others were shared with Pratt and/or Johnston. Even in these early stages of gathering and generating knowledge that led up to the public think tank, questions about power and appropriation proliferated. (73–74)

The problem of payment for services brings up an important consideration around the power of money to erode or eradicate healthy boundaries of those employed to excavate their personal lives for the purposes of creating a show. Does the commodification of the relationship defined by the exchange of money for services put undue pressure on the participant to ante up their part of the service bargain, which is to provide “good story” as part of the agreement of the contract. Is this implied in the relationship regardless of the Joker's care to ensure a safe and respectful environment?

As artists and educators, we must continually ask ourselves: in what context are risky stories being told? Within what frameworks did they originate? And what is the cost to the speaker? Taking responsibility should extend beyond an ongoing inventory of who we are as individuals to an understanding that there are stakes for those with whom we work – stakes that exist, but are never more than partially knowable. (Salverson “Performing Emergency” *Collective Creation* 88-89).

It therefore becomes part of the production facilitator’s responsibility and ethical concern to check in with participants to ensure consent.

It is important to consider that this work functions as a catalyst to broadened awareness of actual circumstances. Therefore it sparks a chain reaction of analytical thinking within those that participate. I would be more concerned about a process that did not generate larger questions of power than one that does. The paradox of the work is that it stimulates critical thinking that then can call the “good intentions” of the work itself into question. The process of transforming ourselves from objects to active subjects means we must analyze our relationships within the context of power hierarchies, abuse of power, sources of power, and the use of what kind of power when. We must then confront how we may be implicated as part of the problem and not the solution. To identify a problem is not good enough. We must take action in our own practice to solve the problem in expectation of our own ethics. Building awareness of the power structures we are beholden to, as well as the power we carry or access, is an important part of critical pedagogy and one of the most lasting contributions this work can have for those who participate in it whether or not we create or change the law this time.

Questions of appropriation provide an ongoing issue for Theatre of the Oppressed. This is because the work does excavate the lived experiences of its participants and it interacts with cultural knowledge at the level of the individual, the community, and even nations within hegemonic states.

Simply paying someone to share their story does not mean the practice is absolved of any

possible exploitative nature. Thoughtlessly soliciting autobiography may reproduce a form of cultural colonialism that is at the very least voyeuristic. This is particularly true when the voice of the artist or educator herself goes unexamined, or when the choices students or project participants make for speech are privileged over choices made for silence, neglecting the highly complex negotiations that are involved in the politics of knowing, and being known. (Salverson, *Collective Creation* 89)

It is within the suspicion of or identification of appropriation that the most fertile ground for building ethical practice is found. Projects can plant seeds for the ethic of respectful collaboration and cultivate productive alliances that result in enduring partnerships that live beyond any one project. Or they can continue a pattern of exploitation through a lack of critical self-reflective activity.

This is why Theatre of the Oppressed Forums are often conceived from the stories of the participants during the research phase of workshopping but the play itself is most often a fiction that tells the truth about a shared circumstance versus a simple autobiography. However autobiographical material can be used to frame the Forum scene. What is important when incorporating popular theatre verbatim moments is that the desire for sharing such material must be initiated by the participants and have value beyond voyeuristic titillation for the audience. I believe it is a Joker's responsibility to always be checking in with the desires of the participants and to dialogue with participants about how to stage that material should the desire become apparent. Different approaches can be taken to discover what theatricality lays within the verbatim material but ultimately nothing should be staged against the wishes of the performers whose stories are being placed into the public realm. For the actual Forum I strongly uphold the practice of creating a synthesized fiction that tells the truth of a researched reality. From what I observed in *Practicing Democracy* the final stage play was a synthesis and not a verbatim presentation.

After Homelessness...

After Homelessness... was Headline Theatre's second attempt at the Legislative Theatre project. David Diamond claims that much was learned from *Practicing Democracy* and what was learned during that project was implemented in *After Homelessness...* (Personal communication, April 3, 2013). The project and its purpose is addressed in the promotional material published on the Headlines website.

Does Metro Vancouver need a theatre project that rings an alarm bell about homelessness? Absolutely not. **Headlines Theatre** is in collaboration with people who have been homeless and various agencies working on the issue to create an interactive Forum Theatre project. **After Homelessness...** will ask questions about what it takes to create housing that is safe, appropriately supported and affordable, in the context of having been homeless and the mental health issues that are often attached. A **Community Action Report**, generated from the interactive Forums, will suggest policies that will be received and considered by Government and Agencies ("After Homelessness" *Headlines*).

The production of *After Homelessness...* was framed "as a true voice of people who have themselves struggled with the issues" ("History of the Project" *Headlines*). The workshop participants and cast were drawn "from a diverse range of people who have experienced homelessness in the past and/or the present; also people who work with the homeless and people whose loved ones have been or are homeless" ("History of Project"). The website claims in its promotion of the project that, "Because the play creators carry this expertise the play will certainly help communities, agencies and Governments seeking grassroots input into both the social and the structural aspects of the issue" ("History of Project").

Headlines received written agreements from the Mental Health Commission of Canada, BC Housing, the City of Vancouver, the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on

Homelessness, RainCity Housing and Coast Mental Health to use the *After Homelessness...* project and the resulting Community Action Report as part of their respective research for national, provincial, regional and local strategies on mental health and homelessness. This level of complexity of committed engagement showed how the Legislative Theatre methodology may work beyond the legislature of municipal government and yet still have significant transformational impact. Indeed with laws that exist at higher levels of government and where the desire for change is coming from the grassroots working to serve coalitions in their research is a valid application of the methodology.

The project describes its success by the number of performances it achieved, how many venues it performed in and the amount of interventions it inspired. At each performance, between eight and twelve audience members intervened. It also mentions that it had sold out houses every night. Therefore, the project is still constrained by the business indicators that meet the current theatre business criteria and not necessarily, criteria such as changes in attitude, desires to take action, and laws that were promulgated. Headlines use of Facebook and twitter suggests that the interactive mailing list, which formed a vital part of the Rio experiment is actually much easier to set up today than it was in the early 1990s. Consequently, innovations in social media mean experiments may not be so beholden to the dissemination systems of government or large institutions for either attracting participants or input during the structured Chamber in the Square sessions that would include the Forum itself.

Diamond also states that the scribe is an absolute necessity for a Legislative Theatre project (Personal communication, April 3, 2013). I also suggest that legal support is necessary to effectively make adequate proposals of a legal nature that will be taken seriously by legislative bodies. Of course this was supplied to Boal as part of the mechanics of his role as a vereador. Outside of the legislature this becomes a challenge and potential cost of doing the work. While this may be a symptom of the hegemony of the legal system in Canada it is also a practicality that cannot be ignored if you want to

take a Legislative Theatre initiative beyond a symbolic display of possibility.

After Homelessness... involved three community dialogues with expert panelists, which I think was an important part of the information exchange process between experiential and expert knowledge. According to the final report,

"What Makes a House a Home?" followed the theme of the stage production in examining the personal and relational issues of homelessness and living at risk.

"Location, Location, Location" focused on the construction and operation of social housing, as well as neighbourhood reaction to such projects. "Where's the Money?" discussed the financing of non-market and low-income market housing, in general and specifically by jurisdiction and geography. Again, at each dialogue event, comments and suggestions from all participants were noted for this report (Franklin 3).

Mixed Company

Mixed Company seems to have struggled more than Headlines to maintain a fundable standing. Malbogot discusses hegemonic funding structures as ascribing to a "flavour of the month" mentality (Personal Communication April 6, 2013). He states that he has had to embrace an entrepreneurial approach to keep Mixed Company going. He also discussed the challenges within the Canadian arts funding structure. Thus Forum theatre is often not recognized as theatre but is viewed as community animation. He describes Theatre of the Oppressed artists as "The discarded ones" (Personal Communication April 6, 2013).

Mixed Company's Project with the City of Toronto was not developed to the extent that Headlines achieved and it occurred much earlier. From the published script *Ready, Set, Civic Action!* it seems that the work was more abstract and satirical dealing with criticism of government itself by tackling the perceived phenomenon of apathy. According to Iogna and Malbogot this play was part of a larger series of events that were responding to "Premier Mike Harris' Conservative Government's

forcible amalgamation of seven Toronto municipalities into one single Mega City in 1998” (5-6). It was a city councillor who would later become Mayor of Toronto that initiated the series. What was apparent from the exercise, according to Iogna and Malbogot, was that multiple levels of different communities had to be engaged.”(6).

As a point of history, Mixed Company became the first Canadian official Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed, which meant it was authorized to teach Forum theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed techniques it also hosted the Ripple Effect: 8th International Theatre of the Oppressed Festival.

Headlines is also an official centre for Theatre of the Oppressed.

According to Iagno and Malbogot,

Although Mixed Co. has always taken part in organizations representing the theatre community in Toronto (Theatre Ontario, the Toronto Association for the Performing Arts and the Theatre for Young Audiences Association), it has not always been readily accepted by other groups that represent mainstream theatre, such as the Canadian Actors Equity Association and the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres or even at times by certain arts-funding bodies like the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts. In its attempt to redefine the role of theatre, Mixed Co.’s work was labeled as ‘Community Development’ or ‘Community Animation’ or ‘Social Animateurs’. This distanced Mixed Co. from the rest of the Canadian mainstream. It was a catch-22 because while Mixed Co. felt they were a part of the theatre community the perception was that they didn’t belong. Despite Mixed Co.’s innovative development of a unique working model and increasing international profile, the model just didn’t fit the structure demanded by its peers and funding organizations. The lesson: if you are looking to take theatre outside the traditional mainstream definition, you’d better be prepared to grow a thick skin and expect funding challenges! (Luciano Malbogot, *Mixed*

1)

Malbogat expressed that several projects of Mixed Company have impacted law and policy-making at the level of organizing services. One in particular *On the TTC* influenced the way Toronto Transit communicated with its clients by becoming aware that many immigrant users could not read their signs. The project was not officially or explicitly a Legislative Theatre project. It was intended to bring forward issues that related to harassment on public buses. It was staged at Queen's Quay as a site-specific piece of theatre and several TTC directors saw the show. The company performed invisible theatre outside in the line up going into the theatre before the actual Forum was presented where harassment occurred and no one did anything. Once inside the audience began to recognize the actors that had performed the invisible scenarios. Malbogat said "this was a very effective strategy in their staging that encouraged the audience as bystanders to consider why we often don't do anything and to consider why adults aren't modelling that type of assertive interventions in our daily lives" (Personal Communication April 6, 2013).

Simon said "the company also observed from this presentation that many immigrant women didn't know they could go to the bus drivers and complain about harassment. This came to be understood in the absence of interventions that involved the bus driver. Consequently, as a result of the creation of a Forum theatre piece around struggles using the bus system, the bus company, a public service, was made aware of the problem and instituted signs in several languages explaining the rights and procedures for complaints"(Personal Communication April 6, 2013). Malbogat emphasized that the TTC now educates its riders about what do to if they are harassed using signs that disseminate this information in over 100 languages as a result of the Director of Promotions and Marketing attending one of the shows (Personal Communication April 6, 2013).

While such a recommendation may have also ended up in a report, it is the point of contact between the production and the audience that included a professional with the agency who could

actually take actions that would make a difference. This scenario demonstrates that the act of witnessing does invoke real concrete change. What can be determined by this is that community outreach and making sure you get the “right” people in the room is very important to the successful outcomes of any Theatre of the Oppressed project. If you desire changes to policy as an outcome it is imperative.

Malbogot, like Diamond, has developed his own specific style of dramaturgy as a Joker that has come to define the style of the company. Diamond, drawing from scientific systems theory and Aboriginal community based pedagogy, has adapted a community alliance model for working with Indigenous communities where he has adapted the Theatre of the Oppressed creation model to reject the oppressor/oppressed binary. Malbogot seems to maintain the Oppressor/Oppressed model but has adopted masks as a means to develop full-bodied oppressors and assist in characterization. The masks identify the tactics they employ to oppress. Malbogot swears by its efficacy in training the performance of oppressors and identifying the tactics of the oppressor. Names like Brutal/Vicious, Sly/Cunning, and Devious populate archetypal characteristics and behaviour that can be called upon to generate oppressors that will offer challenges to those with the courage to intervene. The power of the masks is in their aesthetic language that conveys meaning without a lot of description. Malbogot asserts, “Participants who work with them will say “Oh yeah! I met the blue mask today” and everyone in the group knows exactly what is meant. It doesn’t matter if the language that is shared within the creating group is the language that is being shared outside the creating circle what is important is that the participants understand each other and can share a common definition and meaning of the same experience. Hence “I met the blue mask today” (Personal communication, April 7, 2013). He goes on to explain,

It’s a short cut to relating without training. This is definitely the pedagogy part of it.

This is important because the question is how do you create shows if participants are

illiterate? Illiterate does not mean incapable. It just means we have yet to find the common language between us that allows us to communicate using these tools (Personal communication, April 7, 2013),

Malbogot explained if the participants were illiterate we told them to write in symbols as anything was acceptable that could create a common language for the purposes of creating theatre. He claims that participants definitely increased their self-confidence and self esteem and attained skills to succeed in other parts of their lives through their participation in creating this type of work (Personal communication, April 7, 2013).

Mixed Company evolved to create a company within its larger structure. Cobblestone Theatre was a company of street youth and Malbogot claims that “*Wild Child* hit a real button” This company performed for upwards of 80 conferences as well as the Mayor’s Taskforce on Homelessness including the Minister of Homelessness. (Personal communication, April 7, 2013). The Legislative Theatre model requires significant cross-sectorial will to invest in a theatrical investigation of any topic. In an ideal society the impetus to make life better should be the only incentive to support a Legislative Theatre project; however, perspectives about what constitutes the good life can be very different and defined by the specific desires of individuals and groups inhabiting various hierarchies.

The success of the Cobblestone experience was the creation of a structure where the youth, who are some of the most marginalized members of Toronto society talked directly with their city’s politicians. The insidious learned helplessness that informs Cops in the Head of regular citizens is “You don’t talk to,” “You can’t fight or dialogue with city hall,” perhaps in this instance this self-talk was interrupted and that in itself may have had positive outcomes down the road.

Malbogot supplied some anecdotal evidence of positive outcomes for participants in Cobblestone including one homeless Ojibway woman’s story of attending school at University of Toronto, writing a play in Ojibway and marrying. She attributed her experiences with Cobblestone, as

part of the trajectory of her personal transformation and subsequent happiness. Another participant actually became a city worker and left the streets (Personal communication, April 7, 2013).

Sheatre

Sheatre is a company located rurally near Owen Sound, Ontario that I have had the pleasure of working with fairly recently as a co-Joker with Joan Chandler. I worked with her on a project where we brought together social workers who were involved professionally with issues about family violence along with community members who had been touched in some way personally by some form of family violence. The show was in response to recent legislation concerning violence in the work place and harassment, as well as privacy legislation that hampered appropriate sharing of information between service agencies when necessary.

It was during a casual conversation about Legislative Theatre that Chandler mentioned that her company had produced a show that predated Boal's Legislative Theatre experiment in Rio. The name of the production was *Images of Birth*. Joan was the Joker of the production and an organization called *Women Today* organized the presentation and partnerships. *Midwifery Support Group* provided the participants. The play was shown to the *Provincial Task Force on Midwifery*. There were around twelve female performers, all adults ranging in age from their 20's to their 60's. According to Chandler in 1986 a group of legislators toured the province to collect information from "key informants" in order to investigate the need for amending the law that stated that midwifery was illegal, and to create appropriate legislation.

"Women Today, a rural women's organization, was asked to make a presentation. They brought together Sheatre and a local group of women comprised of home birth mothers and a midwife in order to bring a truly grassroots statement to the Taskforce. Our group was extraordinary, in that the others who were called to speak to the government were medical professionals and midwives... not the women who were the "stakeholders". We

represented the women and children most affected by the legislation. The group felt the pressure of this responsibility and had some stage fright, but the stakes were high. It affected the health and freedom of women in Ontario in perpetuity” (Personal Communication March 17, 2013).

Although Legislative Theatre was a term not yet coined Chandler asserts that this project was definitely Legislative Theatre in that it used theatre as a means of communicating directly with a government body in order to influence legislation. Monica Walker Bolton in her research for a Master of Science interviewed three of the women involved in this project. She describes what the women told her as having “used an innovative theatre technique to illustrate their idea of the conventional, patriarchal, doctor-dominant approach to birthing versus the ideal woman-centred approach where the woman is lovingly supported. The women used their bodies to create a sculpture or “machine” to illustrate the non-ideal and ideal birth. As one of the women explained, “part of our message is that birth is part of the sexual act and that’s part of the problem that it’s not being seen as part of sexuality” (Walker - Boulton qtd. in Chandler Personal Communication March 17, 2013).

The theatre piece was breaking new ground and challenging standard protocols for government research so much so that as explained on the Sheatre website, “The day before the taskforce was to meet in London, a government representative called *Women Today* to tell us that we could not present our dramatic image theatre piece, nor could we work to animate anything with the audience” of fellow presenters and onlookers. The Executive Director of *Women Today* said, “Do you mean to say that the women of Huron County, the constituents of the Minister of Health, cannot be heard by the Minister’s Taskforce?” (The minister was our regional MPP.) They backed down, and allowed our presentation.” (Chandler *Sheatre*). This particular moment is inspiring because it shows that changes can be made and citizens can assert their agency in very profound ways. The Sheatre website explains the show through the words of Joan Chandler,

In addition to our scenes I also animated a midwife/homebirth machine with participation by others in the gallery. In every other circumstance across the province, speeches were the only form of presentation. The panel would listen and make notes, but said nothing to the presenters. However, after our dramatization, the leader of the Taskforce looked up from her notes, peered over the imposing dais of the courtroom, and said, "That is the most powerful presentation we have seen in our travels across the province. (pause) It's too bad you can't work with the doctors." These were the only comments ever made by the Taskforce to any of the presenters. We broke the silence” (Chandler 2012).

This account, although obviously the subjective recalling of the creators of the piece, and shared with that bias in mind, provides an important play by play account of the power of the aesthetics of theatre to invoke dialogue: a dialogue that generated desire.

As David Diamond says it is disingenuous to claim that a Legislative Theatre production is solely responsible for legislative change as legislative change in our various levels of government is a complex affair. The theatre can transform thinking and elucidate experience in a manner that is both intellectual and visceral. It may not be solely responsible but to say it has no impact would be equally disingenuous.

For me this one account of a Legislative Theatre project that predated Boal’s experiment supports the premise of the butterfly effect. It suggests we are never truly aware of the impact of our actions but that does not provide enough reason to not take action. Was it the law that changed that was the most important outcome that may or may not have been passed because of this presentation or was it the ongoing self-esteem and empowerment that the participants gained by participating in the project at all? Did this experience inform subsequent choices in their lives where they learned that their actions mattered and could actually participate in change?

It also supports my belief that the most effective Legislative Theatre projects are yet to come and will result when legislative bodies themselves believe in the power of the work to access and elucidate experiential knowledge to inform their decision making. While there was resistance to the approach only briefly, the fact that the initial invitation had come from the legislators themselves allowed the presentation to carry more weight than had the theatre troupe been forced to beg for a hearing or simply stage their play outside of the council chambers that day. Theatre is itself a powerful conversation and it can be put to greater purpose than simply entertainment. Imagine if the Canadian Government of any one of our provincial governments or even a town or city council tendered *Jokers* to conduct theatre workshops with people most impacted by decisions they were considering making along with whatever quantitative research they employ. What insights might be gained and how might that truly alter the ways they make decisions, therefore altering the decisions that get made? “The outcome of the work from the Taskforce on Midwifery was that midwifery was legalized in Ontario” (Walker-Bolton qtd. in Chandler Personal Communication March 17, 2013).

Joan Chandler recalled,

I would also like to say that during the interactive machine, people came from the gallery and the corridors to join in the birthing. A legendary Amish midwife who had kept in the background, because she was vulnerable to arrest by being present there, stepped into the scene to “catch the baby”. Her bravery and commitment, and that of every other woman who was there, was highlighted by that moment. The elation and power that all of the participants felt was palpable then, and afterwards. They beamed in the parking lot. And they are still proud today of what we accomplished together. While this example provides a great example of how theatre can infuse a larger movement with powerful support perhaps what is more important than the legal outcome is the personal empowerment that came to those women through an

aestheticized act of solidarity (Personal Communication March 17, 2013).

New Orators Youth Project

I attended a conference in Brantford about Aboriginal Education and that was where I met Darren Thomas. He presented a history lesson about colonization that was very performative and interactive where he had audience members come and take positions in a human sculpture that represented seven generations. I was so impressed with his work I introduced myself after to ask him if he knew of the Theatre of the Oppressed. He said he did and began to tell me about the New Orators Youth Project and how he had taken this kind of work to various reserves across North America.

I interviewed him about the project because it seemed to me to relate to Legislative Theatre in some key ways. Having lived on reserve while I worked for land claim negotiations and also having grown up outside of a small town in rural Ontario I was very intrigued by the idea of using these techniques in smaller communities. I am particularly interested in Legislative Theatre's potential to help Indigenous communities decolonize and also engage settler communities in truthful acts of reconciliation. The project indicates a potential to activate the grassroots in a constructive exercise of meaningful civic engagement where the systemic distance between citizen and legislature is much shorter than the complex bureaucracies that characterize large metropolitan centres or even larger institutions.

Thomas told me that the project really started as a project for a community capacity grant in his home community and it simply grew from there. It took off in such a good way that he needed to take a leave of absence from his job to dedicate his time to the project. The original project at Six Nations had twenty people committed and their ages ranged from four years old to sixty-eight. When the project went on the road to other reserve communities it would take four to eight people as facilitators and presenters. They took a version of the play they created at Six Nations on the road with a smaller ensemble. As facilitators with communities where the participants were taking the leadership training

the troupe would spend two days. The first day would be spent playing theatre games, which were fun and built trust and rapport. By the end of the day they would be asked to tell their story. On the second day they would design their play (Personal communication, May 16, 2013).

The project operated for six years. And Darren explained that the project likely could have continued but travel was taking its toll on him as he has a family as well. He and other trainers would go to other communities and help them set up similar programs (Personal communication, May 16, 2013). Part of the strength of the program was that it was set up as a youth leadership program. Although it used theatre techniques it was not a theatre company specifically so it operated outside of the confines of the Canadian theatre estate and its funding models. The project was funded through other state apparatuses including the Ministry of Education. Its focus was on reserve communities so it had a large network to outreach to with some common concerns and interests, although the concerns of reserves in Canada are as diverse as the land they are living on.

They always ended their time with a community performance. Band councillors, service agency leaders and the general community including family members were most often invited. While the projects weren't specifically targeted for the Band Councils it was much more likely that a few councillors would end up at the show than had these event occurred in large urban centres. Sometimes the entire council would attend. There is no doubt in my mind that councillors that did attend took what they learned into work the next day.

According to Thomas, there was a general tendency for councils to remain neutral in their responses to what they say (Personal communication, May 16, 2013). I am certain this is the result of the inherent conflict of interest that being both an elected official and a bureaucratic agent who must serve and enforce the Indian Act creates. However band councillors are also positioned within their own communities and within the Canadian state with agency that can make a difference when their grassroots members are facilitated to communicate their real concerns and their leaders take action and

speak in alliance with their concerns.

Lasting outcome of these events included the forming of youth councils, the forming of community health initiatives, the establishment of more community arts groups, structures to bring in cultural elders to support cultural rejuvenation and retrieval including language. Thomas says they did hundreds of shows. A typical show was about an hour and included what he called teaching moments. It was usually set up as a variety show where they lip sync'd popular songs that were relevant, monologues or speeches, and actual scenes. The pieces were often comedic. Thomas states that "humour is still alive and well in our communities It is a sign of our resiliency" (Personal communication, May 16, 2013).

Thomas has a background in working in both education and in therapeutic addiction treatment centres and was able to put his skills and experience to work in these projects as well. Often the desires and themes identified in the work included identity, healing and wellness, strength in cultural knowledge and participants grappled with core issues like unworthiness, shame, and guilt. According to Thomas, he discovered that performing made people very vulnerable so it was important to find gentle ways to do it. He found that using original teaching was a real source of strength in the process (Personal communication, May 16, 2013). Why these projects are closely related to the goals of Legislative Theatre were their focus on communicating desires for change not just therapeutically but within a public sphere of performance that included presenting to the political leadership in their communities. The participants presented their desires as essentially performed proposals of how to make a difference where they lived.

Thomas states what made this process so powerful about the performance was standing in front of your family and your leaders and speaking from your heart. These young people became so motivated by change they could articulate clearly the way they would make a difference and how they were going to do it (Personal communication, May 16, 2013). While not specifically Legislative

Theatre as it has evolved as a Theatre of the Oppressed genre, these projects succeed in bridging the process of the subjunctive into actual lived circumstances in the lives of the participants, which would have required interaction with and the support of band councils and service agencies. “The subjunctive will only take political organizing so far. Believing that changes in law can happen is important, yet so is figuring out how to turn potential to reality, future subjunctive to past indicative” (Boal, *Aesthetics* 40). Britt Howe recalls Boal’s warning in Omaha, “the knowledge we built together becomes valuable only when applied to concrete circumstances” (195).

The New Orators Youth Project while not specifically legislative did achieve concrete strategies and outcomes that improved life in some reserve communities. I believe this work would be easily transferrable to a focus on changing law that could support some of the more complex desires that require legal change to begin. The project was not without its challenges and it did come up against hegemonic forces. According to Thomas in northern communities in Canada where Christianity is an entrenched institution there were concerns about paganism. Many of the ceremonies if they are practiced at all remain underground. There was still a lot of fear and anxiety about certain topics. Those topics were talked about when it was safe to do so but did not necessarily make it to public performance (Personal communication, May 16, 2013). The use of an ensemble allowed obfuscation of stories similar to Headlines practice of emphasizing the reality of the stories but emphasizing that no one was playing themselves. The New Orators Youth Project would let the ensemble hold a story when it was appropriate but allowed personal testimony monologues as well.

There were serious concerns about not leaving a community in stress. As Darren called it “opening them up and walking away.” They had to be careful in remote areas that don’t have any resources so there was always work done to strategize putting participants in touch with the right people in their community that would be resources but there was an emphasis on the responsibility that lies within the community (Personal communication, May 16, 2013). I see this as extremely

empowering. We often talk of the establishment of or protection of human rights as the nexus point of empowerment but realizing ones own responsibilities and being trusted to take on those responsibilities is also an important part of the liberating process if it is focused on the cultivation of healthy thriving community life.

The project saw many participants take on leadership and there were several anecdotes of change that occurred because of the interface of grassroots performance and political leadership that seemed to make strong argument for the work as an effective catalyst for community development but Darren imparted to me the profound impact this work can have in Indian country. After a show in a high school he said he received a voice mail message thanking the troupe from coming because that night this particular participant was going to commit suicide and chose not to. He said it hit him right between the eyes how critically important this type of work really is (Personal communication, May 16, 2013).

Thomas' story of the New Orators Youth Project suggests that theatre-based projects that are focused on outcomes of community transformation like Legislative Theatre have great potential to make a huge difference in Indigenous communities within Canadian borders and across Turtle Island. His project shows that you do not need the weeks of research time and play development that Headlines requires to meet the production values that live up to the Canadian Theatre funders preconceived notions of "good theatre." However there must be invitation and trust and a recognition that the process needs to consider the role of colonization in producing the specific symptoms of community dis-ease that manifest in reserve communities. For Legislative Theatre to have effect in Indian Territory it will need to confront the legal relationships that are forged in our municipalities and the legislation that is imposed by the Indian Act itself. The Indian Act is a powerful hegemonic force that underlies much community dysfunction whether it be played out on or off reserve. It is important to remember that many Aboriginal peoples live in small neighbouring towns and are not all on reserve.

I can't help but think a Legislative Theatre project enabled by a band council or a town council in rural Canada could really benefit from the interaction that is sparked by Legislative Theatre projects because the process itself considers the importance of safety and respect. Residents would also benefit from knowing that their concerns have been witnessed and addressed and collisions of desires can be analysed and studied not simply theoretically or through various ideological lenses only. They can be considered from a holistic perspective that takes into consideration emotional and spiritual well-being as well. The challenges with this work however would be the lack of protection around confidentiality. Therefore some issues of a sensitive nature may still be too sensitive to bring forward in more rural settings when anonymity is harder to protect. It is not the Joker's job to force issues they think need to be addressed only to create space for issues to be examined and potentially staged.

I believe there is much potential in projects that are embedded and serve smaller communities. These communities are more likely able to facilitate processes of direct democracy that can affect municipal policy-making and may even be able to track efficiently changes in perspectives and laws as a direct result of legislative projects. The distance between residents and the offices that govern civic planning is often much shorter in terms of physical and relational access. Through these conditions they can better enact a meaningful processes of feedback around decisions as well. The rationale that supports this hypothesis assumes the people and offices entrusted to create law, or advocate on the community's behalf when interfacing with provincial or national legislation that regulated activities, remain closer to the experiences of on-the-ground community residents when a community is small and condensed.

There is the potential for crisis to occur when blinders are removed about particular social issues and community denial needs to be respected as part of a complex coping mechanism for survival but with the right planning and supports in place if a community is ready to take that challenge on it is the participants call, not the Joker's. There is potential for Theatre of the Oppressed when used in

collaboration with Indigenous communities to be part of the process of genuinely realizing citizenship and self-governance as a decolonizing tool. The New Orators Youth Project is located dramaturgically under the wider popular theatre umbrella but its key contribution to this thesis is its success in First Nation communities and its engagement between experiential knowledge and expert knowledge where the possibility for learning and transformation occurred and how that could easily be taken to the next level of proposing actual policy and legal change.

Chapter Four

My Story

I have worked on and off in the theatre since I was a teenager. I am now middle-aged. I cut my teeth on original scripts in summer stock repertoire as an actress. Within the theatre I was a temporary worker moving from contract to contract with no job stability or benefits so I also worked in many temporary jobs like most other actors. I became an ally of the labour movement because of these experiences even if I rarely myself enjoyed the benefits of such memberships.

I discovered the power of popular theatre to express my own lived experience inside and with community when I connected with Windsor Feminist Theatre and I no longer cared if I was considered a “professional.” This company was starting to create their own work through collective playwriting. Collective devising felt incredibly empowering as we were mining our own lives and our own opinions to say something and not just entertain. We were putting these experiences and opinions aesthetically into a public space and discovering that our audiences related to, and were themselves, inspired by our choices and revelations. I began to notice kinship with my audience as they were validated by the mirrors we were placing in front of them. We as the creator/performers were validated by their responses, which moved beyond polite assessments of our “talents as actors” to meaningful discussions about pay equity, reproductive rights, racism, female aging, sexual discrimination, gendered violence and poverty and what might be done about these issues.

This was so much more fulfilling than simply entertaining or showing how you could master a performing skill and then show it off. This was affirming that the life I was actually living, and sharing with other people in the room of the performance, mattered, at least within the shared context of the event itself. In our sharing we were connecting in a manner that was creating community and not just reflecting it or entertaining it. During my time at Windsor Feminist Theatre I was lucky enough to work with Lib Spry over the entire summer in 1991 where she taught us about Forum theatre. She used

many of the sculpting techniques and image theatre exercises I still use today. I was hooked. This work took us beyond the ritual of theatrical “*show and tell*” and “*intellectualized talk-backs*” to a revolutionary approach to the theatre itself. It inverted the locus of power and trusted our audiences as much as we trusted ourselves. It wasn’t espousing democracy – it was enacting it. I was later to learn through my studies in Adult Aboriginal Education that experiential learning was a highly valued way of coming to know things from an Anishinabeg epistemological perspective.

In 1992 I was also fortunate enough to spend ten days learning directly from Augusto Boal at an intensive workshop held at Wikwemikong Unceded Territory which is an Anishinabeg reserve community on Manitoulin Island. In my personal life I was struggling with my own sense of Indigenous identity as a descendent of Algonquin people who had never registered under Canada’s Indian Act. I was definitely struggling with my own sense of personal/political/social/spiritual well-being and was not yet aware of the teachings that lead to *mino bimaadizwin* – a good life. At the time I was unaware of land claim negotiations in my home territory and I did not know that in a few short years I would be working within that process in a profoundly personal/political way.

Through my experience I believe I do hold knowledge about the dynamics of divide and conquer and how such dynamics are encouraged by colonizing systems. That knowledge and what I do with it is a part of my responsibility bundle. I can carry it as a burden or a gift. I have come to understand that some of my experiences, if not all, in some way or another, are related to the fall out of the process of colonization imposed on several generations of my own family. I come from a family, on my father’s side, that had to accept foreign laws that defined and limited their access to land, self-knowledge, and justice. I would be lying if I did not say this knowledge has contributed to depression, anxiety, and my own constant wrestling with several *cops* that reside in my own *head*. They reside there until I am able to identify them and expose them as the impotent bullies that they really are. These are bullies with historical political weight: they do not exist without context.

While at Wikwemikong I also observed the power of the Cops in the Head and Rainbow of Desire techniques to deal with the practical fall out of these larger issues by allowing participants to deal with the tangible symptoms of lateral violence without judgement and with compassion. In some ways simple hierarchical relationships of oppressor and oppressed are easier to deal with on a personal/psychological level than the violence that can occur amongst people who share oppression. Although lateral violence is itself a symptom of colonialism it is not readily understood politically when it is occurring. It is felt deeply and personally and can wound spiritually. A useful description of lateral violence as a phenomenon can be found on Kwéykway Consulting's website. According to them,

Lateral Violence occurs within marginalized groups where members strike out at each other as a result of being oppressed. The oppressed become the oppressors of themselves and each other. Common behaviours that prevent positive change from occurring include gossiping, bullying, finger-pointing, backstabbing and shunning. ("Lateral Violence: *Kweykway*).

Participating in Cops in the Head and Rainbow of Desire techniques marked for me the beginning of a liberation of my soul from being devoured by what the Anishinabeg call the Weendigo. The Weendigo is a cannibalistic spirit that can enter the body of unsuspecting victims and that person can then wreak havoc on their own community. Basil Johnson has this to say about the Weendigos,

These manitous came into being in winter and stalked villagers and beset wanderers. Ever hungry, they craved human flesh, which is the only substance that could sustain them. The irony is that having eaten human flesh, the Weendigos grew in size, so their hunger and craving remained in proportion to their size; thus they were eternally starving. They could kill only the foolish and the improvident. (237)

He discusses his view of the modern Weendigo, which I think offers a perfect description of the

hegemonic powers of our day. He states,

The Wendigoes have never disappeared, they have simply been assimilated and reincarnated as corporations, conglomerates, and multinationals. They've even taken on new names, acquired polished manners, and renounced their craving for raw human flesh in return for more refined viands. But their cupidity is no less insatiable than that of their ancestors...the only difference is the modern Wendigoes wear elegant clothes and comport themselves with an air of cultured and dignified respectability. But still the Weendigos bring disaster, fuelled by the unquenchable greed inherent in human nature.

(237)

I depart from Basil in his assessment as I see unquenchable greed as the property of the dehumanized soul and not an inherent human trait. The transformative work of the Theatre of the Oppressed is the work of the critical pedagogue. It is a hopeful practice that entails the constant search for tools and processes that restore humanity to the dehumanized soul through learning. Such restoration occurs through the practice of being human. This practice is performed. Humanizing is a feat much easier to achieve within a community of those who can identify their dehumanization as something imposed from the outside. A far more difficult challenge is required if we have consumed and been consumed by the spirit of the Weendigo. These souls that often live in the bodies of our oppressors, but may also form a part of our own behaviour, are addicted to consumerism through believing in the illusion of the benefits of the deregulated free market economy.

My later experiences with land claim politics at home suggest to me that Legislative Theatre could be a very effective decolonizing and consultation tool for both

Indigenous and settler populations. As someone legally located within the division in a deeply personal manner I would question my ability to Joke such a project alone. I see a project like this as needing a team of facilitators. It would best be served by multiple Jokers working with various

communities replicating the nucleus system of festivals similar to what Boal created in Rio de Janeiro.

These negotiations are complex and they have been conducted since the mid-1990s. There is much polarity on just about every issue you can think of. The negotiations are so toxic that there is a movement of people who resist them entirely. I know I share feelings of helplessness and hopelessness that the process itself encourages, although it masquerades as democratic. I am quite certain I can locate all of Mixed Companies masks in various players that populate these negotiations. I agree with David Diamond that we must see our communities as organisms that are struggling to become healthy and whole but I do believe that it is important to not gloss over the oppressor/oppressed dynamic as the most fundamental relationships that is the root cause of the dysfunction in the first place. Whether or not the oppressor is a person, a system, or an internalized cop in your own head.

A settlement will likely remove our collective original title to the land that remains outside of private ownership from remaining members of the Algonquin nation and fully immerse us as participants in the capitalist economy. We will likely participate in collective investments that harm other Indigenous nations we aren't even aware of. Ongoing relationships to remaining land will be severed to generate a cash settlement that will then be invested in the global economy and held at distance and in trust from the actual people who form the nation.

A legitimate process would encourage respect between peoples and across nations, shared jurisdiction requiring meaningful responsibility and more than enough wealth to ensure not one Algonquin in the Western Watershed of the Kichissippi River is poverty stricken. We come from a very resource rich part of the country. I am afraid however that poverty is still common in the Algonquin communities of the Ottawa Valley and in some of the settler communities as well where Algonquins also reside. Colonization is alive and well and asserting its hegemony as I write this document. Brant Castellano, Davis, and Lahache discuss the uneasy relationship Aboriginal people can have with the law as a hegemonic influence on our lives. This is something that I experience as part of my own

assertion of an Indigenous identity within the contested location of the struggle for land rights, jurisdiction, retention of distinction, and self-determination as they are enacted through the Canadian comprehensive land claim process. Brant, Castellano, Davis, and Lahache state that Indigenous nations “continue to be nations, despite the assumptions implicit in laws imposed on them without their consent” (xii).

On Manitoulin Island I gained a grounding in Cops in the Head and Rainbow of Desires techniques and I was blown away by the power of the work to help me analyse my own circumstances. I was able to get outside of my own head and share my internalized oppressors with others who miraculously shared similar psychic stalkers. It was truly revolutionary to my own thinking to realize that these voices, these hauntings, and these tormenters did not bubble from the depths of my flawed person but were themselves sourced from the socio/political landscape I was inhabiting. Kicking them out of my head to expose them for the bully representatives of dominating forces they were was very liberating. Suddenly my circumstances and my challenges had context.

I went on to create a play that included a Forum anti-model and a Rainbow of Desires skit inside a larger production about eating disorders with a large community of women in Windsor. The show was well received. We toured to Detroit to an all-girls school and it was taped on local cable television. So I was well aware of the power of the work to encourage spectatorship and attract attention. I was also aware of the confidence-building the process generated. One of the participants in the show went on to National Theatre School. Another wrote several plays after her participation in Not Shown Actual Size, which was also published in Manitoba by International Readers' Theatre in 1997. Some women who struggled with bulimia became fully committed to their own healing and gained the confidence to move on from those circumstances with healthy relationships to body and food. I would not credit the show with healing their issues but I would say it participated in their ongoing process in positive way.

In 1996 I became a single parent under financially volatile circumstances. I became very aware very quickly how difficult it was to be a welfare recipient in Mike Harris' common sense revolution. To cope with my circumstances and fight back the dehumanizing forces around me, and they abounded, I gathered other single mothers who were struggling with poverty themselves and we created a Forum about our experiences. We took it to the Ripple Effect International Festival of Theatre of the Oppressed in Toronto in 1997. We held a yard sale to raise some of the money to get us there.

It was during this same festival that I experienced a real frustration with my own work as a Theatre of the Oppressed Joker. I was grappling with my own poverty and struggling to find meaningful and fruitful opportunities to continue to do theatre that was first and foremost a vehicle for positive social change protecting and encouraging meaningful citizenship. I had assembled our group and together we created a show about being single parents, being women, and being financially challenged. When we brought the project to Toronto, we could not incite intervention. The response was their situation seemed so dire that no one saw hope. I thought quickly on my feet trying to save our show and my own hope. I asked audience members if they could create and animate the systems that were informing the characters actions that were creating such inertia in both the character's and the audience's ability to act. I feared we had truly created a "Theatre of the Depressed."

The audience had no problem *zooming out* to reveal, through various images that they inserted into the scene using their own bodies that represented systems that were informing the stalemate on stage. Zooming out simply means to make the picture bigger to include more elements. The term is borrowed from television and film camera jargon to communicate the process of widening the lens of our observations. In this context the audience zoomed out by adding characters that represented systems informing the situation staged that appeared hopeless in the moment. Various hierarchies of oppressing systems began to emerge as well as the influence of mass media. It seemed to me in that moment of complete inertia, where we theatrically placed ourselves, and our audience, in a situation of

stalemate and hopelessness that individually we could not alter, that we had failed. But through the aesthetic process of staging what was going on in the socio/political environment around us we were able, with our audience, to explore the social systems and dynamics that were containing our abilities to liberate ourselves.

In the systems containing us I could see gaps in hierarchies and influences where transformation was possible but that transformation required collective action and community organizing. We found hope for change and found that liberation from the isolation of our experience existed in forming organized resistance, which was also where we could continue to create community and resist the ongoing and ever present isolation and alienation that was a part of being members of the Ontario provincial government's scapegoated population – single mothers on welfare!

Hope manifested in our ability to organize beyond the myopias of the phenomenon we were experiencing. This simple act of *zooming out* and staging the forces around us widened our understanding and helped us to see what was invisible because we were exhibiting the symptoms of the unhealthy system in the same way the scapegoat of an unhealthy family is often the individual that exhibits the most outward symptoms of a systemic problem. It is often the scapegoat that gets the entire family into therapy. The spectators helped us through their participation to comprehend the structures that were contributing to the actual circumstances that were making us all stuck.

It was in the surrounding circumstances where dehumanizing policy needed to be changed. It was in the wider community where we could assert our agency with others to make changes that would help us move forward from our own circumstances as they were. Within those few short days in Toronto I was able to hear Boal speak about his time as a vereador in Rio and I was entranced by the possibilities. Especially because of the experience of *zooming out* beyond the myopias of the symptoms of my own predicament that I shared with other women of my own community to see the larger contributing circumstances. Imagine! Using theatre to create law! As I believe the law in some

circumstances has been my oppressor, I have been in love with this idea that theatre could actually transform law ever since I heard Boal speak in 1997.

Another critical incident in my own life that suggested that there was something very powerful operating within the theatre of the oppressed system from a place of activism occurred while I was working for a campus community radio station in Windsor, Ontario in 2000. My daughter was only three years old and I was actively involved in anti-poverty work as a commitment to bettering my own circumstances and not succumbing to stigma. My work as the spoken word coordinator and my activism converged with the production of a weekly current events show called the *Poverty Line*. In this capacity I applied for media credentials to attend meetings of the Organization of American States, which were being held in Windsor. This event proved a rude awakening as I discovered freedoms I took for granted were much more privileges than inalienable rights. As the dates for these meetings grew ever closer our city was filled with swat teams, sniper units, riot squads, and the list goes on. Anyone familiar with the G20 meetings in Toronto will have a sense of what I experienced. Only it was ten years earlier and did not receive near the coverage that Toronto's meetings did.

When looking at Boal's Tree of Aesthetics of the Theatre of the Oppressed you will find two categories of performances: Invisible Theatre and Direct Action (3). I created a theatre company through our local Ontario Public Interest Research Group and we created several interventions including something called the *Dirty Laundry of the Americas* where we travelled around Windsor displaying second hand clothes and old sheets that described atrocities that had occurred across the hemisphere. We also performed speeches at City Hall and sang protest songs mostly lifted and adapted from the Raging Grannies. The singing was an experiment in attempting to humanize us to the several thousand police that had landed on our doorsteps. We sang to every police officer we could over and over again. We engaged them in conversations whenever we could and we presented ourselves as very friendly regular people but stood our ground in terms of our beliefs and opposition stance to the OAS

using our city as its own police state and to our city leaders who were allowing this to happen. We formally invited City Council to walk with us during the march on the first day of the meetings in support of freedom of speech regardless of their collusion with what was happening.

Censorship was swift. I was removed from an entertainment line-up of the Organization of American States Hemispheric Tent where I was scheduled to perform and my press credentials went mysteriously missing on the day of pickup. The entire radio station was removed from the invited press list. It was during this meeting that I became aware of how laws were manipulated by the powerful and that human rights were not protected in the way they should be. I became that much more committed to the use of theatre as a liberation technology because I learned it was so powerful that it could invoke censorship only by its potential to subvert or disrupt the plans of the powerful. The Hemispheric Tent programmers never reviewed or read the material I was going to present – they simply reacted. They had removed me as a performer based upon their fear of what I might do because they had seen our direct actions of hanging the dirty laundry of the America's around town on the news. This all occurred in a community where they were cleaning the streets by depositing the homeless as well as identified political activists in jail. According to Boal in his analysis of Aristotalian concepts of justice, freedom, and law, the criteria of inequality was and is established through laws. Who makes the laws are the privileged free people of an established democracy and not necessarily all of the people who make up the society (*Theatre of the Oppressed* 23). I have not yet attained the kind of privilege that has given me the power to realize my desire easily. Therefore I have gained several insights from both Boal's accounts of his original experiment outlined in *Legislative Theatre*, from my own lived experiences and experiments with both *Theatre of the Oppressed* Forums and from the Canadian experiments I looked at in Chapter Three of this thesis. I think the future of *Legislative Theatre* lives in two distinct possibilities. One is in the setting up of micro projects similar to the idea of micro loans that can at least cover the costs of the human labour that is required to create a Forum on a subject of public interest.

The other is in building an experiment in a small community instead of attempting to woo large municipal governments. Moreover simply creating a small nucleus that creates even a symbolic law-making session or Chamber in the Square session does come with its own rewards. These rewards are the exposure and training of more people into the Theatre of the Oppressed methodology. This action works toward the larger goal of educating citizens about the power of the work by generating space for it to occur at all.

From my experiences to date I have a few things to share about the specific position of the Joker in the creative process of building a Forum that might make policy. The Theatre of the Oppressed Joker function is comparable to the Freirian description of an activist or a popular educator. The Joker's tool for teaching and learning is dramaturgy. As Freire describes, "Their hopeful discourse is not that of someone intending to liberate others, but that of someone inviting others to liberate themselves together" (*Pedagogy of the Heart* 78). The Joker is not an autocrat or propagandist. When we work with groups to create *fictions that tell the truth* we do need to stay true to the stories being told even when they bump up against our own beliefs lest we run the danger of becoming sectarian in our practice. As Freire warns, "sectarianism is blind and antidemocratic. Unlike the sectarian always tied to their truth, the radical are always open to revising themselves; they are always ready to discuss their positions" (83). In this sense I think a Joker ascribes to a radical practice and philosophy that is not blindly left or dogmatic and is always working toward the goal of stimulating conversations that are specifically dialogic.

Boal asserts that artists are necessary, not to talk on behalf of the oppressed or about them, but to function as expert allies. He emphasizes that we must participate without paternalism but we do act in some ways as parents. I would say we have a distinct role as nurturers who value each participants individual journey verses strict authoritarians who demand conformity to rules that are made without consult (*Hamlet and the Bakers Son* 338). Alliance is a fragile relationship that must be maintained

through negotiation because people come together through their differences to assert common or related goals but they may also hold within their own social locations privileges and oppressions that must be understood to find respectful common ground.

A Joker's job is a hybrid phenomenon. S/he is a theatre artist that facilitates and supports critical pedagogy for the purposes of social change as inspired by the people s/he is engaged with and collaborating with whether s/he or they have asserted the initial invite. Iogna and Malbogot stress, "Due to the very nature of Forum Theatre...it was impossible to be separate from the community when creating plays of social import" (1). I am not making an argument for imposing a subject or project onto a community simply to bring a play into existence, but I did ask how an independent freelance Joker can be a catalyst within his/her larger community, where one lives and is facing challenges, by inviting others into an inquiry that sparks his/her genuine epistemological curiosity. In essence, once one has been trained in these techniques and has experienced the power of Theatre of the Oppressed to inspire action in the "real world", how does one keep the process continuing, even if as an individual you are not part of a larger organized community of Theatre of the Oppressed practitioners or a professional institution that has mastered a funding structure that supports your work?

It also should not be overlooked that artists themselves, at least the professional kind, may also inhabit oppressed locations within any social system. Depending upon the issues that any one project is working on, there may be times when the Joker herself does feel deeply connected to the struggles that are present in the room. Therefore it is important to be clear and defined in your role within that particular group. Holding expert knowledge does not preclude someone from also holding dual experiential knowledge. Sharing that knowledge when appropriate to bring out more trust and sharing in the room is great use of your experience as long as the process is not just all about you.

This position of the Joker, which is itself a professionalized discipline within the Theatre of the Oppressed, must be responsible for the power of the position s/he holds within the room and over the

project. The roles of this contributor are multiple: artistic advisor, director, skills trainer, and facilitator/difficultator of the actual Forums that are created. Within Legislative Theatre as it manifested in Rio they may also become a public servant and be required to provide accurate synthesized reports that are meaningful in the process of designing and proposing law. It is not surprising to me that all of the Theatre of the Oppressed companies and Jokers I spoke with, while not all being First Nations themselves, have worked with several First Nation communities and individuals. All have adapted their processes to include practice and insights from these cultural sources. Of course Darren Thomas' work is completely culturally based using theatre to complement his Haudenosaunee epistemological foundation. It is important to remember that Augusto Boal, when developing Theatre of the Oppressed games, has often incorporated the children's games of cultures from all over the world. Children's games of course embody an inherent sense of play but they also carry strong metaphors that are often Indigenous. All children, who live within communities that have not been completely destroyed by colonization, play games appropriate to the skills they need in life when they get older to ensure they can survive. All people from all cultures use role-play as a means to learn and to practice skills. Role-playing is not the exclusive tool of psychology as it has always been an intricate part of the theatre and ceremonies, rituals, and rites of passage that incorporate performance to teach.

While there is a preference for those practitioners of the Theatre of the Oppressed who are approaching the work from a strictly community development bias to downplay the importance of artistry and aesthetics within the process, I challenge that view point from a distinctly theatrical place as the Theatre of the Oppressed is first and foremost theatre, which is a practice of aesthetic intelligence. Albeit this is an aesthetic intelligence being used as an innovation to law-making, but it remains theatre none the less. And while I respect the many material and psychological barriers that may make doing theatre feel intimidating, I think it is also insulting to other human beings to not

believe in their capacity to partake in the most human of the human arts.

A professional or skilled Joker is an individual who is courageous enough to be self-reflexive on an ongoing basis. Self-reflection is an important part of the knowledge we carry with us. It informs our personal wisdom in how we relate to other people. The ability to self-reflect informs what appears to be a character trait or the intuitive nature of the “good facilitator.” This skill is cultivated over time as it also requires a conscious awareness of ego desires. We all have them: they are human. “Joking” practice should be self-reflexive. It includes honouring mistakes as great teachers and learning from failure. True self-reflection is also a conscious act of humility.

Chapter Five

Reflecting Upon Experience

While thinking about and preparing my own Legislative Theatre experiment there were three experiences that informed my choices. My plans and subsequent analysis then grew from the following questions. Is Legislative Theatre useful; if so how; to whom; and in what circumstances? I then extrapolated my own possibilities for Legislative Theatre from reflections based upon these experiences. Then I contemplated circumstances that could potentially nurture such an innovation into institutionalized settings where the goal of effective communication with tangible results could be realized with an honest commitment to problem solving.

Unlike other Theatre of the Oppressed methodologies, the Legislative Theatre assumes interaction at all levels of our governing system. It must however remain true to a commitment to teasing out and bringing forth the point of view of its oppressed messengers within a re-humanizing structure of consultation that utilizes aesthetic intellect as a valid crucible for knowledge necessary for effective community planning and problem solving. The Legislative Theatre is not a departure from the basic Forum: it is simply an extended application of the theatre to serve policy making explicitly and consciously from the point of view and needs of those most impacted by the policy.

Legislative Theatre must also move into the realm of real life governance and not remain within the realm of a rehearsal for life. Although there is definite value in symbolic demonstrations of the techniques to encourage interest and inspiration within groups that desire to change the laws that impact them. Indeed, symbolic Chamber in the Square sessions may be the best way to educate communities about the potential of the form.

The Legislative Theatre creates a space and process where knowledge is gathered and shared as the first stage of a lobbying effort to change or create the laws by which we live, at times resist, and are governed by. It must be acknowledged that the legal system itself is a hegemonic force that does not

always create law that serves people but often serve the interests of large corporations or ruling classes. Laws are often imposed without adequate consult and in situations where colonization informs the ruling authority laws are used to directly support the rule of one group over another. Therefore the law itself is the oppressor. “Thus we come to the conclusion that justice is not equality: justice is proportionality. And the criteria of proportionality are given by the political system actually in force in a particular city. Justice will always be proportionality, but the criteria that determine the latter will vary depending upon whether the system is a democracy, an oligarchy, a dictatorship, a republic, or other” (Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* 23). Legislative Theatre constitutes a dynamic and creative think tank methodology as described by Kelly Britt Howe that leads to establishing justice through democracy.

The Ride is Right

The first experience that has informed my research was a commission with Guelph Independent Living. Guelph Independent Living is a community organization that serves people who are differently abled. Their mission states they are committed to their clients “living with dignity by delivering quality programs, housing and supportive services” (“About Us,” *Guelph Independent Living*). This project was not a Theatre of the Oppressed Project specifically. It definitely fit under the umbrella of popular theatre and had the project been taken further could have easily transformed to Forum theatre. It showed potential to be adapted into a Legislative project or process. I would also classify it as “Organizational Theatre.” Organizational theatre is described by Clark and Mangham as a theatre not primarily as a resource, an ontology, or a metaphor but as a technology”(3). Organizational theatre “usually dramatizes a critical problem situation faced by the organization in question. Whatever the style, organization theatre exposes the audience to a situation of their daily working life” (Schreyogg qtd. in Clark and Mangham 3). *The Ride is Right* was a collective creation that was intended to show why issues of independence were important for the clients of Guelph Independent Living and that

greater independence could be achieved by the purchase of a mobility van. The play created scenes that showed problems where institutional policy interfered with practical “on the job” problem solving and also showed the many barriers that clients experienced when achieving adequate transportation and general respect and sensitivity to their needs when attempting to access services.

The Ride is Right did not yield Forum theatre. They ultimately create several scenes to tell the story that would make their case for the purchase of mobility van. There may well have been legislative solutions to their transit woes but this would have required a significant time commitment to exploring the legal landscape where the group lived and worked. This was time the group did not have. Two of the scenes that were created and performed could easily have been presented as Forums if the players were trained in intervention improvisation.

The participants worked on various related issues by sharing stories and sculpting scenarios of oppression, challenges, or problems. Through the devising process they began to also share how internal policy or outside legislation negatively impacted their abilities to do their jobs or achieve goals for the Independent Living complex itself. They expressed desires to raise funds for other priorities or to have other priorities addressed. I began to question how much the campaign for the van was truly the desired priority, although it was obviously an important campaign. I wondered if a deeper process of consultation using Theatre of the Oppressed dramaturgy to research their circumstances within a Legislative Theatre nucleus might help address more of the underlying systems that kept them from achieving their other priorities as well. I left this project with the impression that there was extremely rich soil to be tilled for a Legislative Theatre project to be cultivated with this group. The barrier was capacity at that time but the now that ground work had been laid and the group had experienced creating theatre together perhaps collaboration in the future was a possibility. While *The Ride is Right* was an Organization Theatre Play that presented systemic issues as reason to fundraise for a mobility van, had there been circumstances such as time and funding to keep the work going there is a good

chance we could have developed these two scenes further to create a “Play that could potentially make Policy.”

Hey, Where’s Carley

The second experience was a project commissioned by the University of Guelph Open Learning and Education Support where I was able to create a piece of actual Forum theatre that was performed with an audience transformed to spectators. This production allowed me to focus on my role as a Theatre of the Oppressed Joker within a Forum presentation and reflect upon that practice. We were able to conduct a full Forum session on two occasions.

I would still classify this project as essentially an organizational theatre project as I created it for the purposes of a conference for an organization but unlike complete “Boal Lite” defined by Clark and Mangham as “an approximation to the form of his [Boal’s] shorn of much of its political interest” (6). I would say as a feminist piece of theatre it did stay true to a presentation and analysis of gender relationships, sexuality, and bullying that was decidedly political, and did not shy away from challenging power. The project itself informed me of possibilities for Legislative Theatre to be applied within our educational system. A full Legislative Theatre project that included devising a Forum, presenting the Forum, and applying the Forum to a Symbolic Chamber in the Square presentation could easily be incorporated as a cross-curricular application of practical and critical pedagogy. If the Chamber in the Square session was successful in drafting an actual policy or law that could be passed by student council, or the governing body of the actual institution it would definitely provide a gateway of learning on many levels for all involved and aid in teaching future leaders about the power of this democratic tool.

The organization really didn’t know what they wanted; they just thought something theatrical would be nice. I took that opportunity to suggest that perhaps they might want to consider a Forum theatre piece about the subject. I find that you can’t always wait for an invitation to do Theatre of the

Oppressed because people need to be educated about what it is in the first place. If they are already thinking theatre and they are already interested in presenting material that addresses issues that are human rights–related then a Theatre of the Oppressed experience may be much more effective than an under-rehearsed presentation that is either didactic or propagandist.

I found three teens to help me create the actual show. And using the basic park bench structure of a Forum we created a party scene where the park bench was transformed to a couch. The park bench structure is an embodied way to teach quickly what the basic dramaturgical structure is of a Forum anti-model. Placing the three chairs together I get a volunteer to come up and sit at the end of the park bench. Then I will become a stranger who chooses to sit on the bench as well. The unstated social boundary is assumed that I will sit on the bench on the other outside chair but instead I look and choose to sit on the chair right next to the volunteer protagonist. In that moment everyone in the audience understands there is a problem of assumed boundary and they sympathize with the volunteer protagonist. I ask them if there is anything wrong with this picture and they proceed to share what they believe is the problem. After identifying the problem through dialogue I ask who might want to come to the stage to replace the volunteer protagonist and play an improvisation game with me to win. Winning in this instances means being able to get me to move or to at least feel safe or not be bothered by my presence. *Hey, Where's Carley's* first scene's underlying structure was essentially the park bench.

The first time the event played it was a very dynamic. There were several interventions and getting people to participate was not at all difficult. This is in part because the subject matter was something timely and urgent that they could relate to as a teen issue. The warm up exercises I do as a Joker I never see fail. The most significant of these is a game described in Games for Actors and Non-Actors entitled “Two By Three By Bradford” in the section “Listening to What We Hear” (Boal 106). I like this game in particular because it essentially teaches acting and devising theatre in three short

steps. If time is limited then we must encourage the audience to transgress the fourth wall quickly. The game imparts to them skills in an entertaining way that implicitly teaches what is needed to participate in a Forum scene. This exercise accomplishes the task every time through a constructed experiential and embodied experience.

I was able to actually pay our Forum creators and actors for the second show because a high school paid for the production after seeing the original presentation. It was a modest amount but it allowed me to pay close to equity rates to the performers and cover all of our expenses. One of the show's creators had a job so she could not perform but she was given a playwright's residual fee. The play was scripted so there was schema to follow and we were able to cast her role quite easily. To pass the role from one actor to the other the sculpting techniques were crucial. While these plays are built from the lived experiences of the participants who are constructed as the experts they are not so literal as to require the same person to play the role every time.

The sculpted image of the male character was all we needed to know. It was a particular tilt of the head that triggered the emergence of a particular arrogant personality that everyone could recognize. The actor's entire character would come alive in the exchange from the sculptor's hands to the body of the sculpted. In this way it was quite easy to transfer the knowledge of the character from one actor to another because the knowledge was embodied knowledge and not simply conveyed by text. What Mixed Company achieves through actual mask work I believe can also be achieved through sculpting.

Hey, Where's Carley is a viable touring package for high schools. It was apparent to me that it could be adapted and developed further in a school as the basis for a Legislative Theatre project that could work across the curriculum as perhaps an "artists in the schools" project. It could engage student council, courses in social studies, law, and drama to create an assembly Chamber in the Square session to tackle regulations about Bullying in the school that is specifically internet related. I believe this is

the kind of work that will lead future generations to desire such innovation within civic government or in community organizations. To me this is the pathway toward a tipping point of acceptance and advocacy for the innovation down the road. Therefore I think initiating Legislative Theatre projects within high school curriculum is a solid way to introduce the concept to the society at large. The art form itself is an applied research technology that can be used by students in other contexts including experiments in applied self-governance and law-making.

Michel McDonald Defense Hearing

In February, 2013 I travelled to Pembroke Ontario with my father, two uncles, my cousin, his wife, and their son to testify on behalf of my ancestors to maintain our family's names on the Algonquins of Ontario voters list. This is not a confirmation of legal citizenship within the Algonquin Nation as that is a criterion that is still contended as a site for negotiation. The definition for beneficiaries of the claim is also a site of ongoing contention due to several divisions of Algonquin people due to the Indian Act and separation of us from an empowered relationship to our land as a whole. Our family remains in a somewhat legal/political identity limbo. Yet the Algonquins of Ontario are positioned to vote on a draft Agreement In Principal supposedly within the year.

The draft agreement was released to the general public before the Algonquins themselves have been able to vote on the document to see if they even internally agree with it. Due to controversies around the actual identities of various root ancestors a review process based upon individual protest was set up to deal with suspicions of error or fraud on various voter enrolment files. Our ancestors were included in the files that were protested by various individuals who sit on the Pikwakanagan Band Council. Colonialism has interfered with Anishinabe self-determination to the extent that we collectively no longer determine our own memberships within Algonquin communities that would then constitute the larger Anishinabeg Nation. The larger Anishinabeg Nation encompasses several different peoples including the Algonquin nation specifically.

Moreover I believe Legislative Theatre is an important and relevant innovation that could be extended to hearings and consultations processes related to ongoing land claim negotiations within Canada. This is notwithstanding my own apprehension about any statement on my part that would seem to endorse the negotiation process occurring between the Canadian State, the Province of Ontario, and The Algonquins of Ontario in its current manifestation. Legislative Theatre if used in consultation practice is a wholistic counter-hegemonic application.

According to literary scholar Abdul Janmohamed, the dominant phase of colonialism can be distinguished by “the colonizers’ exercise of direct and continuous bureaucratic control where native consent is passive and indirect. . . .By contrast, in the hegemonic phase (or neocolonialism) the natives accept a version of the colonizers’ entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions, and, more important, mode of production” (61). With this in mind I would place my personal experience with land claim negotiations as they are currently constituted as existing within the liminal and transitional political domain from the dominant phase to the hegemonic phase.

I do not see land claim negotiations as they are playing out in the Ottawa Valley to be at all counter-hegemonic or decolonizing. I believe instituting Legislative Theatre also into the process could begin a true reconciliation process that is genuinely decolonizing and resistant to global trends in globalization that negatively impact Indigenous peoples and our lands. But for this to happen the first target of inquiry and reform would be the comprehensive land claim policy itself.

Narratives that are encoded in law do shape and inform how we understand ourselves. According to Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark “U.S. law [and I say the same for Canadian] and the national narratives that inform law and policy function as the creation stories of the nation-state” (262). The “Michel McDonald Defence” was in essence an intervention into that narrative that interrupted the dominant assumptions about Algonquin Identity, which are the result of the Indian Act becoming the legal creation story of Algonquins over the last 100 + years. It is through stories of settlement,

conquest, exploration, and discovery that distinctive nations, peoples, and communities are constructed. Although such narratives are embedded in a variety of cultural forms, few of these are equal in weight to the narration of the processes in which an entity acquires legal shape and status (Kiiwetinepinesiik 263).

According to Boal, the virtue of the legislator is to make perfect laws that will bring happiness to the citizens (*Theatre of the Oppressed* 21). “The highest good is the political one, and the political good is justice!” (21). Of course, this is the ideal, in practice there is no evidence of perfect laws as laws are but agreements between human beings that structure relationships. The bias of the law is often one that reflects deeply rooted inequities in societies. Such inequities remain powerful social definers because they are so deeply woven into the social fabric of thought that they are accepted and acted upon without question as if they are the only reality. This of course is debilitating to the group on the receiving end of the ideological containment. They feel its effects but they have no exterior validation for their feelings as harbouring the truth of their marginalization, isolation, and separation from the herd.

Cultural studies theorist Philip Auslander states that “the legal arena may be one of the few remaining cultural contexts in which live performance is still considered essential” (9). In this instance Auslander’s assertion held true. I strongly believe that without our presence at the hearing and our embodied emphasis of shared oral history presented in person to tell our story from our point of view that the outcome may not have been positive and the protest against our family upheld. Colonialism wreaked havoc on Indigenous ways of remembering who we are and had we relied solely on colonial bureaucratic records that obfuscate Indigenous identity we may yet again have been separated from legal recognition as original people in this land.

A process that seriously invited Legislative Theatre in a think tank methodology could also help Indigenous people who are caught within the current land claim negotiating process to better

comprehend what comprehensive lands claims are, what their stake in, or potential loss is, in such negotiations. It could also help the Algonquin Nation specifically challenge the premise of the Comprehensive Land Claims policy itself as it is currently applied. The comprehensive land claim policy was created in 1973 and revised in 1986. Canada became a signatory to The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2010. Perhaps the actual policy itself may not be in compliance with International Law and requires significant redrafting to ensure actual compliance within a global context and not simply a domestic one.

My experience of using performance to reclaim my family's oral history and present that oral history has maintained my family's agency within the very flawed Algonquin claim process for now. This process gave me the opportunity to theorize about the potential of Legislative Theatre to be a positive force inside negotiations between Indigenous communities existing within relation to Canada's Indian Act and other legislation such as comprehensive and specific claims policies, settler communities, and within the political apparatuses of colonizing nation states.

The application of elements of the Legislative Theatre system maintains for me an ever-hopeful intent of transformation. It may very well be an exciting and inspiring tool to encourage greater cross-communication problem solving and law-making between Algonquin communities themselves who have experienced over two hundred years of legalized division, erasure, and containment. Aboriginal Law is a relatively young discipline. Western law itself is an apparatus of colonialism but it is not going away so we are required as Indigenous people to interface with it and we do feel deeply the impact of its authority.

There are many precedents to be set and there are fundamental questions of jurisdiction and authority that must be considered to achieve agreements that abide by international standards and are not simply domestic hegemonic solutions to the "Indian Problem". Since we are not going away it makes sense to create processes that encourage needs based planning between settler communities and

First Nations communities while considering the states fiduciary responsibilities to First peoples, status or non-status, living on reserve or off reserve, inside or outside identified unceded territories.

We must exercise bravery to challenge our own learned helplessness and role model that courage to others in our work as Jokers, especially if that work overlaps with our own personal/political struggles for liberation and in the case of Algonquins respectful recognition and honest reconciliation. The law cannot be the private property of the legal profession's expertise alone. If it is to function as a democratic social regulator it must be first and foremost committed to re-humanizing the dehumanized. Scholar Lynn Gehl states that when politically organizing it is important to stress that the "turtle must lead" ("The Turtle Must Lead" *Rabble.ca*.) I take this to mean that in relationships of alliance those with privilege must stand behind and in support of the most marginalized in our nations, our communities, and families for true equalization to occur.

Capra brings up in his forward to David Diamond's book entitled "A Theatre for Living," that "one can never direct a living system; one can only disturb it" and that "'emergence' is one of the hallmarks of life" (qtd. in Diamond, *Theatre* 17). "Evolution is no longer seen as a competitive struggle for existence, but rather a cooperative dance in which creativity and the constant emergence of novelty are the driving forces (qtd. in Diamond, *Theatre* 14). Legislative Theater goes beyond using the theatre as a vehicle for communities to tell their stories. It uses theatre to disturb a status quo stagnation within a community thus inciting the *emergence* of creative innovation, which can be seen as a positive mutation to the organism that is a self-regulating community that must also negotiate with other communities to share limited resources and work to achieve abundance.

The Housing Project

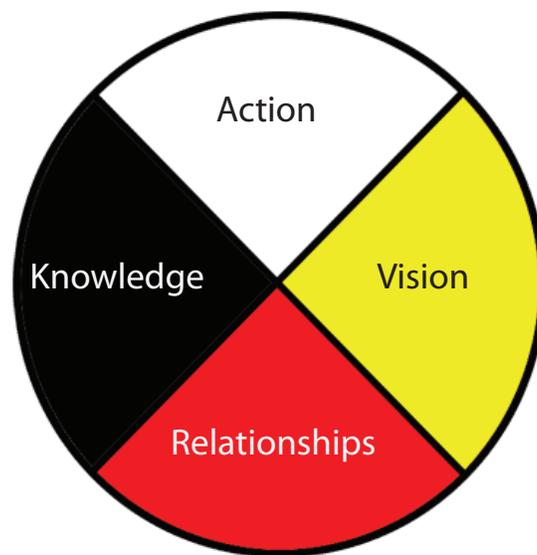
When reflecting upon my praxis as a Joker within the experiment I created I considered Giroux's assertion that, "you should never engage in a practice for which you are not reflective of that practice" (qtd. in Rajmanovich). Boal also explains the value of such reflection in these terms, "from

practice, we must arrive at a theory, in order to understand what we are doing, so we can do it better and so that we may be able to apply the experiment to other places” (Boal, *Legislative Theater* 88). A Joking ethic is a radical ethic: not a politically positional one. The radical action is to consciously listen, to watch intensely, to be present to everyone in the room, and to guide the process always to the end of creating theatre; theatre in the service of liberation. For an oppressive system to remain intact we succumb to an ideology that does not allow the work to be truthful. Without truthfulness, even when those truths we are confronting fly in the face of what we have always believed, we cease to have a pedagogical theatre in service of the oppressed and we move into the realm of being propagandist for whatever dominant ideology is forming both our motives and our work. The Joker is a Freirian radical; not a leftist sectarian. “Radicals are at the service of truth; the sectarian at the service of their truth, which they hope to impose” (*Pedagogy of the Heart* 83).

With this spirit in mind I conducted a brief experiment in my community to see if under restricted circumstances what might emerge. What emerged was *The Housing Project*. Inspired by the work of Headlines and the original Rio experiment I chose a general premise for theatrical exploration that housing is a human right. If it is a human right then what are the challenges to realizing that right for everyone in our local community? By looking at those challenges what would we learn about the legal landscape we inhabit and would we find gaps in the current legal landscape that needed to be addressed from our theatrical explorations? Would we be able to create a Chamber in the Square Forum based upon our identification of the gaps?

I planned the project using the Medicine Wheel where I considered the vision or idea of the project, the relationships I would need to cultivate, steward, and maintain and how I wanted to negotiate through those relationships to encourage a commitment to the Seven Grandfathers as my guiding principals while aiming for the larger goal of creating a law through the process of theatre. The knowledge of Theatre of the Oppressed was gained through the literature review and interviews I

conducted and this knowledge helped to guide the process. But I also thought about what wisdom might be gleaned from the experiment itself that would contribute to my final conclusions on this particular Debwewin Journey through the possibilities of Legislative Theatre as one means of transforming the way we relate to laws and law-making in our society. Finally I considered the actions that needed to be taken to realize the experiment we were conducting into a full Legislative Theatre initiative and in what circumstances it would best be applied.



The Medicine Wheel as Brant Castellano, Davis and Lahache assert is “a teaching device that originated among the First Nations of the Plains” (xiii). It has become a paradigm adopted by many Indigenous educators from many cultures including my own and it informs the way I organize and categorize my own learning and how I establish the space for the learning of others where we can engage in a reciprocal process. The Medicine Wheel is a good example of a sign that has gained wide acceptance as a useful tool for teaching, learning, and self-governing within a wholistic Indigenous world view. Brant Castellano, Davis and Lahache say it “had gained broad acceptance as a means of maintaining awareness of the interrelatedness of all life while we deepen our understanding by focusing on segments of the whole” (xiii). It is a useful paradigm for organizing theatrical exploration and

community based decision-making where diversity is integral to the process. “The vertical and horizontal axes of the Medicine Wheel reach out in the four directions to include all the peoples and cultures and draw attention to the harmony that can be achieved when divergent elements are brought into balance within the circle of life” (Brant Castellano, Davis, Lahache xiii). Legislative Theatre must engage diversity to function. The wheel emphasizes dynamic relationships and movement. You can enter the wheel from any direction, *ergo* visions evolve after actions are taken as often as a vision inspires new relationships. Knowledge is not always gathered before an action teaches us how to move forward. A project can almost be complete before we discover what its vision truly is.

My own process incorporates the Talking Circle as both a debriefing container for communication and evaluation with group members but also a self-governing mechanism to encourage consensual decisions about next steps. According to Britt Howe, “equating democracy with lack of structure can mean that the same voices assert themselves again and again” (163). It is important to me as a Joker that I constantly strategize ways to interrupt dominating communication to allow for the wisdom of more introverted personalities to emerge.

The talking circle is a communication facilitation tool common to Aboriginal organizing. Its structure is specific in that each person holds an object that is considered sacred *ergo* when whomever is holding the object their words are also preferred in that sacred space and are not to be interrupted. Each person talks until they have nothing left to say and once the object is returned to the first speaker that person can choose to continue the conversation or pass the object on. The participants continue around the circle until everyone has finished speaking and there is nothing more to say.

I encouraged participants to take notes so that if there was something important that came up in another person’s time to speak and they wanted to address it they could during their turn. This sort of conscious structuring ensured that each individual was given equal opportunity to share thoughts, concerns, and suggestions in a manner where they knew they were heard but where a conversation

could not be derailed through polarizing debate and competition for focus. It encouraged conscious discourse and a discipline of listening. Difference of opinion and critical discourse was encouraged but everyone had the opportunity to say everything on their mind and to still ask questions when it was their turn, although the answer may be delayed because the person who could answer the question might be four or five turns away.

The Seven Grandfather Teachings include humility. Legislative Theatre can be a transformative tool for such realization. As Freire points out, “it is necessary for the Oppressor to convert to the cause of the oppressed” to become humble. And it is the Oppressed that must “commit to his own fight for liberation” (*Pedagogy of the Heart* 87). Freire continues to elucidate the exchange of power that can happen in a truly democratic learning process. “It is only from that point on that both will have met the requirements for learning humility” (87). The talking circle structure allowed everyone in the group to practice humility in communication implicitly because the structure itself required it to function. The structure itself encouraged and required the group to self-govern and chose when it was time to move from unfocused discussion to discussion that would lead them to produce creatively and problem solve issues in the group. They also chose when the circle would end through their own implicit signaling and through their respect of their own desires and feelings.

My final experiment was intended to take me through the play devising process resulting in a Forum theatre performance that would encompass a symbolic legislative Chamber in the Square session. I was pleasantly surprised and pleased to have attracted eight regular participants all from various backgrounds who felt a connection to the issue of housing in their own lives and who were curious to learn more about making “Plays that make Policy.”

Another Grandfather Teaching that forms my ethical code is respect for the work. With skills come confidence. With confidence comes mastery. Mastery means empowerment. It doesn't matter that most people who engage with a Theatre of the Oppressed project will not go on to careers as

professional actors. That is not the purpose of the exercise. Although the system of games and exercises is as an effective training system as any I have been exposed to. It matters that they are given the respect that comes with the belief that they have the human capacity to learn and to express theatrically. In this I wholeheartedly accept and advocate Boal's deprofessionalization of the discipline but I do stand with David Diamond and Headlines ethical commitment to ensure that participants are supported financially, and in other ways, to participate in the work especially if there are systemic barriers that keep people with experiential knowledge from participating. I see Theatre of the Oppressed Jokers as professional skilled cultural workers who should be respected as such as well.

“To change what we presently are it is necessary to change the structures of power radically” (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart* 80). At the heart of the Theatre of the Oppressed anti-model is the understanding of power and the desire to actually transform how power is wielded from top down structures to radically equal. The process of building a Forum can help participants identify the toxic hierarchies that are blocking possibilities for democratic decision making. What matters in the Theatre of the Oppressed is to identify those top down structures that are actively oppressing, repressing, and upholding hegemony to discover cracks in the oppressive system's armour thus mobilizing citizens' power to make change.

David Diamond furthers the forum practice within Canada by challenging the simple binaries between the oppressed and the oppressor in the original forum model explaining that communities and social systems are much more complex than the power relationships originally described by Boal. I am reluctant to remove the oppressor/oppressed binary from my dramaturgy. While it may be true that we inhabit complex roles where anyone of us can be oppressed or oppressor there are still clear lines from moment to moment that delineate who is upholding hegemony or who is operating from a dominating desire. It is also important to identify the protagonist of the struggle. It is rare that even circumstances that appear to be laterally violent are wholly equal. Moment to moment analysis of a script will identify

the oppressed.

Lib Spry also addressed the dilemma that occurs with the labeling of the oppressed due to a tendency for participants in her workshops to think of the oppressed as “other” and passive. She incorporated into her process the concept of power. Therefore I still apply Lib Spry’s application of Starhawk’s analysis of power as outlined in Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism because I find it a useful and activating vocabulary. Lib describes three different kinds of power that are operational in our world. Power within, power with, and power over. Quoting Starhawk, Lib outlines these three states of power by explaining power over as “linked to domination and control, power within being “linked to the mysteries that awaken our deepest abilities and potential” and power with which is “social power and the influence we wield with amongst equals (177). This very much mirrors the kind of power engaged with when using the medicine wheel to dynamize a pedagogical process. Visioning equates with the power within described by Lib and Starhawk. The relationship quadrant applies to power with and it is our knowledge gained through our experience creating and enacting the Forum that helps us to decode and transform toxic hierarchies.

The final ensemble was composed of six individuals that expressed a desire to continue working on the project to take it to a final Chamber in the Square session. This however has not yet been realized but is something we are planning to accomplish in the future after we have committed time to serious community outreach that will ensure when we are ready we have the right people in the room to experience the session. Securing the adequate resources to ensure that the ensemble can meet on a regular basis, including a means to pay them for the cultural work they are doing is an important next step not realizable in this experiment.

Diamond structures his preliminary workshop week very carefully drawing upon the original arsenal of the Theatre of the Oppressed. He would spend the equivalent of a week with people using what he calls his “Power Play” model of dramaturgy. I originally structured my own experiment to

mimic his structure over a longer stretch of time. However my resources were so limited that I could only secure commitment from a random group of community members for about half of what Diamond's needs are for his devising research phase.

My experiment ran for approximately eight weeks in total with a three-hour session of training and devising once a week before the capacity of the group was exhausted. Our first struggle was keeping the ensemble in the room together as I had no incentive to keep them there beyond their own desires for whatever reasons were internal to them. There was no money to pay them as creators and actors. Therefore we experienced irregular attendance. A script did emerge that drew attention to several issues that could inspire a Chamber in the Square Forum. Those issues included how to regulate and deal with mold as both a health concern and a serious problem of substandard building materials that have been used since the 1970s. The play evolves to look at the challenges of landlords who are themselves house poor who rent to others and are now impacted by a law in Waterloo, Ontario that renders several alternative or low income housing arrangements illegal. This law is under review with the Ontario Human Rights tribunal.

Finally the show that emerged looked at falling between the cracks of systems that seem to be set up to help the most vulnerable members of our society but with closer scrutiny work at cross purposes to that end including very recent cuts to welfare that have removed housing start-up allowances. This was a situation directly impacting one of our participants. Other problems included fear of dealing with insurance companies whose profit motives ultimately work against the claimant thus making the process of claiming benefits from such policies a greater sources of stress than the original contributing crisis in the first place. Therefore the systems that are supposed to help a person in crisis become further victimizers.

Finally the bureaucracy of certain social services emerged as contributors to the crisis in homelessness due to slow turn around times and delayed access to workers and answers. One of the

most enlightening conversations that emerged for me was one that illuminated poor city planning that located the disabilities office across a major highway with no direct access by transit. It turns out someone with a walker or wheel chair had to cross a major highway that would be dangerous for even an able bodied person to cross to access the office. Surely there would be a way to organize around requiring municipalities to locate social service offices in locations that are actually accessible.

First and foremost Legislative Theatre is theatre. It may be theatre in service of the legislature but it is theatre none-the-less. Hence ideas are generated through theatricality. Remove the theatre and it is no longer what it claims to be. Boal says, “the more theatricalized and the better prepared the session of the Chamber, the more pains that participants take to set out their thoughts and suggestions with care and precision. The theatricality of the scene stimulates creativity, reflection and comprehension” (*Legislative Theatre* 93). Thus it is vital to any Legislative Theatre project where the goal is to make law that the theatre be strong and well-crafted: otherwise, the Chamber in the Square session itself will not yield effective and clear results. Theatrical expression is the heart of the matter. Respect for the theatre is paramount to success.

The Housing Project forum emerged two protagonists that at one point enact lateral competition for resources that bring them both precariously close to homelessness. Amal is a landlord who is dangerously close to the poverty line herself but due to the system she does wield power over her tenant Alice. To afford the home she has purchased on credit and in tandem with contributing relatives after not being able to find adequate rental arrangements she experiences a flood in her home that exacerbates an already growing mold problem. Alice, one of her tenants, begins to experience health issues likely associated with or exacerbated by a chronic mold problem made worse by the flood. Alice leaves after a difficult confrontation with Amal who out of fear of the cost and bureaucracies she may have to deal with acts with denial about the mold problem. Alice is in effect homeless and “couch-surfing”. Amal is facing losing her home.

Our theatrical research lead me to discover through reading a Report on the Real Cost of Homelessness that “one homeless person costs the public system in excess of \$55,000 per year... Alternatively, if this same population was provided with adequate housing and supports, it is estimated that the cost per person would drop to \$37,000 per year” (Patterson qtd. in Gaetz 5). The process itself lead us to becoming more educated about the issue at hand and this was in itself and important outcome with regard to our personal transformations from passive recipients of policy to engaged participants in learning.

The social systems themselves emerged theatrically as an ensemble chorus representing different environmental pressures that were causing the current circumstances and how they were perceived by the two protagonists effectively focused the point of view to be that of the oppressed. Anthropomorphized rain, mold, and even a water sucking machine established the precarious situation of both protagonists quickly and also allowed the group to effectively use their bodies as the primary aesthetic force shaping the mise en scene. In interviews with the creating group they all mentioned these particular moments in the play, and their creation, as highlights of their experience. They felt excited by the aesthetic pleasure these moments created and how clear the issues became with their use.

One of the participants who is a Joker herself explained that she had always worked on very realistic scenes in the past when staging Forums but found the surrealism that characterized these choices to be theatrically exciting. Improvisation games like the Machine, which can be found in Games for Actors and Non-actors, were used extensively to help train the group in building scenes that expressed their points of view in much the same way that Boal discusses the aesthetic use of objects in the Theatre of the Oppressed. Boal asserts that “every object should always be the carrier of an opinion, of a value, a significance, an ideology... the Image must be filled entirely with objects that have a meaning, a significance...” (*Aesthetics of the Oppressed* 123). Theatre Forums may tell a truth about a reality but there is no need to be realistic in the presentation. In fact such realism can obfuscate the

actual point of view. This is Theatre of the Oppressed and therefore should represent the creators of the play's point of view. This is not the realm of pseudo-objectivity. Boal is very clear that we should "seek to place on stage objects that are 'ideologically characterized'" (123).

We created a chorus of four actors that then provided several characters that would pop out as medical professionals, insurance representatives, and social workers who represented complex systems with political underpinnings that were working against the basic premise that housing is a human right and not simply a commodity to be exchanged in a free and unregulated economy. With the knowledge that housing bubbles contributed immensely to a serious economic crisis in the United States because of corruption within capitalistic institutions and that housing was also a primary issue underpinning First Nations activism in our own country that led to hunger strikes in the winter of 2012/13 this issue is one that can benefit from deep exploration from the point of view of the most vulnerable members of our society as experience experts. Dilapidated properties with compromised and substandard structures that use cheap materials in their construction are short term solutions to housing the masses but cost us all in the long run due to issues like mold.

The involvement of a legal expert according to Boal clarifies legal niceties relating to the theme and translates possible suggestions into legal terminology (*Legislative Theatre* 91).

A Forum show always seeks to understand the law behind the phenomenon. But with Legislative Theater we go beyond this, trying not only to discover the law but to promulgate it in the Chamber. Or to discover it and modify it. When we talk of law we are talking about written law or law to be set down in writing. To be written into legislation. This is the main conquest of our experiment" (94).

For this particular experiment I was able to acquire the help of an articling student. He was able to help me communicate with other community agencies, thus giving me a bit of a doorway in to start vital conversations about the project, which did help me recruit participants. But we were not able to

use his services to complete the Chamber in the Square session where we would draft a law simply because we were not able to rehearse the Forum that was created before the experiment dissipated. Augusto Boal discusses the need for crystal clear questions to be constructed for the Chamber in the Square session. “Only a question of crystalline clarity will lead to precise and relevant answers” (*Legislative Theatre* 90). Some of the questions that emerged for us in planning our Chamber in the Square symbolic Forum included:

1. What legislative steps or incentives can be created to encourage the prevention of mold or the clean up of mold when found, especially for small landlords or organizations committed to affordable housing?
2. Should there be a mold registry and if so how would that be set up?
3. What law would need to be created to ensure that repairs needed because of chronic mold infestation is mandatorily covered by insurance companies if material used in the building of the house is substandard and chronic moisture is not avoidable due to original construction defects?
4. What amendments should be made to City of Waterloo Bylaw 2011-047 and By Law 2012-004 amendment to ensure it complies with Ontario Human Rights legislation?
5. What can be done at the municipal level of government to support the passing of Bill C-400, which is a “private members bill currently before Parliament that addresses the crisis of homelessness and inadequate housing in Canada?” (Bill C-400 Backgrounder).
6. How can our municipality enact inclusionary zoning?

I intended to plan my own symbolic Chamber in the Square session based upon the description of a session by Britt Howe in her dissertation that I will reiterate here as a blueprint for a session that I think would apply to *The Housing Project* if I take the project to a full session at some point.

Actors passed out pencils and blank paper to everyone in the room, and Boal invited

each person to “write down a law that you’d like to get promulgated.” He elaborated, “What are, in your opinion, the laws that have to be abolished, the laws that have to be modified, or the laws that have to be implemented?” Then, after we collected all the laws, a PTO-assigned assistant read at least a few of the laws out loud one by one. After the reading of each proposed law, Boal invited people to raise their hands if they wanted to speak in favor of the law or against it. For each law, one person spoke on either side. Following the position speeches, we took a vote. A majority vote constituted law passage. We followed the same process for all ten laws read out loud. During this process, all the political guests sat in the seats usually occupied by the Omaha City counselors. They flanked Boal, who sat in the center. He appeared extremely impressed by what he called the “avalanche” of papers to come to the front desk. Boal, lawyer Susan Koenig, and some of the other guests briefly combed through the laws, selecting some of the most legibly written and on-topic suggestions to examine that evening.

(183)

Even without reaching the Chamber in the Square final outcome the workshops provided a crucial mechanism for community building through the act of play building. The space that was created for sharing stories also facilitated expert knowledge sharing within the group itself. During *The Housing Project* several group members shared their challenges with housing only to discover that one of the members of the group was a municipal housing manager. This expert knowledge was offered in alliance to help support participants in real life challenges simply because of the nexus of interaction that the workshop provided. A nexus that otherwise would not have occurred. When contemplating the value of this sort of work using theatre within community as critical pedagogy it is valuable no matter the outcome.

Chapter Six

Conclusions – My Truths

Boal himself acted as a vital bridging link between the work of the Rio nuclei and the final laws. Through his personal/political commitment to the democratic process of the work he used his agency within the established hierarchy consistently to vote for the recommendations that came from the Chamber in the Square sessions, the interactive mailing lists, and the reports from the Forums generated by the Joker's working in the field. The laws that were passed came from a variety of nuclei functioning across a community and did not simply tackle one issue.

Law-making is an important component of our politics. "Law is a term which does not have a universally accepted definition"(Hampstead 39). Geoffrey Robertson in Crimes Against Humanity: The Struggle for Global Justice describes law as a system of rules and guidelines enforced through social institutions that govern behavior (90). This model of social intervention uses the performing arts as a consultation tool encouraging vocal, empowered, and responsible citizenry without marginalizing participants as "other." It requires and supports the development of empowered individual and group agency from traditionally marginalized populations. Boal's mandate allowed for a dramatic bridge to be built between citizens and government without marginalization of the citizen groups. They were not labeled as special interest groups representing the "other." They were asserting their voices because they were asked. This very act of invitation gave credibility to each nucleus and the message it was carrying. Boal's agency as an ally to the cause helped ensure the promulgation of the laws that made it.

Forum itself is an innovation of the theatre that birthed a new interactive genre that dismantled the fourth wall and de-professionalized the discipline of acting. It transformed the spectator from passive observer to active participant in the creation of stories and their outcome. Legislative Theatre is an innovation of the forum itself transforming the forum from a theatre exercise that rehearses for real life to a tool for actual governance. This tool directly informs and therefore impacts our social design

and its subsequent regulation. The Legislative Theatre to be effective cannot participate in governance from the location of outsider: it must function inside and in tandem with the state apparatus it most desires to change. Therefore it must cultivate a culture of invitation and embrace contradiction as a state of existence that can teach and inform participants rather than impede progress.

Using dramatic arts to enter the legislative arena of government, within positive and supportive circumstances, can potentially transcend the limitation of political partisanship. Its potential strength, as a research tool, that effectively and holistically informs policy-making, is that it directly inquires into, and represents, the lived experiences of those most impacted by social policy. It invites those most impacted by social circumstances, as they exist tangibly, to express their experiences. These experiences are in relationship to laws, or lack of laws, that are negatively impacting their lives. It then asked the community, as a whole, to brainstorm ideas and try out alternatives to the circumstances as they currently exist.

Friere asks a pertinent question that offers a paradox for Legislative Theatre, “How can we expect the elitist to propose progressive cultural programs and educational projects?” (*Pedagogy of the Heart* 80). Yet it seems to me that this is what the Legislative impetus is suggesting. Accordingly the current struggle for Legislative Theatre is to create symbolic sessions of Chamber in the Square Forums and then work to get the right people in the room who can then advocate for this innovations inclusion within governing institutions as an invited and supported think tank methodology.

Wouldn't it be astounding if we were truly able to present Forum plays to a city council on a regular basis with the report from the sessions within the community to elected councillors in their decision making? Legislative Theatre does have a strong possibility of institutionalization within smaller municipalities as part of their budget planning process. Such efforts in participatory budgeting have met with some success in communities in Brazil. This idea is affirmed by Biaocchi who suggests that a “Legislative Theatre session could contribute to the continual reform of the [Participatory

budgeting] process” (85).

Biaocchi states,

If history teaches us anything, it is that practice and experimentation with participatory tools of democratic governmental action will produce unexpectedly good outcomes. Those who carry out such experiments must above all remember that the ultimate goal of both Participatory Budgeting and Legislative Theatre is not improvement of urban government or promotion of participation for their own sake, but rather social transformation.” (86)

For this idea to take hold there must be a shift in perception of the theatre artist as frivolous entertainer to serious cultural worker. A commitment to an experiment in Legislative Theatre embedded in a municipality with adequate resources allocated to hire trained Jokers into the bureaucracy can move institutions in a direction of more democratic decision-making. This commitment would serve the most vulnerable members of a community because their voices and experiences will become privileged locations of research, consultation, and discussion.

By community I am not necessarily only suggesting a municipality’s council – I could mean a not-for-profit board or a school board. There are many self-governing groups that exist in our society. Groups that have the power to pass legislation that directly regulates human behaviour in that community or communicates to wider realms its desire and the power to negotiate its communities needs with other communities. Headlines made links with City Hall but could not enforce a commitment to direct democracy in the way that Boal enacted his role because it was still operating outside the institution itself. A Legislative Theatre project designed in collaboration with a supportive community council where that council was truly vested in learning the truth about circumstances as they exist for the people they serve could be very productive in finding creative solutions to serious problems that plague that community.

Legislative Theatre operates within this larger process as a catalyst to transforming attitudes

about what constitutes legitimate and expert knowledge in the decision-making process. This ideological transformation is beneficial to society at large because it takes into account the overall impact of actions; it infuses decision-making with tangible anecdotes that reflect lived experience. It also honours and acknowledges complexity. Such respect for complexity allows for humility to germinate within and legislating institution from the largest to the smallest. This humility in turn keeps decision makers open to innovation. Humility, as was stated in my description of methodology, is one of the qualities that inform actions that lead to achieving *mino bimaadiwizin* from an Anishinabeg world view. Such cultivated humility could go along way in helping to resolve land, resource, and responsibility disputes between First Nations and the Canadian State. Such humility would allow us to restore the original intent of what it means to be treated people.

Legislative Theatre returns voice and action to the concrete dehumanized soul afraid to speak who is constrained by systems that limit, or completely halt, the creative human impetus. Being truly heard and gaining the confidence and ability to express impact from actual experience encourages healing regardless of any laws that are actually passed. The mere creation of possible laws, drawn directly from those witnessing and interacting with the Legislative Theatre's Chamber in the Square Forum, can bring the hope of possibility into a situation that has been constructed as hopeless. Legislative Theatre projects build communities where diverse informal networks of people can fight the isolation that comes from non-representation or non-recognition.

On this *Debwewin Journey* I have come across the poetic words of Art Solomon, an Anishinabe Elder, "We must walk in beauty and with power" (12). Speaking through the aesthetic space of the Theatre of the Oppressed we can reclaim our personal agency to act upon our lives and not simply be passive recipients of social policies we did not create. We begin our walk in beauty and with power. When we come together in community to create "Plays that Make Policy" that honestly and truthfully reflect our collective circumstances expressed from our distinct point of view we share responsibility.

We ask what can be done better the next time? We are engaging in generating our shared aesthetic curiosity and we become social designers with others. We are no longer passive recipients of social policy we are powerful generators of social change.

The fact that we are ontologically responsible is not something that can be experienced without search, without fighting against those who irresponsibly prohibit us from being responsible for our own freedom” (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart* 100). The Legislative Theatre is one way to fight such irresponsibility in the realm of governance and specifically within the domains of policy and law-making mechanisms that exist throughout our society and not just in municipal government.

Communities, as David Diamond describes, are living organisms that hold within them dysfunctional behavior systems. These systems are plagued by executions of power over as described by Lib Spry. For this reason it is important to confront denial or obfuscation within culturally and economically complex societies with descriptions of relationships as oppressive and explore how they are oppressive to begin to build non-oppressive ones. Systems transform because behaviors change at the most basic levels of our interactions because we encourage liberation from denial. Sandra Pronteau signaled how meaningful it was for her to inhabit a pedagogical role, offering that, for her, the most important accomplishment of Practicing Democracy was “educating the public, bringing the awareness out” on subjects about which people might otherwise say, “sweep it under the carpet” (qtd. in Britt Howe 90).

I see great potential in the work to ignite individual agency, encourage empathy and sympathy that leads to alliance, and widen our collective consciousness in ways that help various sectors of our society think and act outside disciplined limitations. This in turn leads to the cross-pollination of creative and generative problem solving that is inclusive and constructive while respecting and honouring differences as a rich cauldron of creative emergence and not simply a location of sectarian xenophobic and immovable conflict.

I saw within the Theatre of the Oppressed dramaturgical system the opportunity to counter hegemonic forces using the performing arts. Working toward changing laws that oppress, or to create laws that liberate, is a humanizing activity that is life affirming no matter the outcome. Britt Howe argues that using Forum Theatre as the primary methodology for Legislative Theatre construct citizenship as a process of collective knowledge-building. These projects stage citizenship as a collaborative act through which citizens gather together to teach each other about their experiences with policy and about how legislation might be changed in the interest of justice (5).

If you feel pushed to the margins of citizenship, which does confer agency within a society, there is no better an antidote to that trajectory than to engage in a struggle to change those circumstances. Such struggle is a hope-filled action. There are many ways to conduct that; one way is through Legislative Theatre.

To seek liberation and healing from oppressive circumstances and various marginalized social locations through artistic means is not just an act of survival. It truly is a revolutionary act of love. This is a love for self and for community. which embodies the hope for global justice from the psycho/spiritual geo/political location from where one actually lives. No one event changes everything but some critical incidents do transform behaviour and perspective. Theatre can allow us to consciously create such critical incidents so we can better vision alternative and generative pathways to decision-making that brings change. Theatre of the Oppressed allows us to begin our walk down that pathway. Legislative Theatre asks us to take responsibility for the steps we choose.

Works Cited

- Abele, Frances and Carolyn Dittburner, Katherine A. Graham. "Towards a Shared Understanding in the Policy Discussion about Aboriginal Education." *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise*. Ed. Marlene Brant Castellano, Lynn Davis. British Columbia: UBC Press. 2000, 3-24. Print.
- "About Us." *Guelph Independent Living*. Guelph. 2007. Web. 30. Mar. 2013
- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards and Investigation)." *An Anthology of the State*. Ed. Aradahna Sharma, Akhil Gupta. USA: Blackwell Publishing. 2006. Print.
- Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture: Second Edition*. New York: Routledge. 1999. Print.
- Babbage, Francis. *Augusto Boal*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Baiocchi, Gianpaulo, "Performing democracy in the streets: Participatory Budgeting and Legislative Theatre in Brazil." *A Boal Companion: Dialogues on theatre and cultural politics*. Jan Cohen Cruz and Mady Schutzman, Eds. New York: Routledge. 78-87 2006. Print.
- Benton Banai, Edward. *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of Ojibway*. Minnesota: Indian Country Communications Inc. 1988. Print.
- Bill C-400 Secure, Adequate, Accessible and Affordable Housing Act Background*. Toronto: Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation. 2013. Print. Web. 18 May 2013.
- Boal, Augusto. *Aesthetics of the Oppressed*. New York: Routledge. 2006. Print.
- . *Games For Actors and Non-Actors*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- . *Hamlet and the Baker's Son: My Life in Theatre and Politics*. New York: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- . *Legislative Theatre*. New York: Routledge, 1998. Print.

---. *The Rainbow of Desire: the boal method of theatre and therapy*. New York:

Routledge, 1995. Print.

---. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1979. Print.

Britt Howe, Kelly. *Adapting Boal's Legislative Theatre: Producing Democracies,*

Casting Citizens as Policy Experts. Dissertation. Austin: The University of Texas.

2010. Print.

“Building the Canadian Advantage: A Corporate Responsibility (CSR) Strategy for the

Canadian International Extractive Sector.” *Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada:*

Social Responsibility. Canada: Federal Government. Mar. 2009. Web. 15 May. 2013.

Castellano, Marlene Brant, Lynn Davis, Louise Lahache. “Introduction,” *Aboriginal*

Education: Fulfilling the Promise. Eds. Marlene Castellano, Marlene Brant, British Columbia:

UBC Press. 2000. xi-xvii. Print.

Chandler, Joan. “Sheatre Archives Past Work Archives 1986” *Sheatre*: Owen Sound: Gawd

Productions. 2013. Web. 17 Apr. 2013.

Clark, Timothy, Iain Mangham. *Stripping to the Undercoat: Organisation Theatre and*

Forum Theatre. UK: Kings College University of London. Print.

Cohen-Cruz, Jan and Mady Schutzman. *Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism*. New

York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Commanda, William. *A Vision for Victoria Island*. Quebec: 2003. Print. Circle of All

Nations Web. 3 Mar. 2013

Confucius. *Brainy Quote.com*. Xplore Inc. 2013. Web. 1 Jun. 2013.

Davidson, Lawrence. *Cultural Genocide*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. 2012.

Print.

Diamond, David. *Theatre for Living: The Art and Science of Community-Based Dialogue*.

Victoria: Trafford, 2007. Print.

Einstein, Albert, *Creative Creativity: Inspiration and Tools for Creativity* 11 Nov. 2011

Web. May 30. 2013

Gehl, Lynn. Maan Pii Nde' Eng: A Debwewin Journey Through the Algonquin Land

Claims and Self-Government Process. Peterborough: Trent University. 2010. Print.

---. "The turtle must lead, anything else is false solidarity. *Rabble.ca* 20 Feb. 2013. Web.

30. March. 2013.

Gaetz, Stephen. *The Real Cost of Homelessness: Can we save money by doing the right*

thing? Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press. 2012. Print.

Gianpaolo, Biaocchi. "Performing Democracy in the Streets: Participatory Budgeting and

Legislative Theatre," *A Boal Companion: Dialogues on Theatre and Cultural Politics*. Ed. Jan

Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman. 78-87. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Filewod, Alan. *Committing Theatre: theatre radicalism and political intervention in*

Canada. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2011. Print.

Filewod, Alan. Personal Communication. Feb. 2013.

Franklin, Gail. *After homelessness....Community Action Report: Policy recommendations*

arising from audience responses to the Headlines Theatre Production. Vancouver: Headlines

Theatre Feb. 2010. Print.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Heart*. New York: Continuum, 1998. Print.

---. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1983. Print.

Rajmanovich, Jacqueline. "Culture, Politics & Pedagogy: A Conversation w/ Henry

Giroux." On line video clip. You Tube. 12 Sep. 2010. Web. 3 Oct. 2012.

Hampstead, Lord Lloyd. *Introduction to Jurisprudence*. Third Edition. London: Stevens

& Sons. 1972. Print.

“After Homelessness.” *Headlines Theatre*. 2009. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.

---. “History of the Project.” *Headlines Theatre*. 2009. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.

After Homelessness. Vancouver: Headlines Theatre. 2009. DVD.

“Practicing Democracy.” *Headlines Theatre*. 2009. Web. 17 Mar. 2013.

Practicing Democracy, Vancouver: Headlines Theatre. 2004. DVD.

“Theatre for Living.” *Headlines Theatre* 2009. Web. 17 Mar. 2013.

Iogna, Luciano and Simon Malbogat. “Mixed Company Theatre’s Role in Performance and Civic Engagement,” *Community Engaged Theatre*. 1-9 Web. 5 Apr. 2013.

Janmohamed, Abdul. “The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature,” *Critical Inquiry* 12-1, USA: University of Chicago Press. 1985, 59-87. Print.

Johnson, Basil. *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway*. USA: Harper Collins 1995. Print.

Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, Heidi. “Transforming the Trickster: Federal Indian Law Encounters Anishinaabe Diplomacy,” *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World Through Stories*. Eds. Kill Doerfler, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, and

Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press. 2013. 259-278. Print.

Krznaric, Roman. “Five Ways to Expand your Empathy.” *Outrospection: Roman Krznarics blog on the art of empathy and the art of living*. 1 Jan. 2010 Web. 21 Apr. 2013.

“Lateral Violence in First Nation Communities.” *Kweykway Consulting: A restorative approach to organizational and community development*. Vancouver 2013 Web. 27 May 2013.

Little, Margaret. “A Litmus Test for Democracy: The Impact of Ontario Welfare Changes on Single Mothers.” *Studies in Political Economy Volume 66*. Ottawa: Carleton University. 9-

36, 2001. Web. 1 Jun, 2013.

Mixed Company. Toronto 2013 Web. 20 Apr. 2013.

North, Liisa. "Bad Neighbours: Canadian Mining Companies in Latin America,"

Canadian Dimension. Winnipeg: Canadian Dimension. Jan-Feb. 2011. Print. Web. 10 Dec. 2010.

Quinn Patton, Michael, Francis Westley, Brenda Zimmerman. *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed*. Toronto: Vintage Canada. 2007. Print.

Robertson, Geoffrey. *Crimes Against Humanity: The Struggle for Global Justice*. New York: The New Press. 1999. Print.

"Rule of Law" Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 26. Aug. 2013. Web. 1 Jun. 2013.

Salverson, Julie. Ed. *Popular Political Theatre and Performance: Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2010. Print.

---. "Performing Emergency: Witnessing Popular Theatre and the Lie of the Literal. Collective Creation Collaboration and Devising." *Collective Creation Collaboration and Devising*. Ed. Bruce Barton. Canada: Playwrights Canada Press. 88-96. 2008. Print.

Solomon, Arthur. *Poems and Essays of Arthur Solomon a Nishnawbe Spiritual Teacher. Songs for the People: Teachings on the Natural Way*. Ed. Michael Posluns. Toronto. NC Press 1990.

Sheldon, Stacy Ed. "The Gifts of the Seven Grandfathers." *Noongwa e-Anishinaabemjig: People who Anishinaabemowin Today*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan. 2013. Web. 1 Jun. 2013

Spry, Lib. "Structures of Power: Toward a Theatre of Liberation." *Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism*. Eds. Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman. New York: Routledge, 1994.

171-184. Print.

Walker-Bolton, Monica. *Lessons from the Back to the Land Movement:*

*A Major Paper Presented to The Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of
Guelph.* Guelph: n.p. 2012. Print.

Whiles, David. *Theatre and Citizenship: The History of a Practice.* New York:

Cambridge University Press. 2011, Print.