

Report on  
**The Downtown Eastside Arts4All Institute**  
Produced by Vancouver Moving Theatre and Jumblies Theatre  
In association with  
The Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival  
Community Arts Council of Vancouver  
and Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

November 12-20, 2009  
Downtown Eastside  
Vancouver, British Columbia

Ukrainian Hall • Carnegie Community Centre • Gallery Gachet



By Will Weigler

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Images based on photos by Terry Hunter and Ken Tabata

Photo from *Bridge of One Hair* on page 37 by Katherine Fleitas

## Prologue

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*The main tenant of community arts is engagement – when the community itself is engaged in the making of the art. It is about the process of making this art together with the community and what happens to the community when it comes together to create... Which boundaries are crossed? Which bridges are built? Whose voices are heard? Which people meet and greet and play together who otherwise would not? Which conflicts are resolved? Whose lives are improved? Which stories are told?*

*Is it called community arts when the play is about the community [...], when an artist takes some photos or does some interviews or finds a story and then makes a play about the community? After years of pondering, I would say, no, it is not – because there is no real engagement. What if the community members are invited to see the play that has been created about them? I would still say, no, it is not community arts – the participants are the subjects, but they have not been a part of animating their own stories, they have only offered them up. And there is nothing wrong with that at all, it's just not community arts.*

Lisa Marie DiLiberto,  
Jumblies Theatre

Vancouver Moving Theatre (VMT), founded by Savannah Walling and Terry Hunter in 1983, is an award winning interdisciplinary company that has presented thousands of performances, workshops and lectures to over half a million audience members in North America, Europe, Asia and Australia. Ten years ago, VMT began to focus specifically on creating interdisciplinary arts and community building projects in their home community—the economically impoverished Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, British Columbia. Considered “Canada’s poorest postal code,” the neighbourhood is home to a socially and culturally diverse, largely low-income community who, like residents of similar neighbourhoods across North America, cope daily with the challenges of poverty, homelessness, lack of affordable housing and a crisis of drug addiction and a high rate of infectious diseases.

Here, in the very heart of the city of Vancouver, the men and women who live in the Downtown Eastside demonstrate their unrelenting commitment to community activism, social justice, and compassion. Over the past decade VMT has fostered the use of theatre and other artistic media to engage neighbourhood residents in the creative expression of the stories of their lives, their cultural histories, their struggles and their dreams. VMT’s groundbreaking work has included *In the Heart of a City: The Downtown Eastside Community Play* (with Carnegie Centre); *We’re All In This Together: The*

*Shadows Project – Addiction and Recovery* (which featured a story told largely in shadows projected against an enormous screen); the tragic-comic *A Downtown Eastside Romeo and Juliet*; five years of the Strathcona Artist at Home Festival; and, with a host of community partners since 2004, the Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival.

## Downtown Eastside Arts4All Institute



It is the autumn of 2009 and Walling and Hunter are introducing a new layer to their community-engaged arts work. They have extended an invitation to community members to come spend an entire week as participants in the first Downtown Eastside Arts4All Institute, learning about the philosophical principles and the nuts and bolts practices of community-engaged art. Twenty people have signed on to work with a team of artist/facilitators. All of us are hungry to learn. Savannah Walling explains:

*Like most community art projects, the people participating in this institute represent a diversity of backgrounds, skill levels, interests and purposes. All share an interest in gaining skills and insights in processes that engage with communities. Some are veterans in the field who want to revisit the basics, challenge weaknesses in their skill sets and learn from and share with peers. Some are professional and emerging artists who want to engage more effectively with communities and learn how this differs from mainstream arts presentations. Others have organized or participated in a variety of arts related community activities and want to learn how to go about becoming professionals in the field. Some want to figure out how to put Downtown Eastside-created projects onto the road to share with their friends and relatives: to shed light on realities of city life and inspire other communities to put on their own plays.*

*Many have lots of ideas but lack tools to get them going. Most have big or small projects in mind and are looking for tips and tools on project start-ups; facilitation, communication, conflict resolution and delegation; preparing (and maintaining) budgets, business plans, funding proposals; forming partnerships and assembling collaborative creative relationships; documentation, evaluation, legacies. Several are pondering big questions. What do professional artists need to know to work successfully with community members on community-arts projects? How do you create projects that are accessible to diverse levels of experience, age, cultural and social backgrounds and openness? How do you ensure that community-engaged artists deal with a community's real issues of the day and understand –*

*when risking the opening of old wounds with tough themes – how to ensure that these communities and individuals will be okay after the artists leave? <sup>1</sup>*

The course will be based on a one-week training course called Arts For All Essentials, developed by Jumblies Theatre in Toronto and offered annually by that company over the past eight years. Walling and Hunter have invited Jumblies Artistic Director Ruth Howard to co-produce an adaptation of the course specially tailored for the Downtown Eastside's inner city community. They have also brought together colleagues from across the country to co-facilitate this learning adventure.

Howard, Walling and Hunter are joined by Jumblies Executive Director Keith McNair, as well as freelance community arts director Varrick Grimes, and Cathy Stubington, the Artistic Director of Runaway Moon Theatre in Enderby BC. It was Cathy's production of a play called *Not the Way I Heard It* that inspired *In the Heart of a City: The Downtown Eastside Community Play* in 2003. Also invited are Lina de Guevara, Artistic Director of Puente Theatre in Victoria BC, and Susan Gordon who will orchestrate the day-to-day operations of the Institute. Nearly every night of the Arts4All Institute there will be public events on the theme of community-arts, held in venues around the Downtown Eastside.

One of the hallmarks of community arts is the understanding that everyone has much to learn from each other. The professional artists are on the team alongside the community participants and it is understood that every one of us brings valuable and insightful contributions: knowledge, wisdom, and different types of expertise to our week of co-learning.




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<sup>1</sup> The Downtown Eastside Arts4All Institute program "Welcome" page.

## Facilitators and Participants

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**Sharon Bayly** is a performer trained in clown, mask, mime and dance. She studied at the Dell'Arte School of Physical Theatre in California and is Co-Artistic Director of Mortal Coil, with whom she has worked since 1995. She has recently co-directed the Stanley Park Ghost Train and coordinated *Illuminating the Four Corners*, an open air community arts event performed at the corner of Hastings and Main during the Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival in 2009. She was designer Tamara Unroe's assistant for *We're All In This Together: The Shadows Project*.



**Hendrik Beune**, an immigrant from the Netherlands, was formerly a shellfish farmer who built some ocean-going vessels, and floating structures for suspended shellfish culture. He has been a naturalist with diverse interests: ecology, marine biology and anthropology. After sustaining a back injury, he ended up staying in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) where he became a social justice advocate and activist. His writing has been published in several street oriented magazines, and he has been editor of *Upwords Magazine* written by DTES Community folks about issues regarding the area from poverty, addiction and homeless issues. Hendrik facilitates a Social Justice Peer Support Group at Lifeskills Centre, has been working on local documentaries and film projects

**Colleen Carroll** is a retired sawmill worker and single mom from British Columbia's Bulkley Valley. She moved to the DTES when her health deteriorated. Since then, she has written three books and taken up painting, working in acrylic and recording aspects of the DTES she seldom sees portrayed in the media. An ardent fan of Oppenheimer Park and the people who work there, Colleen recently won a Neighbourhood Small Arts Grant to fund an orchestra of instruments for the Oppenheimer Park Band. She curates the Saturday night film documentary series "for thinking people" at Carnegie, and organizes community building events including the Artist Market of DTES residents.



Guest facilitator **Lina de Guevara** is the Chilean-born Artistic Director of Victoria's Puente Theatre, a group that uses theatrical experience as a bridge between cultures, creates community plays which explore and relate the experiences of immigrants to Canada and performs works from other cultures. An actor, theatre director, playwright and drama teacher, she specializes in Transformational Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed and Commedia dell'Arte.





**Patrick Foley** has participated in community plays as an actor, playwright, and set designer, and has been involved in various workshops, symposiums and other DTES community events. His one-act plays have been produced or read by Theatre in the Raw and the Carnegie Theatre Workshop and he was a contributing writer for *In the Heart of a City: The Downtown Eastside Community Play*; *Through the People's Voice*; *We're All In This Together: The Shadows Project*; and *Condemned*.

**Susan Gordon** moved to Cordova Street in the Downtown Eastside in 1979 and started working at the Carnegie when it opened in 1980. She has worked in a number of locations for the City, eventually taking the position as Co-ordinator of Arts and Culture for the Park Board in 1991. Since retiring in 2007, Susan has worked in co-coordinating conferences, one of which was the 4<sup>th</sup> National Canadian Community Play Exchange Symposium in 2008.



Co-facilitator **Varrick Grimes** is a Newfoundland-bred director based in Ontario who's directed collaborative community plays, spectacle and site-specific theatrical events in Toronto, BC and England. As Associate Director of Theatre Newfoundland Labrador, he spearheaded the Gros Morne Theatre Festival. Varrick has worked as a community artist with street-involved youth, directed community opera for Jumbles Theatre and open air productions for BC's Runaway Moon Theatre.

**Lorelei Hawkins** is an urban elder and activist. Among her many activities, she presents Medicine Wheel workshops at the Raycam Community Centre Association, where she is a director on the association's board.



Guest Artistic Director and lead facilitator **Ruth Howard** is the founding Artistic Director of Jumbles Theatre. Ruth creates multi-year and multifaceted community arts residencies leading to large-scale interdisciplinary performances and events. She has designed collaborative community plays across Canada and in the UK as a set and costume designer, and taught at various universities, colleges and schools. She has won several awards for her work and productions, including a 2005 Toronto Community Foundation, "Vital People" award, and a 2007 Dora Nomination for costume design for *Bridge of One Hair*, for which production Jumbles was also awarded an Ontario Trillium Foundation "Great Grants" award.



Co-facilitator **Terry Hunter** is co-founder and Executive Director of Vancouver Moving Theatre with whom he has toured four continents and developed a unique form of drum dancing. A Jessie Award recipient, Terry is also Artistic Producer of the Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival.

**Sharon Kravitz**, Video documentation/volunteer. Sharon has designed and run various street level community arts projects out of the Carnegie Community Centre including "Speaking in Chalks" and "Walls of Change" and is a graduate of the Langara College Herbal Medicine Program and Capilano University's Documentary Film Program.



**Vee Krisp** has worked in performance art, film, video, sound, installation and curation. She has worked collectively with the Public Dreams Society, the Disasteroids, Western Front, and Grunt Gallery among others. Vee spent five years working in a non-profit artist run media arts centre where she directed a three-day interdisciplinary media arts festival that focused on interactivity,



**Bret Little** earned her BFA in theatre from Simon Fraser University's School for the Contemporary Arts where she trained in acting, directing and writing. She also studied Indian Art and Culture at the Nehru University in Delhi, India, and has studied the work of Augusto Boal and other political theatre forms. After assisting Director Steven Hill on *Bone in her Teeth* with Leaky Heaven Circus in 2008, Bret moved to New York City to train in Viewpoints and Suzuki techniques with SITI Theatre. Returning to Vancouver, she volunteered as an administrative assistant on VMT's 2009 DTES Heart of the City Festival. Bret is directing a puppet procession for Leaky Heaven Circus scheduled for the spring of 2010 and is planning a "Spaghetti Dinner" event: an evening of short performances with a dinner.

**Steven Lytton** is Interior Salish Thompson First Nations—he moved to the Downtown Eastside in 1992 and loves the character, heart and courage of this community. Steven was an actor in *The Downtown Eastside Community Play* (2003); *The Shadows Project* (2007); the forum theatre piece "Reclaiming Our Aboriginal Languages" (performed at UBC in 2006); *Trouble in Paradise: Being Poor in a World Class City* where he performed as a homeless man charged and brought to court and convicted of being homeless (produced by Streams of Justice for the Poverty Olympics and other events); *DTES Music Theatre Showcase* (2009) and in the Heart of the City Festival film "Heart and Home"; he acted in *Crime and Punishment* (Newworld Theatre, PuSH Festival, Vancouver Moving Theatre). Steven is a vice president of the BC Aboriginal Network on Disabilities society; he is one of the band members addressing band issues supporting the governing body to make sure they are accountable; served as a Board member on the Carnegie Board; the Aboriginal Homelessness Standing Committee; and has partnered with activist Dave Diewert at speaking engagements promoting the community. He is a Board member of urban ink. He likes public speaking.



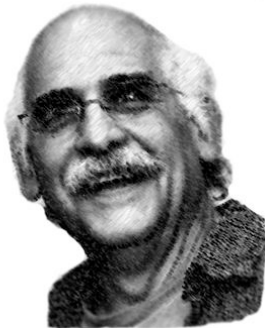


**Teresa McDowell** is a professional graphic artist committed to her community. She has initiated a number of events in her neighbourhood and through her children's school. Along with participating in the Institute, Teresa volunteered preparing the meals during the week.



**Dawn Mcleod** is an emerging actor/creator in Vancouver's professional theatre community. Dawn is currently working on a community development theatre/job initiative project with male, female, and transgender street-entrenched sex workers in the downtown core – a project that stemmed out of a Artist in Residency she did with the PACE (Prostitute Alternatives Counseling and Education) membership at Gallery Gachet.

**Kelty McKerracher** is a Flamenco dancer/performer/teacher and community choir member with group facilitation experience and an interest in social justice. She has been studying Flamenco dance in Vancouver since 2004, which has been a transformative experience for her. She was recently involved in a collaborative project with urban ink and Raven Spirit Dance at the Firehall Arts Centre.



Co-facilitator **Keith McNair** joined Jumbies as Managing Director after more than 20 years in Toronto's social development sector, including nine years as Executive Director of Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre from where he collaborated in the development of Arts for All Essentials.

**Laura Michel** is an Adams Lake Band member from the Secwepemc Nation in the BC interior. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2007 (majoring in Theatre with a Minor in Sociology) and in the fall of 2010 she plans to begin a graduate program at Thompson Rivers University (TRU) focusing on Social Theatre and Community Theatre. Laura is currently working for the Secwepemc Cultural Education Society (SCES) as Projects Coordinator and on a Multi-generational Language Theatre project.



**Joan Morelli** studied theatre in the Carnegie Centre theatre workshops (and other places) and has participated in several Downtown Eastside community arts projects (*I Love the Downtown Eastside*; *The Downtown Eastside Community Play*; *The Shadows Play*; *Condemned*). A member of the DTES Women's Writing Group, Joan was one of the writer/performers involved in urban ink's recent project *Dreamcatcher* at the Firehall Arts Centre.



**Violet-Rose Pharoah** performed in the local production of *The Vagina Monologues*, staged and directed by Art Matters as a fund-raiser for V-Day and women's organizations. She has participated in acting classes hosted by the Firehall Arts Centre, a manuscript writing program with Canadian poet/creative non-fiction writer Betsy Warland, and in EMERGE, an 8-week evening media training project offered by Vancouver Status of Women.

**Jim Sands** is a Strathcona-based actor, musician and songwriter who believes everybody's gift needs to be honoured. A ensemble performer in *The Downtown Eastside Community Play*; *The Shadows Project*; and *A Downtown Eastside Romeo and Juliet*, Jim has also performed as a soloist with bands and as an orchestra member for several community arts projects. He has performed his original compositions at venues such as La Quena, WISE Hall, and has facilitated workshops in community social planning, partnership building and engagement in over 30 BC communities. Jim is employed by SPARC BC, a provincial non-profit involved in research, community development and accessibility issues.



**Melanie Schambach** is a Colombian/Canadian emerging artist with a degree in Visual Arts from Emily Carr Institute. She channels painting into activism by encouraging critical thinking and discourse through participatory painting. Melanie facilitates short and long-term workshops for children, youth, adults, seniors, participants with special needs and/or chronic illnesses, youth at risk and other minority groups. She has made long and short-term partnerships with community centers, shelters, schools, alternate school programs, non-for-profit organizations like Positive Women's Network, Vancouver Metis Association. Melanie's commitment to the community is to motivate people to change through participatory painting

Co-facilitator **Cathy Stubington**, based in Grindrod (Enderby) BC, is artistic director of Runaway Moon theatre, a professional theatre company specializing in innovative puppet theatre and multi-generational community art experiences that engage the imagination, offer alternative perspectives and bring together artists and public. A puppet designer, puppeteer, writer, singer, community-based artist, Cathy has been producing theatre with puppets and actors in unusual settings for 30 years. Currently in a partnership between her community and a health education program in Kenya, she's developing a new community art project celebrating water.



**Priscillia Mays Tait** is a single Witsuwit'en mom—an artist with a twist of activism. She has been co-facilitating the DTES Women's Writing Group, and recently performed in the urban ink project *Dreamcatcher*. Priscillia was actively involved with *The Downtown Eastside Community Play*; *The Shadows Project*; and *A Downtown Eastside Romeo and Juliet*.



**Gena Thompson** (pronounced GAY-Nah) performed in three productions created for and with the Downtown Eastside and is also a local photographer who has documented many DTES events including *The Downtown Eastside Community Play*; *Condemned*; *A Downtown Eastside Romeo and Juliet*. Gena thanks the DTES community for helping her art practice bloom!

**Dan Vie** has 25 years experience in event production, custom design of community celebrations for parks, festivals and public spaces, and campaign events for youth, labour and environmental groups. In 1997, Dan founded the Carnival Band community orchestra based in the Commercial Drive area of East Vancouver, and for 15 years he produced Vancouver's annual free participatory *Alice in Wonderland Festival*. Through his own Community Arts Workshop Society, Dan has led workshops for participants of all ages in schools and community centres on creating theatre scenarios, costumes, parade figures, and music. He studied theatre at Simon Fraser University, and graduated from the Dell'Arte School of Physical Theatre in Blue Lake, California.



**Will Weigler** is the author of an award-winning book on techniques for collaborative scriptwriting called *Strategies for Playbuilding: Helping Groups Translate Issues into Theatre*. A long-time community arts theatre director, playwright, producer and actor, Will is currently a doctoral candidate in Applied Theatre at the University of Victoria.

Host Artistic Director and co-facilitator **Savannah Walling** is founding Artistic Director of Vancouver Moving Theatre, with whom she's toured four continents and created over forty productions. A theatre artist and playwright trained in music, dance, and mime, she collaborates with artists of many genres and traditions to create interdisciplinary repertoire influenced by Vancouver's Pacific Rim culture and her inner city neighbourhood.



My name is Will Weigler. Savannah and Terry have invited me to record the events from day-to-day, and to write a journal of my reflections on what happens: the activities we do together and the ideas we discuss. It will be an enormous challenge. I know I can't hope to include everything, but have offered to do my best to capture some sense of the Downtown Eastside Arts4All Institute for those who aren't able to be here in person.

### **Thursday evening, November 12 Carnegie Centre**

The first event of the Institute is held in the evening at the Carnegie Centre and it is open to the public. We've come to hear Ruth Howard tell us about the history and philosophy of this field of participatory arts practice. But first, Rika Uto, Education and Arts Programmer for the Carnegie Community Centre, welcomes us all and acknowledges that we are here this evening on the traditional territories of the Coast Salish people. We take a moment also to acknowledge the generosity of our funding partners

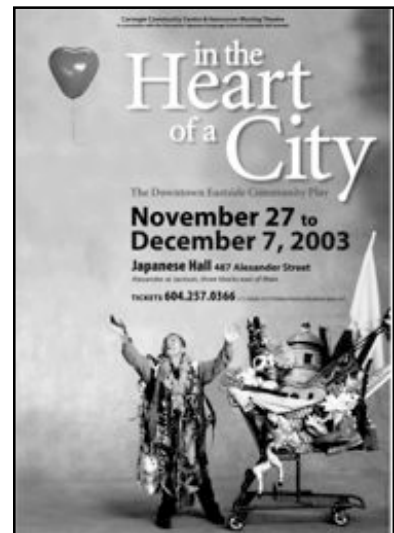


this week, Canadian Heritage, British Columbia Arts Council and Gaming, City of Vancouver, the Community Arts Council of Vancouver and Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, and the BC Government Employees Union.

There is a buzz in the crowd when the announcement is made that Terry and Savannah have just received the 2009 Vancouver Mayor's Award for Community Arts. As recipients, they are invited to share the award (and the cash prize of \$5,000) with an emerging artist from their discipline whom they feel demonstrates the promise of the next generation. Terry and Savannah have chosen Rosemary Georgeson, the Aboriginal Community Director for Vancouver-based urban ink productions. Rosemary has worked on Vancouver Moving Theatre productions, and is now working on an urban ink co-production: The Williams Lake Squaw Hall Community Arts Project (stories of stampede culture that will lead to the creation of a performance honouring the history and experiences of Aboriginal people).

Next up is the talented and effusive Valerie Methot, Roundhouse Community Centre artist in residence. She leads the audience in a look back at the experience of *The Downtown Eastside Community Play*, performed six years ago. This evening Valerie is launching the release of a book she has written

documenting the making of that play. She wonders aloud, how can a book possibly hope to capture the creative process of such a vast community arts project? For that matter, how can a theatre performance capture all the richness of experience that goes into its making? She reads a few selections from *A Journey into the Downtown Eastside Community Play: In the Heart of a City*<sup>2</sup> and it becomes evident through these brief passages that she has done an extraordinary job of capturing the many voices of those who were a part of this astounding project.



After her readings, Stephen Lytton asks Valerie how the experience of her involvement with the play has changed her. Valerie considers the question momentarily, and then admits that it shifted her sense of what it means to participate with a community. She says that, as an artist, the experience has led her to become more open to welcoming community members' insights about her work.



It is a perfect segue into the main event of the evening: Ruth's illustrated talk on the work of artists who are based in community. It is a field known by many different names, including: community arts; community animation (from the French term *animation socio-culturelle*); community-based arts; cultural work; community cultural development; participatory arts projects; community arts residencies; artist-community collaborations; applied theatre; community-engaged theatre; popular theatre; grassroots theatre; and site specific theatre, to name a few.

Ruth is quick to point out that names generally have connotations associated with them and, if we want to explain and convey what we do, we need to be aware of the tactical use of words. For example, community artists often have to clarify that, despite the similar-sounding names, "community arts" is not the same as "community theatre," in which amateur performers put on well-known plays or musicals that once appeared on New York's Broadway or in

London's West End. When developing relationships with potential partners, artists need to be able to

<sup>2</sup> Valerie Methot's book is available at the Carnegie Centre Branch of the Vancouver Public Library (call number: 792.0971 I35me)

put a name to the work that will explain what it is. So, in Ruth's opinion, what name best explains the core sense of this work we do? What name allows us to think about it and talk about it in terms that we feel we can support?

After having considered the possibilities for some time, Ruth has come to love the simplicity of the name Community Art. It is, she says, a congenial pairing: community and art. "Community" isn't a vague notion; it is very specific. As Ruth explains, the very word community invites important questions to be asked, including: who takes part in the creation of these projects, who attends the performances, and what food will everyone eat when they gather together? For that matter, what kinds of containers will the food be served in? A serious attempt to answer these sorts of questions begins to reveal the commitment to community that rests at the core of a participatory community arts project.

Speaking of containers, Ruth describes how art is the container that holds the community together. It is the process of collectively making art/theatre that brings about positive change every bit as much as the presentation of a finished performance or an art exhibition, perhaps even more so. Whether creating and rehearsing a script, or building and painting all the material aspects of a community arts project, the active engagement of lots of people forges relationships among them, builds common memories, and develops pride in a collaborative endeavour that expresses the shared stories of all those who contribute to its making. The special ingredient in these projects is the art. Cathy Stubington (in partnership with one of her long-time collaborators Paula Jardine) coined the term *Oblique Activism* to describe how artists can create opportunities for people to feel open to accepting multiple perspectives and to see the once familiar in new, unexpected, and extraordinary ways through their involvement in an artistically creative project.



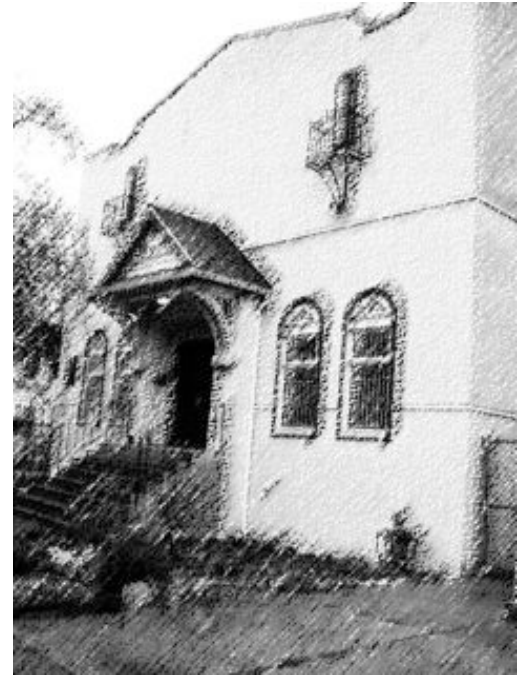
While acknowledging the many different approaches to community art, Ruth suggests that there are common guiding principles and a powerful set of values at the work's core. These principles, Ruth acknowledges, have served her well. To begin with, the work is open to everyone. There is an emphasis on aesthetic quality as well as on the quality of the experience in the relationships among participants and artists. Community arts are uniquely conceived for the place where they happen.



## Friday November 13: DAY ONE Ukrainian Hall

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The Ukrainian Hall is a modest looking building on East Pender Street in the Downtown Eastside. On the first day, participants arrive one by one, walking up the steps and through the large front doors. There, alongside a table with the obligatory sign-in sheet and various other forms, is another table. This one is stacked full of baskets and plates of fresh breakfast rolls, juice, coffee and tea. In a ritual that will be repeated each and every day we meet, Susan Gordon and Teresa McDowell lovingly and skillfully prepare both morning and lunchtime meals (and even one dinner with the help of Sharon Kravitz) for all the participants and workshop facilitators. Financial support is provided by the Community Arts Council of Vancouver and donations provided by Starbucks, Terra and Uprising Breads.



Though it may appear that providing food and beverages is a simple and common courtesy, there is much more to it than meets the eye. Social theorist Iris Marion Young explains that when we attend an event, there is a natural tendency for us to classify what we are about to get ourselves into: this will be a classroom with a teacher in charge; this will be a lecture by an expert; this will be a public forum where I may have to stand up and speak publicly in defence of my opinions, etc. Any one of these scenarios can feel like very dangerous and intimidating territory for those who have experienced bad associations with classrooms, lectures and public forums. Iris Marion Young suggests that the simple act of having good food at gatherings such as these can fundamentally re-orient expectations of what the event is about among the participants: this will be a group of people breaking bread together. Food sets a tone of welcoming—of a convivial gathering.<sup>3</sup>

It is, in fact, a core feature of the work at Jumbliies Theatre, according to one of their artistic associates, Leah Houston, now the Artistic Director of MABELLEarts:

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<sup>3</sup> Iris Marion Young, "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy." In *Democracy and Difference*. Seyla Benhabib, ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

*The dying art of hospitality is a cornerstone of the Community Play Movement and of Jumbles' work. Everyone who endeavors to make a community play realizes very quickly that people must feel welcome and wanted if they are to participate. The doors of creative expression and art making have been closed to most people for so long that often they feel completely unable to imagine themselves participating. Therefore Jumbles spends a great deal of time and effort on hospitality. The tea is always on and neighbours are always invited in for a cup or two. It is not uncommon for an afternoon's worth of administrative work to be put aside to have tea with a visiting participant. All meetings, drop-ins, and rehearsals include snacks and childcare. In Jumbles' new project at Mabelle, where a large number of participants are new to Canada from Somalia, rituals of hospitality are culturally appropriate—whether this means providing proper foods, recognizing matriarchal elders, or participating in local cultural events and ceremonies.<sup>4</sup>*

On one side of the room, long tables have been arranged in a rectangular “circle” and we participants take our places seated around it.



There is a large stack of papers in an assortment of colours, each about the size of a standard sheet of typing paper, but these are thick and feel handmade. Every one of them has the same line drawn upon it. We are all invited to pick one “in a colour that pleases us.” For the rest of the morning, we work on art projects that involve these papers, and other larger sheets, as well as pastel crayons, coloured tissue paper, glue and stories. We create paper figures based on ourselves; we invent paper figures based on our heroes; we create collectively designed labyrinths<sup>5</sup> and then illustrate them with the journeys of our

<sup>4</sup> Leah Houston. “Gratitude is a Wheel: Community Plays, the Gift Paradigm and the Women-Centered Community.” Unpublished paper.

<sup>5</sup> As The Downtown Eastside Arts4All Institute is convening, Vancouver Moving Theatre, is working with Varrick and Runaway Moon Theatre on a community arts theatre project that will incorporate the Greek story of *Theseus*

personal heroes as they face dangers and challenges encountered in our labyrinths. Creating this physical artwork, Ruth and Varrick explain, will provide us with some tangible material to incorporate into the staging of the dramatic material that we will be generating later on in the workshop.



The process of this art making represents one answer to a question that will be asked by a participant later in the morning: “How can diversity—authentic diversity—be facilitated?”

At each step, Ruth and Varrick create the possibility for a balance between individual artistic freedom and the need to create a group collaboration that is aesthetically unified. For example, we bring virtually limitless individual creativity to the figures we make to represent our personal heroes, and ourselves but they all appear more or less as a visually cohesive set. How is this done? Ruth has started us off by drawing a simple line on the paper that leads us to create the same basic shape of a paper doll when we tear along that line. To draw the walls of the labyrinth, Varrick walks us all through a few simple steps that result in the same labyrinth pattern—but in the hands of a dozen different artists this initially unified pattern develops into a dozen different interpretations.



The idea of the aesthetically unifying “prompt” will be a recurring feature in the week ahead. It is one of the challenges of a community-based artist to foster the creative ‘juice’ of many people, and

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[footnote 6 continued from previous page] *and the Labyrinth*. This ancient myth offers a creative throughline for community members and artists to develop a uniquely Downtown Eastside interpretation of that story. As part of laying the groundwork for “The Downtown Eastside Labyrinth Project,” the imagery and themes from the story have figured into this workshop, too, in the form of free-form play, exploration and discussion.

still facilitate the making of something that hangs together aesthetically. An hour into the work on this first day, Ruth admits that, before everyone arrived, she pilfered all the black pastel crayons from the many boxes placed around the tables. She's observed how people automatically tend to reach first for the less adventurous choice of black pastels, and so she purposely withheld them until all the colours blossomed on our pages. Only then did she produce the secret supply of black and explain her reasoning. Some of us reach for the black pastels now, but at this point black gets used for accents, not for the primary design. While this may sound controlling, it can also be seen as the way the artist/facilitator can choose to limit the participants' choices in order to challenge them to go beyond their comfort zones.

Using the activity of art making as a way to ease into the process of making theatre together has its benefits and its liabilities. On the plus side, it offers a tangible, hands-on group process that involves relatively little risk-taking. Doing something with their hands helps some people to listen and learn more easily (Ruth admits that she is one of these people). However, it is not an ideal 'way in' for everyone. There are some in the group who feel uncomfortably adrift by the opening art-making activities. "I felt like I was in kindergarten," wrote one participant in her reflections on the experience.



Their unease reveals the need for an understanding among community-based artists that, within any group, there will be a range of learning styles and skill sets. While some participants are perfectly comfortable being led along a path of activities one after the other, there are others who need to have a sense of the ultimate destination in order to feel comfortable. It is similar to drivers who prefer

looking at a map to spot where they are and where they're going, compared to those who prefer step-by-step instructions.

During a break in the art making, we move to a different part of the room and stand in a circle as Varrick leads some first-day exercises designed to introduce us to one another. These kinds of

icebreakers are a staple of group process, and yet this one has a lovely twist. He teaches us a song with a sweet melody and simple lyrics:

*I come from a place  
I'm going to a place;  
I am...  
And, I am ...  
[repeat]*<sup>6</sup>

We all sing the song together and then each one of us takes a turn telling what amounts to a brief story about where we have come from and where we are going. We interpret it in whatever way we wish and deliver it as spoken narration under the rest of the voices singing. Volunteering personal information, all eyes upon the speaker, can be intimidating. This gentle multi-voiced song creates an undeniable sense of being supported and nurtured by all as each individual speaks. Like the unifying prompts offered in the art-making exercises, it creates an aesthetically engaging container that allows for individuality within the group unity.

As it happens, Ruth is among the last in the circle to share her story of where she's come from and where she's going. She describes her thoughts on the work we are about to begin. I am personally struck by the degree of vulnerability she risks by speaking with such candor about her feelings. I regret that her turn didn't come earlier in the circle so that more of us might have followed the tone of openness and sincerity she sets. Still, it is only the first day, and I can't help but feel that she has modeled a general level of personal commitment that will inspire us all to take greater risks of openness in the days to come.

As the workshop unfolds, it becomes clear that Ruth is approaching the work not as a 'teacher' here to 'help the students,' but rather as a co-investigator of the possibilities of the project. Again and again she says, "I am finding [such and such] interesting." This is not the voice of a teacher who knows what the artistic product is 'supposed to look like,' and who guides her students to achieve that pre-determined



<sup>6</sup> Varrick learned this exercise from Linda Parris-Bailey of The Carpetbag Theatre ([www.carpetbagtheatre.org](http://www.carpetbagtheatre.org))

product. She unabashedly brings her expertise to the work and, as an artist, she is enlivened by the partnerships and creative relationships she enjoys with the workshop participants.

After our lunch break, we explore some puppet theatre. Working in pairs with the paper dolls we have made to represent ourselves, we take turns stepping up to the 'stage' (a table) and present a puppet dialogue about our reasons for wanting to participate in the Downtown Eastside Arts4All Institute. In a surprisingly difficult twist, we are asked to manipulate our partner's puppet while he or she is providing the voice. This is harder to do than it seems—the temptation is to talk while animating one's own puppet and then rest while the other puppet is talking. But this way, at no time during the exercise is one member of the team sitting idle—we are either inventing something to say, or animating our partner's puppet so that its movement matches his or her speech. The challenge of achieving this is clearly visible and audience members (the other participants) watch the struggle with hilarity. Varrick later explains that this simple exercise is analogous to so much of the challenge of community-based arts work. How can artist/facilitators design activities so that they will actively engage all of the participants?

### **1:30-3:00 Community arts, what is it? Definitions and core principles**

We settle into our chairs and give our attention to Ruth who expands upon some of the history, background, and philosophies of community arts that she discussed in the public lecture the night before.

Articulating the nature of the artist's relationship with community members (a relationship that she has been demonstrating all morning), Ruth links that wobbly term "community empowerment" to risk-taking by the artist. It involves starting with a question and not knowing the answer. It involves the role of the artist as one who creates opportunities for things to happen—creates a container that enables people to engage with one another through the collaborative making of art. Risk is key: risk for everyone, including the artists. She points out that this kind of risk-taking generally runs counter to the work of conventional community service providers whose professional protocols typically require them to maintain a distance from the experiences of their 'clients.' Community artists, by contrast, are encouraged to take risks right along with project participants— participants who bring their wealth of expertise about local knowledge to the collaboration.

The discussion turns to the distinction between the conventional understandings of art compared to community art practice. Ruth is dubious of the distinction. "In a way," she says, "I'd rather just talk



about art." She admits that there is a perception of a vertical hierarchy of artists in our culture where the solo artist, working to achieve his or her vision, is considered to be at the top, and community-based artists are at the bottom. She tells us that some community arts enthusiasts believe society ought to flip the hierarchy around and place community arts at the top. Ruth tells us about the American choreographer Liz Lerman who suggests, instead, flipping the hierarchy horizontally, so that conventional art practice is on one end, community arts practice on the other, and we simply "dance across the continuum."

The room becomes alive with discussion: "What is the relationship between process and product? How are relationships negotiated among community arts participants who have radically different levels of commitment to the project, different levels of experience or abilities as performers, or who have different agendas and opinions about the direction that the project should go?"

*how to trust in abundance?  
...how to stay inspired when the work is overwhelming?  
how to keep the vision big-expensive-not pinched ' cuz of fear  
of resources —physical, emotional, spiritual?*

HOW DO I BUILD A TEAM TO SUPPORT THE PROCESS? HOW DO I  
RAISE THE MONEY? WHAT MAKES INDIVIDUALS WANT TO BE  
PART OF A PROJECT? HOW DO I KNOW WHAT KIND OF LEGAL  
HELP TO OBTAIN?

*sustainability —what is it?  
what is the pre-planning process?  
what is the planning cycle for a project?  
how to maintain a vision while being open to input  
and iterations?  
how to communicate process-based work to  
outcome based funders?  
how to work in the current financial climate?*

*how do I decide what to do?  
how can I facilitate people to join,  
participate, perform, play with me?  
what kind of medicine do people want or  
need?  
what if I don't want a beginning,  
a middle, or an end?*



*how do I unite my dreams and visions  
(the individual) with a community's  
dreams and visions (the collective) to  
create something meaningful for all?  
Connection with the tribe—my family of  
artists to dream and encourage  
La Familia Creativa.*

One actor describes her struggle with the frustrations associated with participating in a community-based ensemble alongside others who are not as dedicated to the work as she is. Who gets to make decisions about what will yield the 'best' work without squashing or suffocating others' opinions or aesthetic preferences? There is an interesting side discussion about whether 'best' is a good word to use: best according to whom? Ruth defends best as a fine word. Aren't we trying to make the best art we can? In some cases, though, 'the best' may mean that no one is suffocated or squashed in the making of the work.

These are questions not easily resolved, and Ruth suggests that a starting place may involve dismantling or rethinking what we assume about theatre. We discuss what ought to be considered as the measure for success in community arts. Is it that, as a result of the project, people (participants, professional artists, and audience members) feel less alienated or more engaged? How does one characterize transformation?

A recurring theme of the discussion is the need to allow for the loosening of one's grip over control of the outcome. Community artists can strive to promote an environment where all feel safe to take risks—even when there are disagreements—and to surrender to the flow of what is happening while still remaining accountable to the goal of creating the best art possible. It is a matter of holding on and letting go. As a lead artist overseeing a project, one can: hold on to the heart of it; retain some integrity throughout; safeguard and nurture the vision while letting go of specific expectations about how the process will unfold, who will be part of it, and how the all of the aesthetic details will look in the end.

After a break, we reconvene to hear Savannah describe her insights and experiences with Vancouver Moving Theatre over the course of its twenty-seven year history.<sup>7</sup>



Two questions come up again: How does one characterize transformation? What is the measure for success in community arts projects? Savannah gently asks us to consider whether there is any institution or agency that has the power to change society all by itself. It is, she suggests, an unrealistic burden to

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<sup>7</sup> Savannah's paper can be found in the appendix at the end of this report.

set upon the shoulders of artists: to expect that a play has the power to bring about societal transformation single-handedly however it may be defined. Perhaps achieving small successes—creating opportunities to honour and value one another through art that begins with the stories of people's lives, experiences and culture and then radiates outward—is a worthy enough task for community artists.

We finish by expressing our feelings about this first day in the form of physical, not verbal, reflections. Taking turns turn around the circle, we invent a gesture that characterizes what we felt when we arrived, followed by a gesture characterizing what we feel now that we are leaving. It is another use of image that pushes some of us past the comfort zone of explaining ourselves through spoken language.

### **Friday evening**

The Ukrainian Hall fills with workshop participants joined by many others who have come for the second public forum. The title for this evening's panel discussion is *May I have this dance? Forming Community Partnerships*. It will be moderated by Michael Clague, the former director of the Carnegie Centre in the Downtown Eastside. During his time at the helm, Michael made a substantial commitment to developing partnerships between the Carnegie Centre and arts groups, notably with Vancouver Moving Theatre. Also on the panel are Judith Marcuse (co-director of Vancouver's International Centre of Arts for Social Change); Cyndy Chwelos (Moberly Arts and Cultural Centre and formerly of ArtStarts); Ruth Howard and Keith McNair (Jumblies Theatre); Dafne Blanco (Headlines Theatre); and Jil P. Weaving (Vancouver Park Board). The questions they will be addressing include:

- How do you go about forming a network of partnerships to support community arts projects?
- What are the issues surrounding partnerships with social agencies, schools, parks boards, neighbourhoods and global organizations?
- How do you safeguard an artistic vision while respecting your partners' agendas?
- How can community partners support you in entering unknown and possibly risky social territory?

Michael makes an unconventional start by asking all the members of the audience to introduce ourselves to the rest of the group, and to say a word or two about our connections with community arts. It quickly becomes evident that there is a wealth of expertise among all the people who have gathered here tonight, and Michael acknowledges that it was the recognition of talent and expertise available in the Downtown Eastside that so excited him about working at the Carnegie Centre—drawing on that local talent and expertise to build programming from the inside.

Many ideas are discussed over the course of the next two hours; here are some snippets:

**Ruth:** There is such a variety of potential partnerships for artists to find: community centres, shelters, schools, public housing agencies, health organizations, arts organizations, universities, business associations, police, other government organizations. Whether you have approached them or they have approached you, be sure to claim your vision as the artist in the partnership—don't be sidetracked into working only in service to your partner's agenda. You are in the dance together. It is wise to trust your instincts about the feelings you get from your initial contact with a prospective partner. If you feel wary at the outset, it may be a mistake to engage with them.

**Keith:** When I was a community centre administrator, we had a positive feeling about the "use of art" but we had no coherent intentionality. We weren't sure how art-making fit in with what we wanted to accomplish at the Centre. As an artist, you can help to articulate that; you can explain to your prospective partner what it is that an artist can do that will forward their mission.

**jil:** Make sure this partner is someone you want to partner with. Do your research and look closely. It is a measure of respect when you first contact them that you can talk intelligently about what they do and that the questions you ask are not questions that you could have easily answered by visiting their website or looking over their promotional materials. Don't assume that your prospective partner will understand concepts and terminology in community arts that you take for granted. They may be familiar with some of the terms you use, but have their own understanding of what those terms mean; you are probably going to have to explain what the terms mean to you. And this is important—especially for partners who are supporting you with resources or funding and are not close at hand: make the extra effort to keep in touch with them as the project progresses. This doesn't mean sending them a constant stream of e-mails; it means periodically keeping them in the loop with updates such as photos and the occasional compelling story that will help them to develop an ongoing sense of what your project is about. The time to positively engage them in the work that their contributions have supported is not at the very end of the run—the final performance. You can positively engage them all the way along the line. Keeping them in the loop gives you an opportunity to influence your partners' capacity to better understand what artists can accomplish and to feel a greater sense of co-ownership in the endeavour.

**Cindy:** As a representative of a cultural centre, my guiding principle is to find artist partners who understand the meaning of relational practice, who can engage in creative facilitation of dialogue and

exchange. When you are considering a partnership with an existing program, find out what their mission statement is and determine if it is aligned with your philosophy.

**Daphne:** When partnering with cultural communities, you are entering unknown risky social territory. The initial consultation is critical. Determine whether they will support what you have in mind. Do they believe the proposed project will be beneficial? Can you make a case that your work will further the funder's mandate?

**Judith:** In the process of creating new partnerships, artists can rely on the potent use of artistic processes as a way to embody and clarify what we have to offer. People are hungry for other ways to be in the world and there is great potential for alternatives to a speech or a PowerPoint presentation. There are workshop games and exercises that stimulate people to think in nonverbal, arts-based ways; right from the beginning, these can promote a deeper understanding of the potential for what artists have to offer.

**Terry Hunter:** (speaking from the audience): It is worthwhile to establish a set of principles that both the artist and community partner organization can agree upon. It allows for a certain freedom and openness in the development of a project while still assuring that the artist remains accountable for upholding those principles in their work with the community.

**jil:** (following up on Terry's comment): Yes, figure out what you are agreeing to at the beginning. Frame it up at the start. Ask "what is the objective in our agreement?" Identify who holds what responsibilities in the partnership you are forming.

## Saturday November 14: DAY TWO Carnegie Theatre

### 10-12:30 Project basics – How to get started

Standing in front of the group, Ruth poses a series of questions to Varrick about one of his current projects. Later in the morning we will be pairing up with partners and Ruth is modeling the kinds of questions we will be asking each other. It is not the typical kind of interview conducted by reporters or oral historians designed to help the person asking the questions to gather information. This interview seems designed to operate the other way around.

### Questions Ruth asked Varrick:

In a nutshell: what is this thing?  
 What/who is the community?  
 What are the themes?  
 Where are you with it now?  
 Who works with you (the artists)?  
 Who does what?  
 Who are the partners?  
 Why are you doing this?  
 What's the form & style of the piece?  
 What are the challenges?  
 What needs to happen now to move ahead?

These questions will encourage the people being asked the questions to think more deeply about the project they are working on, and to help them identify where the gaps are (perhaps when he or she starts to stammer: "Gee, umm, I haven't really thought about that part!")

Over lunch, and then continuing into the afternoon, we pair off and ask these questions to our partners about projects that they are about to begin, are currently working on, or would someday like to do.



But before that happens, it's movie time.

*When an idea starts from nothing and you turn it into something, you can make anything happen.*

Cathy Stubington

We take a break and watch Cathy Stubington's wonderful short film *Something from Nothing*, about the Enderby and District Community Play. The film was produced as part of *Documenting Engagement*, a video documentary compilation of original short films made by community artists across Canada about their own work. All nine films in the series are available on YouTube:

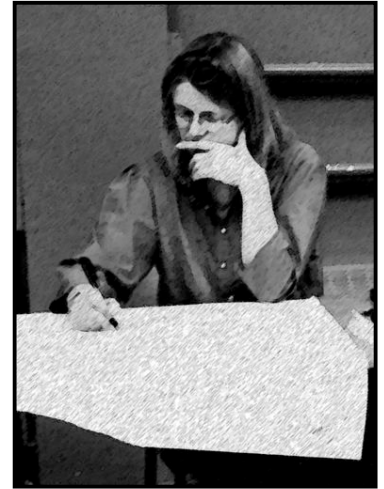
[http://www.youtube.com/view\\_play\\_list?p=B41BA0D902585808&search\\_query=documenting+engagement](http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=B41BA0D902585808&search_query=documenting+engagement)

(Or search for the term *Documenting Engagement* on YouTube.)



### *The Water song*

For some time, Cathy has been building a song, and several times during the week, we take a few minutes to learn how to sing it. It is a song about *water*, and the lyrics are simply the word for water in many different languages, all braided together in rich harmonies, rhythmic patterns, and counterpoint. Wherever Cathy goes, she invites people to teach her the word for water in their language. She then weaves the word into the song, which engages participants in a collaborative inter-cultural artistic creation that is both about nature *and* about other cultures.



Cathy describes how, as an artist, she used to be interested in creating the world we want to see. Nowadays she finds herself drawn instead to celebrating the world that is. There is a great diversity in the practice of community-based arts, with room for all approaches and styles and yet, with this statement, I feel that Cathy has hit upon a significant contemporary theme in the field. It reflects a movement away from the artist as the person who stands up and, through the power of his or her imagination, shows us a vision of what's wrong or right about the world. Contemporary community arts practice seems to be moving toward the artist as the person who forges partnerships with others to combine imagination (and activist organizing skills) with local knowledge to produce jointly created visions of what is in the world: the cultural perspectives and stories that have not been heard before.

### **1:30-3:30 Neighbourhood Tour of places where art making is happening**

After lunch Terry tells us that just over sixteen thousand people live in the Downtown Eastside, which includes the neighbourhoods of Chinatown, Gastown, Strathcona, Victory Square, and Japantown (known as Nihonmachi). At the epicentre of the neighbourhood, situated at the intersection of Main and Hastings, is the Carnegie Community Centre. Ten years ago, the Carnegie Community Centre embraced a mandate that art would have a central role in bringing forward the voice of the community. These days at the Centre, that mandate is clearly evident through a wide variety of cultural programming that is initiated by, with, and for the benefit of neighbourhood residents.

Terry has offered to give us a guided walking tour of the Downtown Eastside in the area around Main and Hastings. We are asked to keep all our senses open and to record—with memory or camera—

notable sounds, sights, tastes, objects (and to gather interesting objects along the way as long as we're not stealing them or collecting something unsavoury). We try to keep a low profile but, despite being led by Terry who is a familiar face in the neighbourhood, we are unmistakably out of place as we move along in a great clump, stopping periodically to hear our guide's stories about the significance of this or that location. A woman who knows one of the members of our group sidles up to him and asks loudly, "What? Are they making a tour of the ghetto now like it's a museum?"

We are told about the residents' struggles against huge odds just to hang on to what they have. There are developers/investors/landlords who have no interest in the well being of the locals, while others choose to give something back. As we hear some of the stories, and we learn about ongoing resistance to improvements (such as in certain types of housing development, for example), it baffles some of us. We wonder why residents wouldn't want to benefit from the proposed improvements put forward by some of these more progressive-sounding developers, proposals that sound perfectly reasonable to us. And there it is—one of the significant elements of why community-based art is so important. Those of us who don't get it are not from here and don't know the community's challenges and realities. We don't know the implications of rapid development that eliminates existing housing stock, makes rental and new housing unaffordable, and displaces low income residents. There are aspects of the experience of living in the Downtown Eastside that are way beyond our ken and yet, artistic expression of a community's inside knowledge of the realities of life here, as seen in the collaborative work of Vancouver Moving Theatre and other community arts groups, allows outsiders the opportunity to begin to see through the cracks. The art offers us a chance to start to understand.

### **3:30-4:30 Playing with images, words and movement**

Back at the Carnegie we regroup and Savannah introduces us to some experiments in image-movement exploration.

We physically explore connections between movement and dramatic intention. Using imagery drawn from our ongoing theme of the labyrinth, we work on building ensemble awareness by coordinating our individual focus on what we ourselves are doing, with our external focus on what everybody else is doing.



We invented gestures for ourselves the first day and now we attempt to translate the physical movement of each gesture into a written iconography. Part of the challenge of community arts is to find a way to set material that has been created by a group into a form that can be repeated in performance. It is the difference between the astonishingly brilliant performed moment that happens and then passes by, and the astonishingly brilliant moment that can be designed, incorporated into a performance, and repeated multiple times without losing its quality.



#### **4:30-5:00 Wrap-up, questions**

##### ***Bumps, bruises and miracles***

We close for the day with reflections on our own experiences and questions we have for one another. One participant feels that she's not yet grounded enough in her own art practice to launch confidently into community arts work. She also feels challenged by the prospect of starting—of getting going—of taking that first step. Varrick encourages her simply to start: so that she can start to make mistakes. Mistakes are going to happen—it's part of the work, and just taking that first step, he says, is often the hardest one. I am reminded of something I once heard Savannah say: It is not a perfect art form. There are bumps and bruises as well as miracles.

#### **6:00-9:00 pm FILMS – Carnegie Theatre Open to the Public**

Saturday night is always Free Film Night at the Carnegie Centre, a program of talk and documentaries called *Documentaries for Thinkers*, coordinated by Margot Butler of the University of British Columbia's Humanities 101 course, and Colleen Carroll, one of the participants in this week's Arts4All Institute. The focus this evening will be on Community-Engaged Art Practice. Margot will host and Colleen will be operating the projector. Snacks and coffee are provided by the Carnegie Community Centre.

The house is packed and we are treated to an astounding series of films, each one so different and yet each one contributes to further understanding the potency of community art. Among the members of the audience are several cast members from past Vancouver Moving Theatre productions. One woman expresses what involvement in the arts has given her: "It's not that I'm seeing through rose-colored glasses, I know the world is hard but I choose to see the beauty."

These are the films we see:

***Dignity and Grace: The Story of the Eramosa Community Play*** documents the making and performance of *The Spirit of Shivaree*, produced by Dale Hamilton of Rockwood, Ontario. It was this play that sparked a movement across Canada to incorporate large numbers of people in plays that tell the stories of their communities. Produced and directed by Charlie Fox and Mark Hamilton.

***Food For Thought*** is a new film created Cathy Stubington about *Two Years of Making Food and Art*, a project created for the community of Enderby, BC by Runaway Moon theatre. Collaborative art projects inspired by a seasonal “theme” vegetable were combined with outdoor spectacles: events each held in a different season and celebrating foods available at the time.

***Bringing Shadows into Light*** is a film created by Squamish filmmaker Cease Wyss about the making of the giant shadow screen community play *We're All In This Together: The Shadows Project – Addiction and Recovery*. Inspired by stories and images from people of the Downtown Eastside, the community arts project exploring the roots of addiction was produced by Vancouver Moving Theatre in association with urban ink's Fathom Labs and the Carnegie and Roundhouse Community Centres.

***Cups for Everyone***. Ruth Howard introduces this video documentary from Jumbles Theatre about the pursuit of Utopia in the history of Toronto's Jewish Left. It follows a week-long re-enactment of a Soviet Jewish Children's Work Commune, held every year at Camp Naivelt, an 85-year old socialist, secular, Jewish summer community in Ontario. The video concludes with glimpses of the young people's performance of *Oy di velt vet vern yinger* [*Oh the world will grow younger*]. Edited by Charles Ketchabaw.

***Despertar (Awake)***. A video directed by Scott Smith, documenting the first International Earth Symposium, a 5-day gathering in 2004 that brought to Vancouver 300 delegates from 23 countries to dialogue, perform and workshop for social change. Afterward, Judith Marcuse, who produced the event, answers questions about the film.

***Good Vibrations – Gamelan in Prisons***. University of British Columbia doctoral candidate Rodrigo Caballero introduces this documentary about a project based in Britain that teaches incarcerated men and women to play gamelan instruments (Indonesian bronze percussion) as a way to greatly improve their communication skills, their ability to interact with others, and their ability to express feelings in healthy ways. Produced by Good Vibrations and Peterborough Prison, UK.

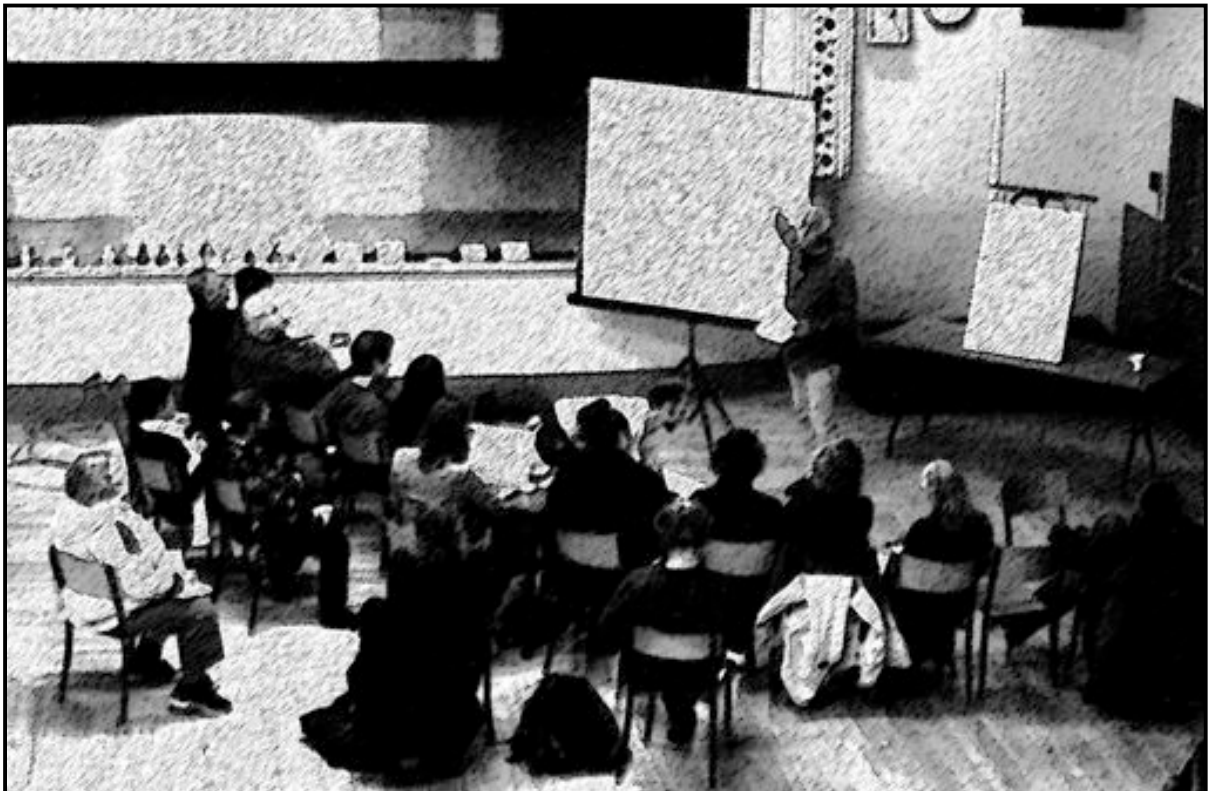
**Power and Stock Characters: *The Cooking Show*.** Elaine Carol, Co-Founder, Artistic Director, and the “benevolent drill sergeant” of MISCELLANEOUS Productions in Vancouver, partners culturally diverse, multi-barriered youth with professional artists to create original hip hop musical cabaret productions. Elaine introduces these high-energy demonstration reels from two of her company’s recent shows and speaks about the ways in which the arts can have a positive impact on the challenging lives of East Vancouver youth, while simultaneously offering dynamic cutting-edge theatre to the general community.

### Sunday November 15: DAY THREE Ukrainian Hall

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#### 10-12:30 Grant-writing

Day three begins with a session on grant writing. Ruth and Keith have invented a make-believe Arts Council and they tell us that we are now a team of multidisciplinary artists who are under a looming deadline to write a grant proposal. In keeping with one of the themes of the week, the grant will fund a proposed arts-based project exploring the metaphor of a labyrinth that will engage the people of the Downtown Eastside.



The choice to suggest a fictional project so close to our group’s experience (the imaginary labyrinth project seems to many of us like a pretty good idea for an actual, feasible project) turns out to cause

some unanticipated problems. In Business School, economists who want to discuss hypothetical scenarios involving the manufacture and sales of something, use the term *widget* to describe the thing being manufactured or sold. For economists, a widget isn't an actual thing, it's a name for a generic unit of something that lets them freely discuss the business of making and selling in the abstract without worrying about the pesky specifics associated with making and selling, say, pianos or cookie dough. If we had managed to find the equivalent of a widget for our community arts project, we may have been able to more efficiently make our way through the steps of the morning's grant writing 'lesson.' Instead, with this nifty idea about a labyrinth project, we find ourselves bogged down in passionate debates over the details of just how we are going to design the project and make it the best project it can be. It certainly engages our interest far more than a project about widgets might have done, but perhaps a blander hypothetical project would have allowed us to focus more on the steps involved in preparing a grant.

Still, some valuable ideas are presented and discussed. The grant writing process is described as a useful way to encourage us to outline what we need to accomplish in the project: an expansion of the questions that Ruth asked Varrick in the mock interview the day before, but with more details.

A grant proposal maps all the elements of a proposed project. It allows a funder to be satisfied that the artists have thought everything through and that they have what it takes to accomplish what they have set out to do. Sometimes an artist can bolster the case for assuring the funder's confidence by forming a partnership with a respected agency or organization. Terry states that Vancouver Moving Theatre's partnership with the Carnegie Community Centre not only lent them credibility in the eyes of funders, it also gave them access to people with lots of knowledge about working with the community of residents in the Downtown Eastside, which contributed a great deal to their successes. Sometimes, Cathy points out, artists can make a credible case for the potential of their project to succeed simply by creating a well-thought-out budget that demonstrates they have reasonably anticipated the needs at the various stages that clearly shows how they plan to proceed.

The discussion turns to the flip side of showing credibility in the grant preparation process: the artists also have to get the attention of the funders and excite them about the project. We are told that it is worth whatever effort it takes to produce a one-minute video on DVD that features the most compelling and professionally presented 'commercial' for the work that we can muster. There is not much time to make an impression in the imaginations of funding agency committee members, and a short, thoroughly impressive promotional video digitized on DVD can make all the difference to people who must wade through dozens, even hundreds of proposals.



Terry encourages us to contact a granting agency when a proposal is turned down and graciously ask why the proposal wasn't accepted. He reports that he will often contact a granting agency even when he *does* get a grant, just to ask for feedback on the grant he wrote. It is a practice that helps him continually to improve his grant writing skills.

### **1:30-4:30 Arts-based and oral history research**

The afternoon is packed with activities but before we launch into them, one of the participants leads us all in an engaging and hilarious post-lunch warm-up exercise that he learned from local clown and master teacher Gina Bastone. It represents another example of the workshop facilitators 'de-centring' themselves—welcoming contributions from participants that go beyond inviting questions from them. There is such expertise here in the group and Varrick, Ruth, and the others are not averse to creating opportunities for participants to step into the role of leaders from time to time throughout the week. As we will see later in the afternoon, they have also provided for contributions to the learning from outside our group: guest facilitator Lina de Guevara, the Director of Victoria's Puente Theatre, will be joining us in just a few hours to share some of her expertise.

We are introduced to the concept of Arts-based Research, in which the making of art is used as a means of creating knowledge and understanding. It is an exciting way to consider the very real connections that community arts can have with progressive social change and social action. I find myself thinking about the story of the "nail on the wall," a story that first drew my attention to the vital link between art-making and activist social research:

*In 1973, while conducting a literacy project in a barrio of Lima, Peru, [Paulo] Freire and his team asked people questions in Spanish, but requested the answers in photographs. When the question 'What is exploitation?' was asked, some people took photos of a landlord, grocer, or a policeman.<sup>8</sup> One child took a photo of a nail on a wall. It made no sense to adults, but other children were in strong agreement. The ensuing discussions showed that many young boys of that neighbourhood worked in the shoe-shine business. Their clients were mainly in the city, not in the barrio where they lived. As their shoe-shine boxes were too heavy for them to carry, these boys, rented a nail on a wall (usually in a shop), where they could hang their boxes for the night. To them, that nail on the wall represented 'exploitation'. The 'nail on the wall' photograph spurred widespread discussions in the Peruvian barrio about other forms of institutionalized exploitation, including ways to overcome [them].<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> Boal, Augusto. (1979). *The Theatre of the Oppressed*. Urizen Books, New York. p 123.

<sup>9</sup> Arvind Singhal, Lynn Harter, Ketan Chitnis, & Devendra Sharma. (2007). Participatory Photography as Theory, Method, and Praxis: Analyzing an Entertainment-Education Project in India. *Critical Arts*, 21(1): 212-227.

In the story of the “nail on the wall,” Freire and his team used what is known as a “prompt.” A prompt can be a challenge, a task, or a question. In the process of responding to it through an artistic medium, the art-making and the research are linked. Ruth describes some of the prompts that Jumblies has used on various projects. For example, they have facilitated a process in which participants write or draw personal imagery sparked by prompts such as an invitation to fill in the blanks following the statement: *I’m from or I come from.*<sup>10</sup>

Each blank is filled in, not just with the names of geographical places, but also with aspects of the participants’ lives that have meaning for them (foods, names, sayings, special places, and objects). The prompts produce vibrant poetry that reveals a depth of understanding about each person’s experience. Jumblies has used the metaphor of a door as a prompt: *what transition would you like to express?* (whether a geographic move, a life stage, a domestic or global event, a fantasy, an abstract contrast, a mood change, a dream etc.).

From Arts-based Research, we move on to Oral History Research. Sometimes the best way to learn is



to see an example of what NOT to do, and this is the approach taken today. Varrick improvises a mock oral history interview with Keith and it is a painfully comic demonstration of all sorts of rude, hurtful, and harmful things one should never do when interviewing someone to learn about his or her history. On top of all the mistakes, it is staggeringly clear that Varrick’s questions didn’t yield any useful information from his source whatsoever.

The comedy routine sparks a productive discussion about the kinds of things one can and should do in an interview, including showing some graciousness toward one’s interviewee and designing open-ended questions that will elicit open-ended replies. *The Downtown Eastside Arts for All Institute Companion* includes several good recommendations for gathering oral histories from radio producer Katherine

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<sup>10</sup> Loree Lawrence introduced this activity to Jumblies. It was devised by Linda Christensen, currently the Director of the Oregon Writing Project at Portland’s Lewis & Clark College, and author of the books *Teaching for Joy and Justice* and *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up*. Christensen’s exercise was, in turn, inspired by George Ella Lyon’s poem “Where I’m From.”

Gombay. She suggests that oral history interviewers spend time thinking about topics and questions *beforehand* and then allow interviewees take the lead if they have stories they want to tell. Interviewers should set their judgments aside and not impose their own assumptions about what the interviewee feels or thinks: ("That must have been terrible..."). Katherine offers some good questions, such as: *Tell me what it was like when...; What happened next?; How did you deal with that?* She advises that an interviewee's belongings (jewelry, or artworks or knickknacks on display in the home) are a good source for generating stories: *That's a beautiful necklace. Can you tell me a bit about it?* Ruth adds, "However you do it: follow what fascinates you, enjoy listening and don't worry!!!"<sup>11</sup>

Lina has now arrived and she contributes some of her thoughts on oral history interviews before we move in a new direction—up onto our feet. Like all good workshop facilitators, these folks know that continually shifting the learning modes is a productive way to keep interest up—large group discussion and discussion in pairs, physical work with our bodies, creating artwork, singing, etc. Lina invites us to step away from a discussion-oriented analysis by asking us to form living statues or sculptures with our bodies that express an idea. We work both as performers— assuming a physical gesture in response to a word that Lina calls out—and also as sculptors, shaping the bodies of our fellow participants either by demonstrating with our own face and body what we want them to do (which the performer mirrors), or by gently moving their bodies into place.



From using our bodies to physically reflect our responses to single words, we move to a more complex idea. On the first day we created dolls based on one of our personal heroes. Now participants are invited to create living tableaux of those heroes using the bodies of fellow participants. One by one, the group sculptures are created and then, before we have a chance to hear what the sculptor of each work intended to convey, the rest of us comment on what we see represented. We respond to the power of the image itself, without a 'label' attached that tells us what it is 'supposed' to be. Only

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<sup>11</sup> *The Downtown Eastside Arts4All Institute Companion* is available at the Carnegie Centre branch of the Vancouver public library. The section on gathering oral history interviews begins on page 27.

afterwards does the sculptor reveal what she or he had in mind. Here, again, is another use of art as a prompt to investigate stories that have meaning for us.

On the first day, we created paper dolls based on a person we considered to be one of our heroes and we illustrated our hero's journey through a labyrinth. Now, after we've been learning a bit about oral history interviews, we take a few minutes to interview someone else in the group about her or his hero (and to be interviewed, in turn, about our hero). Afterwards, Ruth gives us some 'homework.' She asks us to come in on Wednesday morning having turned our interviews into some text or image that can be integrated into a performance that we will be creating. We can turn what we're told by our partners into a poem, a story, a drawing, some physical movement or dance—really any interpretation that can be put on paper or described.



Before the end of the day, we sit in a circle and reflect on what we might still like to get from the workshop in the remaining sessions. The idea of encouraging reflection during the course of a project, rather than as a final evaluation, ties in nicely to many other lessons we've been learning. From Jill P. Weaving's and Terry Hunter's encouragement to maintain ongoing contact with funders, to all that we've been learning about partnerships in general, the consistent throughline is about building solid relationships. As we sit in a circle and report on what we'd like to see in the final few days, we are enacting a relationship of mutuality between workshop facilitators and workshop participants. These mid-course reflections indicate that the facilitators are interested in mutual learning and they are building a relationship of co-learning with us.

## **Tuesday November 17: DAY FOUR Ukrainian Hall**

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### **10-12:30 Diversity, safety and conflict**

Monday was a day away following our full weekend and now, on Tuesday, we have returned refreshed and ready to pick up where we left off. The topics for the morning are diversity, safety and conflict.

Ruth describes her artistic journey from professional theatre designer to community-based artist. She felt that she would be happier creating community projects with a theatre company behind her, rather

than working as a freelance artist. It led to her founding her theatre company, Jumblies. Her interest in the process of building bridges across barriers is the number one motivator that drives her work.

A barrier in this case can refer to anything that people in a community feel gets between them and their ability to take part—to become engaged in an arts-based community project. They may feel that they are too old or that they have a physical or mental limitation that would exclude them; that they are too busy with their lives, or feel too disconnected from others to want to join in. Perhaps they feel participation in a project will cost them money that they can't afford to spend, or that it's just too different from anything they've done before. Then, once people actually do take the first step to become involved, there can be barriers and divisions among participants coming from different cultures and experiences. Addressing these challenges is part of the work of community arts—building bridges through the arts to overcome and diminish these barriers.

As an example, Ruth tells us a bit about Jumblies' current long-term project with the residents of the East Scarborough neighbourhood of Toronto (including Kingston Galloway and Orton Park), a residency that was initiated in response to an invitation from the City of Toronto Cultural Services. It offers an excellent illustration of how Jumblies makes connections with people and works to overcome barriers through the arts. The diverse community of that area includes families, children and teens lodged temporarily at a local City-run shelter or one of the Kingston Road motels; three different Tamil seniors' groups; students from Willow Park Public School; Cedar Ridge artists and craftspeople; youth from Newcomer's Youth Services; and multi-age community members who have connections with the local Native Family and Child Services.

Among the first questions the artists needed to ask themselves were: what is this place; how are we going to connect with the people here; and who will we be working with? Rather than 'parachute' in out of the clear blue sky as strangers, Jumblies artists were able to make connections with the people of the area by partnering with the places where those people were already involved. They set up a home base at the Cedar Ridge Creative Centre and Gallery. They started offering workshops as a way to get to know the local people—and for local people to get to know the Jumblies artists. Later they expanded this initial site, renovating a basement suite at the Lido motel to create a drop-in art space.

Often "a community" is defined by geographical boundaries—such as a neighbourhood. The project participants' association with the place where they live is something that ties them all together. But with Scarborough, says Ruth, there is a fair amount of transience, so starting with their connection to place didn't seem like a good fit. This is also the work of the community artist: to consider thematic prompts

and metaphors that will resonate with a particular group's situation, not just apply a standardized formula to every project. The artistic team on the Scarborough project came up with the image of Russian matryoshka dolls (nesting dolls), as a way to focus on the individual people who make up this group, rather than focusing on the place where they happened to be living at that time. (It was this image that extended into the Arts4All Institute on our first day when we created our own paper matryoshka dolls.) The fact that the participants at Scarborough drift in and out of the project highlights the complexity of the term *community*. For any group of individuals that may be considered "a community," there are some who will be actively engaged the heart of the group's health and collective development, while others drift in and out of active participation. There will also be those whose identity, circumstances, or even place of residence make them clearly a part of that group, but who may not recognize the community that surrounds and includes them. "A community" is not a singular thing with a singular voice: there will always be a diversity of individuals in any group, each with her or his own wants, needs, and points of view. However, one of the exciting aspects of a creative arts project is that it can be a singular vessel that invites a diversity of voices to be expressed within it. One of the critical roles of a community artist is to be the one who maintains that vessel: who strives to keep the momentum moving forward and who can be a steward of the aesthetic choices and healthy interpersonal relationships that will hold it together.

Ruth embraces the experience of focusing on the people who are there and bringing her expertise to engage with them. "It nourishes me," she says. As a community artist, she always brings her interests, her passions, and her ideas to the collaboration. During a recent project involving Somali refugees, one woman told a story about her mother, Hawa Jibril, a well-known Somali elder and poet, who had demonstrated astounding bravery as a girl. Ruth told a fairy tale about a brave girl (Mollie Whuppie) that she knew from her own daughters' childhoods, and images from both stories were ultimately woven into the final theatrical production.



As part of their work to diminish barriers, Jumblies artists take care to ensure that the participants feel fully entitled to exercise their expertise in the collaborations. When Jumblies artists in this production (*Bridge of One Hair*, 2007) previewed a shadow puppetry scene for a group of Somali women that told the story of Hawa Jibril's bravery as a girl, Hawa suddenly cried out in Somali "Stop! It's the wrong kind

of spear!” (the Somali women translated what she was saying into English so the artists would understand). The work was halted while the proper spear design was sketched, approved and made. This is a classic example of a way in which local knowledge—local expertise—combines with professional artistic experience to create a collaborative venture.

Ruth explains the big picture of the work of Jumbliies. It involves more than just putting on plays. Certainly forging on with their own work is one important part of what they do, and even that involves much more than doing conventional theatre productions. Their first phase is laying the groundwork—connecting and learning about the community where their project will be based. It is the first step of building relationships. The second phase carries the relationship building further, engaging participants in the story-collecting and art-making that leads to developing the material, that in turn leads to the creation of the script, music and scenic material for a play or art installation. It is followed by the third phase, the presentation phase: performing the show. The fourth phase is the legacy phase, focused on sustainability—on what happens next. Jumbliies is committed to the idea that when the project is over and the Jumbliies lead artists move on to their next project, there is a solid legacy left in that community that will allow for subsequent projects to grow and flourish. Ruth’s organic image to illustrate how this works is a spiderplant.

### *The Spiderplant*



Just as a spiderplant sits happily in its pot and sends out shoots that then grow on their own, Jumbliies is dedicated to propagating new leaders and new artists who are nurtured and supported from the main company before rooting themselves in various locations on their own. In addition to the production company, Jumbliies operates a training studio, seminars and workshops (our Downtown Eastside Arts4All Institute is an offshoot and adaptation of their Toronto training program that has extended all the way to Vancouver), and offers internships for artists in the field.

There is much more to this morning’s presentation: video clips from Jumbliies productions, further discussion of the so-

called 'nuts and bolts' of working with partners, developing artistic material, and building inclusive relationships. By the end, we're ready for lunch.

### **1:30-4:30 Facilitation: tips and varied approaches**

After lunch we move to an exercise led by Varrick that is designed to demonstrate some of the challenges a community arts facilitator can face. We're all given small cards and asked to write on them a few words describing something about our own habits or personalities that can make us difficult to 'facilitate' (for example, *doesn't pay attention, doesn't stop talking, has to tell facilitator what to do; frustrated by the others, terribly shy, stubborn, etc.*). Varrick collects the cards and redistributes them so that each of us has someone else's card. Then he attempts to engage us in a relatively simple activity while we all adopt the personality traits on the cards we've received. The exercise is, as might be expected, an utter catastrophe. In any group exercise, there will be challenges, but this morning the difficulty dial is purposefully turned up full blast so that we can observe what Varrick does to navigate the rough terrain. He makes an admirable attempt, but in the end we overwhelm him. In the debriefing immediately afterward, we share observations and ask questions to analyse what it was he was doing and to share our own expertise about strategies for responding constructively to individuals in a group whose personality traits may make it difficult for the task to move forward.

What does a facilitator do when one person's actions takes the rest of the group off topic? Varrick navigates this, not by dumbing down, but by being open to the shifting winds and keeping the activity big enough to accommodate what everyone can do. To the guy who couldn't stay still, Varrick didn't try to clamp down on him, he lightly acknowledged what was happening as this fellow's way of doing the exercise, and he moved us on. He turned what was happening into something that was just a contribution to the activity. Interruptions? "Always address it right away," says Varrick, "talking right to the person at the time." *That's an interesting point but it's off the topic of what we're trying to accomplish right now.* Attending to the stress levels among participants rather than ignoring and pressing on is helpful. The facilitator can ask if something is distressing someone who appears upset, and allow him or her to get it out instead of letting it build up.

Keith introduces the idea of the 'parking lot,' a sheet of paper posted for the duration of the workshop where questions and sidetracks can be 'parked' and addressed later. One facilitator can quickly list the idea on the parking lot sheet while the other continues without a pause. It brings up the recommendation that it is always handy to have two facilitators if possible, and that it is best if they don't stand next to one another (avoiding the temptation to whisper check-ins back and forth, giving



the appearance of secret collusion). When the two facilitators stand across from one another, their energy opens out to the group. Having a second facilitator also means that if one person is creating a seriously disrupting influence, (or if one person is distraught) facilitator A can pull him or her aside and have a chat while facilitator B continues with the rest of the group. The more people you have on your facilitation team, we're told, the easier it is.

Safety for everyone is critical: both emotional and physical safety. The general philosophy in the Community Play Movement is that everyone is welcome, but:

*...saying that "everyone is welcome" and meaning it can be hazardous. The spirit of the work is always to welcome, include and bring together, but this doesn't mean that you have to put up with everything or everyone who comes along. We are, by skill and intent, artists not social workers, trained counselors or police. We are responsible for the artistic unfolding of the project as well as for the overall experience of the community, so situations that are obstructive need to be alleviated. Please talk to the lead artists/ project organizers about any challenges, frustrations or worries.<sup>12</sup>*

"Why facilitate?" someone asks. "Why not just get people to do what you want them to do?" It begs the question "what is your goal in any given instance?" Is it to get a scene rehearsed, or is it to build cohesion? Deciding what you are there for may significantly influence your priorities and choices.

Following the exercise on facilitation tips, Varrick shares with us some of his experience staging shows in promenade style. A hallmark of community-based theatre is the use of non-traditional performance venues that take advantage of the qualities and particularities of a site (whether indoors or outdoors). We experiment with the challenges and exciting potential of staging dramatic action when the actors are mingling amongst the audience members while speaking their dialogue. We see how much this engenders in the audience a sense of complicity with the actors. We experiment with actors appearing at a distance on three different sides and work out how to be able to be seen and to shift the spectators' focus from one spot to another.

At the end of the day, Kelty graciously invites everyone to her house for a dinner of homemade soup and bread. She lives a few blocks from the Ukrainian Hall so, when we've finished eating, we will be able to take a short walk from there to Gallery Gachet for the evening's public panel discussion. We make our way to Kelty's home, settle in, and spend time sitting in her living room, standing




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<sup>12</sup> *The Downtown Eastside Arts4All Institute Companion*, p34.

in her kitchen, sharing stories, laughing together, and enjoying a wonderful meal as a group. It is a splendid example of the way in which this work can so effectively lend itself to building community. It is not unusual for people collaboratively working on a creative project to start to feel a sense of family, of co-ownership, and to feel moved to step up and take personal responsibility for volunteering in a variety of ways (rather than expecting that the responsibility for 'delivering' the experience lies entirely in the hands of the 'teachers.')

Once again, eating food together provides a marvelous way for us all to feel connected.

### **7:00-9:00 PANEL: *Making Room at the Table* — Gallery Gachet**

Tuesday night we make our way to Gallery Gachet on East Cordova Street, a few blocks from the Carnegie Centre at Main and Hastings. Named after Paul Gachet, Vincent Van Gogh's homeopathic doctor, the gallery is a place for outsider/dissident artists informed by mental health issues to “exhibit, curate, perform, read, teach and to develop their leadership skills, [...] to demystify the public on issues related to mental health, and to advance the artistic discourse around these issues.”

We will be treated this evening to a public panel discussion titled: *Making Room at the Table*.

Moderator Amir Ali Alibhai will be asking panelists to discuss issues related to inclusivity:

- How do you attract, invite and help diverse groups and enable people feel included in community-arts projects?
- How do you bring them together in a way that allows honesty and safety so that all the contributions are strong and valued?

Panelist Lina de Guevara (Puente Theatre) will look at practical strategies to embed diversity from day one. Rosemary Georgeson (urban ink) will look at how we navigate and negotiate the multi-cultural spectrum of a community and the protocols that make its varied groups feel safe and welcomed. Cathy Stubington (Runaway Moon Theatre) will address the inclusion of all ages, and Bruce Ray (Gallery Gachet) will speak from his experiences with mental health issues.

Here are some snippets from that exciting discussion:

**Bruce:** Some programs are designed to get people whose lives are informed by mental health issues to meet and interact with one another—Gallery Gachet does a whole lot more than that. It provides ongoing opportunities for marginalised people to take an active role in the actual operation of the Gallery in a meaningful way. In Bruce's experience, this is the most powerful way for people from

diverse cultural backgrounds and social positions to become empowered. Here at the Gallery, the members all work democratically in an effort to contribute to the success of something real. As with any democracy, the different ideas collide and a strong community is built through the democratic process—through their struggle to work it out together. Perhaps because the operation of the place is managed by marginalised people, it has street credibility: people who stop by to check it out are at ease and feel this could easily be their place too.

**Rosemary:** Learning and respecting the protocols of others is so important. Don't generalise. We are all very different people and we come from different traditions. Budget enough time to be able to speak with people face-to-face. When you're going to talk with someone to extend an invitation to participate in something, be sure you know who it is you're talking to and listen and take in everything that is said. Recognise different people's protocols and design what you do so that the people you have invited are able to feel welcomed. The process of learning what you need to know is the journey; that's where the learning experience comes in. It can be difficult to participate in a gifting culture when you don't have much money to spend, but remember that simply sharing food—feasting together—is one of the best ways for making bridges.

**Cathy:** Don't underestimate the welcoming power of having people of all ages doing everything together. It can be quite disarming for adults to be working on creative art projects as partners side by side with children and teenagers.

**Lina:** When inviting immigrants to participate, keep in mind that what may be most fragile for them is their sense of self-esteem. They have lost their status in a place they don't know anything about. They may have little or no English language ability. If they have come from the Third World, they may be overwhelmed by First World culture, which seems to present itself as somehow better than their home culture. That is intimidating. And yet immigrants bring all kinds of things to this country. Immigrants are creators of art, and acknowledging that is an important first step in the invitation.

Lina has devised various ways to address the kinds of barriers that Ruth spoke about this morning. Theatre companies can support people's ability to participate by providing for some of their fundamental needs. Arranging for quality childcare is one example, as well as providing food during workshops/rehearsals, and bus fare. Also, if it is possible, some payment for the work can make a big difference.

In Lina's experience, offering to pay the immigrant women in her ensemble, women who have little or no prior theatre experience, has enabled them to take time away from other income-generating work to build their performance skill levels enough that they are able present themselves strongly on stage. For those with limited time to participate, Lina sometimes designs productions that can accommodate participants at various levels of commitment, creating multiple opportunities for people to participate so they can begin to find their niches at a limited level and work up to increased involvement.

Making alliances—partnering—with organisations and centres where the immigrants go is a good way to connect with these groups. To ensure participation, be sure that you are sincerely and authentically consulting with people about the content of the play. Immigrants want and need respect not charity.

### **Wednesday November 18: DAY FIVE Ukrainian Hall**

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Lots of stories about the work of community arts have been shared this past week. Stories have come from the workshop leaders and also from the participants, guests, and evening panelists: we have all been spinning yarns. Today is the day we metaphorically gather together all those many yarns and weave them into theatrical tapestries.

We will be choosing others to partner with today—small groups that will collaboratively create short performance pieces. But before we mutually make our 'casting' decisions, we need to have a better sense of the talents and skills available in the room. We go around the circle and each person tells about the performance assets they can contribute to the work: he enjoys singing; she plays the guitar; she can dance and juggle; he's a good joke teller and can sing too; she is a visual artist good at graphics and design; and so forth. What a rich pool of skills and talents to draw upon! The exercise represents an orientation of collectivity and agency often found in community arts work. Agency in this case, means that we are able to exercise some control over what we do instead of being told what to do by the boss. Here we don't have a director in charge who is the sole keeper of the knowledge; we all share knowledge of our group members' skills and talents and so we all have the tools we need to make decisions ourselves.

We have arrived this morning carrying the poems, drawings and stories we created from last Sunday's interviews about each other's heroes. Varrick collects them from us in a basket and then redistributes them. Based on what we know about each other from the time we've spent together, as well as what we've just learned about specific talents and skills in the group, we team up to form partnerships.

On one end of the room at the Ukrainian Hall there is a raised stage with a red curtain. All week long the curtain has been open, but today it has been drawn closed. Ruth, Varrick, Savannah, and Keith invite all of the groups to go explore a surprise environment that they have prepared for us behind the curtain. It turns out to be a labyrinth of tables all laid full with objects.

Some of the objects are familiar: material we've been generating from the exercises during the week. There are cards with the iconographic representations of our gestures; scraps of paper with our notes about what we saw and heard on our walking tour of the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood; our paper matryoshka dolls and drawings of our labyrinths, etc. Also on the table are piles of other "found objects."



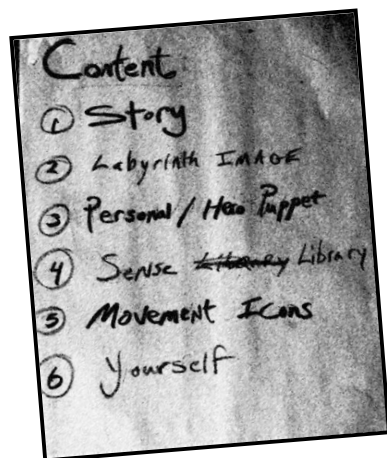
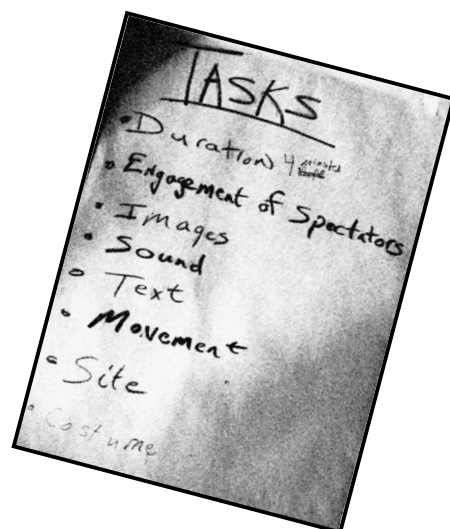
There are wooden building blocks, little utensils and other assorted found objects; and also art tools and materials like coloured paper, fabric scraps and glue and scissors. These materials, in addition to the drawings and texts about our heroes, are all rich sources of meaning that will contribute to our performance pieces.

We set to work and, for much of the remainder of the day, we imaginatively explore, invent, test,



discard, refine, and attempt again to create theatre based on our collective local knowledge. The whole building is a hive of activity as the work spills over into the basement and into the storage room tucked up above the main hall. Some groups recruit supplementary performers from other groups to play cameo roles in their pieces. Keith organizes sub-groups to orchestrate transitions that will help to segue between one four-minute performance and the next.



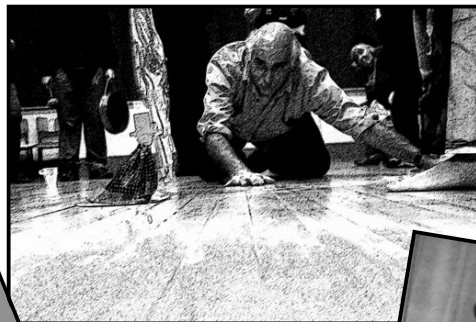


By 3:30 in the afternoon we are as ready as we will ever be.



A marquee displaying a series of the titles and cast members in each piece is taped to the edge of the proscenium (*Mine, Yours and Me*; *The Journey*; *Play Bill: Charlie Chaplin*; *Love me Tender*; *Medicine Wheel*; *Transitioners*)

And we begin. It is an astounding mixture of images, words, song, choreography and story: beautiful and whimsical, lyrical and edgy, joyful and heart-rending. Again and again, we experience unforgettable moments that represent so much more than the sum of the parts we have brought together.



## Thursday November 19: DAY SIX Ukrainian Hall

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### 10-11:30 Ethics and Aesthetics

Varrick starts us off today by inviting us to reflect on some of the moments that have stayed with us from the performances the day before. The invitation is to reflect them literally: to create a movement, sound or gesture that captures the quality of something we experienced. Some re-enact what they saw and heard, others re-enact how they felt. It is a performed reflection that allows us to honour and celebrate the experiences we have had without having to reduce them to language-based analysis.



In anticipation of VMT's upcoming collaborative project with Runaway Moon Theatre, a theatre/arts-based creative project based on the Labyrinth myth, Varrick and Savannah have created a short questionnaire to incorporate insights from all of the Arts4All participants about the idea. Inspired by Ruth's advice that the best way to get a survey completed is to do it on the spot and in pairs, we spend a few minutes interviewing each other in pairs generating our reflections.

Then we take our seats around the tables and Ruth brings us full circle to revisit some of the definitions we began with on day one: *what are we talking about when we say community art; how do we talk about*



*the work as 'good art' or not 'good art' and—given our definitions—why does it matter that it is 'good'?*

She opens the question up for group members to answer according to what we have been learning and to deepen our collective level of understanding on this, our final day together.

Ruth has asked me to share a few of my thoughts about ethics and aesthetics in community arts since these are two of the core issues I'm investigating as part of my doctoral research. I begin by talking about ethics in terms of the motivations that drive artists to want to engage in this work. I recall my own motivations as a young theatre worker, wanting to help, wanting to empower communities that were 'disenfranchised and disempowered.' I tell the story of the first time I came across some words that a group of Australian Aboriginal activists had spoken to outsiders who had come to help 'empower' that community. The Aborigines said: "If you have come to help us you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with ours, then let us work together."<sup>13</sup>

As a middle class, politically progressive, North American white male, this rocked my world. I suddenly realised that I had always carried an unarticulated sense of working in service to the community groups with whom I had made plays. I quickly began to think about some of the hidden and not-so-hidden patronizing attitudes that can be wrapped up into notions of empowerment and helping. I asked myself: what would it mean to have 'my liberation' bound up with these people? What would that look like?

I came, finally, to realise how much I am personally enriched, and how much my professional practice is enriched, through mutually beneficial creative collaborations with members of communities who have experiences and knowledge beyond what I know. I described to the Arts4All participants my belief that an attitude of approaching this work with a goal of achieving reciprocal benefits puts artists on far firmer ethical ground than my former attitude of wanting to charge in and fix or help 'people in need.'

Ethics in community arts can, at it simplest, be a matter of asking who benefits from this work, and who decides what those benefits are? As an artist, it's all well and good for me to claim that a community will benefit from working with me. But if they were given an authentic chance to weigh in, what would they claim that they get from the experience? Would they see it as mutually beneficial and mutually owned, or would they consider it to be my project that they have been invited to join?

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<sup>13</sup> This line is often attributed to Lila Watson but, according to Ricardo Levins Morales (Northlandposter.com), Watson herself says that it was actually devised collaboratively by all the members of an activist group that she belonged to in the 1970s.

Moving on to aesthetics, I talk a bit about the concept of *relational art practice*. Relational Aesthetics is a term coined by Nicholas Bourriard, a French visual arts curator and critic who was describing art that succeeds by provoking and encouraging vital encounters between and among people, rather than succeeding according to the design and presentation of the artwork itself as an object. When we talk about the aesthetics of community art—what qualifies it as ‘good art,’ it is useful, I explain, to have a broader understanding of how we measure ‘good.’ I tell the story of an experiment that happened a couple of years ago in Washington, DC. A newspaper reporter asked one of the world’s most renowned concert violinists, Joshua Bell, to pose as a subway busker and play his violin for passersby.<sup>14</sup> Most people walked right by him without stopping to listen. The story about it in *The Washington Post* generated a lot of commentary that people don’t appreciate “good” music, but there was one comment that stood out to me. A New York busker wrote that Mr. Bell was undoubtedly an excellent musician according to the aesthetic standards of a concert performance. There he is judged by the technique and skill and passion of his musical interpretation. But a busker, she wrote, is judged by a different aesthetic standard. Buskers succeed by drawing people into the playing, and making them feel that they are a part of the experience.<sup>15</sup> It is a *relational aesthetic*. When we are creating community plays we certainly strive to make excellent work that holds up aesthetically, but we’re also gauging whether it succeeds in making people feel drawn in and a part of the experience. That includes people who create the work and the people who come to sit in the audience.

The conversation is opened up to all, and we have a lively round-table on ethics, aesthetics, and definitions of community arts, supported by phrases that have come up in discussion during this week’s workshop. They have been written on slips of paper by Keith and Varrick, and are now passed around the table and read aloud. We segue into some more art making. We are invited to create visual representations of the journeys we’ve made over the past six days using pastels, paper, glue and other materials. We’re challenged to characterise the highlights, the obstacles we faced, to incorporate suggestions, insights, questions, and desires for the future. *Where did we challenge ourselves artistically? What inspired us through the process and product? What were the challenges? Were we stepping into the unknown as an artist? What kept the decision-making process happening?* We evaluate the work of the Institute this week, first in small groups and then all together. We evaluate it with words, with our bodies (using group sculptures). To close, we return to the song: *I come from a place, I’m going to a place...* This time it is sung to include our feelings about the entire week’s experience. We finish the day by sitting for some group photographs, followed by a lovely dinner and conversation.

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<sup>14</sup> Gene Weingarten, Pearls before breakfast. *Washington Post*, (April 8 2007)

<sup>15</sup> Natalia Paruz, (The Saw Lady) “Is Joshua Bell a good busker?” (April 7, 2007). Blog of a NYC subway musician and musical saw player. (<http://sawlady.com/blog/?p=27>).

## APPENDIX

***Introduction to the Downtown Eastside  
and Vancouver Moving Theatre's community engaged arts practice<sup>16</sup>  
by Savannah Walling***

I'm Savannah Walling. I'm going to tell you a story about a neighbourhood, an arts company and a relationship with a neighbourhood.

Most of you know that I'm the artistic director of Vancouver Moving Theatre, a company I co-founded with my husband Terry Hunter, the executive director. I'm a theatre artist trained in music, dance, and mime. For over 30 years, we've lived and worked in the Downtown Eastside - the city's oldest neighbourhood and its most misunderstood. Its historic boundaries are Burrard Inlet on the north, tidal streams flowing through gullies east and west and the tidal flats of False Creek in the south. Resting on unceded Coast Salish Territory are its mini-neighborhoods: Gastown, Main and Hastings corridors, Chinatown, North of Hastings (Japantown) and Strathcona. This is the place that over 25 years ago gave birth to our company Vancouver Moving Theatre. It's the home in which we've raised and homeschooled our son and the community with whom we've engaged on projects big and small.

The Downtown Eastside is the first place I ever experienced what it means to be part of a community. I had no experience of community growing up. My family moved every year, from suburb to suburb. There were no community centers or gathering places. My dad's family clan spreads across North America. Half of mother's West Virginia family refused to talk to the other half. I left even these roots behind when I emigrated to Canada in 1968 and – breaking family tradition – became a performing artist.

When Terry and I arrived in the Downtown Eastside back in the early 1970s, we encountered a very different world than it is today. Back then we saw a residential community with a dynamic retail strip centred around Woodward's retail and grocery store, lots of mom and pop stores serving the mostly low-income locals, and long-standing cultural centres. No visible homeless were evident,

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<sup>16</sup> Sections of work that appear in this paper were originally published in the journal *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage* Vol 5.4, and in program guides for *We're All In This Together*, *In the Heart of a City: The Downtown Eastside Community Play* and *Eastside Stories: The People. The Voices*.

nor were illegal drugs used openly on the streets—in fact, locals were concerned about bars overserving beer to their patrons.

Our arrival coincided with a whole slew of local victories, in particular, the defeat of a plan to wipe out the neighbourhood with an eight-lane freeway. This victory changed national housing policy, turned around years of civic neglect, and resulted in innovative social and cooperative housing and new, revitalized community and cultural centres.

But we didn't know any of these stories when we arrived. We only knew we had found an affordable home and rehearsal space, a community that welcomed and respected diversity and a steaming stew of cultural aromas, celebrations and ceremonies.

Ancestors of today's Coast Salish people have used this spit of land for thousands of years; today it's called the largest urban reserve in Canada. It's also home to North America's second largest historical Chinatown. Almost half of the population is a visible minority.

The seeds of our interdisciplinary practice were planted in this spot; our commitment to bridging barriers between cultures, our desire to connect artistic practice with community.

Our home community in turn shaped our practice, our repertoire and who we are. Witnessing the annual return of Chinese Lion Dancers on the streets of Chinatown, for instance—who arrived to bring blessings to the community and frighten away evil forces—inspired us to take our work into the streets.

When Terry and I began our lifelong partnership, our shared love of music and dancing set in motion a long line of collaborative interdisciplinary explorations in companies we co-founded: two years of the Mime Caravan (with Doug Vernon); seven years of Terminal City Dance (with Karen Jamieson and others) and over twenty-five years of Vancouver Moving Theatre. From day one, we strove to break down boundaries between music, dance and theatre; bridge artistic disciplines and cultural traditions; create accessible art; step through imaginary fourth walls to interact directly with spectators and communities; take theatre out of the studio and into the streets and community; participate in places of celebration where people gather in a spirit of peace and hope for the future.

We blended personal passions with local inspiration. I researched Asian practices of combining dance, live music, and mask and European popular theatre forms like masques, mumming, and Commedia Dell Arte. Inspired by Korean and taiko drum dancing and studies in Afro-Caribbean percussion, Terry developed his own style of drumming and moving at the same time. Out of these fusions emerged productions we toured around the world – like “Drum Mother's Gifts”, with an audience-interactive character who danced and played music on large drums built into her red hoop-skirt. We launched her at the Chinatown New Year's Parade, before she led 30,000 people in the 1984 Vancouver Peace March, and left to tour across Canada and four continents.

During these years, we were profoundly inspired by residencies and collaborations with the interdisciplinary and community engaged practice of artists like Great Britain's Welfare State International, Denmark's Odin Teatret and Richard Fowler.

For 15 years, we continuously departed from the Downtown Eastside to tour Canada and the world, learning our craft as artist-producer-performers until arts-funding shrank in the 1990s and we could no longer afford to train and maintain a touring ensemble. We turned to one-man shows, projects and partnerships. During our years of raising a child, we looked for opportunities to nourish local connection and plant deeper roots- with percussion ensembles; volunteering for local events; drum dancing workshops for emerging dancers at the studio around the corner from here. A small annual festival for Strathcona opened a rich vein into the history, cultures and stories of our community. The more we learned, the more we participated in local events, the more involved, connected and committed we became. Over the years, we were transforming from artists living in the Downtown Eastside to artists nurturing and being nurtured by the community.

Over the years, our home community was also transforming. During the 1980s, over 1000 SRO hotel rooms were converted as landlords geared up for Expo 86. Thousands of apartment units across the city converted from rental units into condominiums. In expo's aftermath, the Downtown Eastside gained a reputation as Canada's poorest urban postal code. Woodward's – our main social and shopping area – closed. Globalization of the illegal and legal drug trades, downsizing of the mental hospitals, the loss of resource industry jobs, cuts in corporate taxes, off-shoring work to third world countries, welfare reduction policies, loss of affordable housing- all of these correlated with the emergence of extreme and visible poverty, homelessness, increased addiction among all levels of society; a swelling survival sex trade and property crime; and a new drive-by drug market.

By the end of the 1990s, a grassroots surge for renewal was again emerging from the Downtown Eastside. Believing that a neighbourhood can only heal itself and move forward if residents engaged in their community and culture, artists and organizations participated in a series of collective actions to give voice to the Downtown Eastside, confront its challenges and mobilize its strengths through arts and cultural programs. These plans led to a focus on the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the building at Main and Hastings – the Carnegie Community Centre to put some of the ideas in motion – including a great big play created for and with the community – the kind of collaborative community play discovered in Britain in the 1970s in which a small core of experienced theatre artists work with community members – as many as wish to participate – to create a strong artistic work to express and celebrate their community.

The folks at Carnegie were very excited; hoping this kind of play could contribute to community transformation through the arts. Vancouver Moving Theatre agreed to join forces to co-

produce the play. Although, we knew the task was too big, the time line too short, the financial resources insufficient; we also knew our community had tremendous talent; it was sensationalized by media across Canada and it was our turn to give back. It took a month of negotiating with Carnegie to make sure we were climbing the same “mountain”; operating by the same goals and guiding principles; agreed on the physical boundaries of the community; the definitions of “community member” and “community play” and expectations around diversity and bridge-building. The responsibilities were immense: all of us knew that because of where our play was coming from – the Downtown Eastside. The failure would have been damaging.

The creative journey was like Mount Everest – the task was so multi-layered and complex. Striving past cultural and personality differences, participants coped with a host of challenges ranging from stolen computers and water pipes bursting, to falling off the wagon, children in trouble with the law and loss of housing, children in trouble with law. On the journey, all of us learned about Downtown Eastside stories, heroes, history, and values – and strategies to de-fuse tense situations that leave everyone’s dignity intact.

With the help of a whole community of supporters – including advice from folks who put on the Enderby community play and from Ruth Howard – with over 2000 volunteers and 80 volunteer performers – we all managed to pull off Vancouver’s first large-scale collaborative community play and presented it to sold-out houses, standing ovations and audiences from Vancouver beyond. Afterwards everyone wondered - what do you do when the party leaves town? What about the stories you didn’t include, the people who didn’t get to participate and volunteers hungry for more? Lots of ideas came forward at a post-community play workshop facilitated by Rachael Van Fossen, visiting from Montreal. People wanted to change negative perceptions of the Downtown Eastside. They wanted more help for drug users; to preserve the neighbourhood’s cultural diversity and creative community; to build on the momentum of the community play experience – to start new art projects, involve local writers in script development processes for big projects with a common theme; they wanted opportunities to develop their skills in the performing arts and expand those skills into different areas. They wanted work opportunities. Although they were prepared to volunteer in the community play, in the future low income residents wanted honoraria and wages.

Well, it turned out that the creative stone of the Downtown Eastside community play set off an ocean of ripples – and served as a catalyst for a whole whack of creative projects.

The Carnegie Community Centre, wanting to build on partnerships and energy demonstrated during the centennial year, asked us to join forces to produce a Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival. Last’s years fifth annual festival was produced with the help of over 50 community partners, 400 volunteers and featured over 100 events involving over 1000 community and professional artists

in 43 locations- there were concerts, theatre, films and art exhibits; art in the streets and schools; historical walking and activism tours; forums, workshops, talks; mentoring opportunities, community celebrations; feasts and a Coast Salish canoe launch ceremony. The programming was developed by collaborative consensus with community partners and artists, some of whom partnered with other organizations for additional support.

Inspired by the Downtown Eastside community play and by real life events, other community members are writing plays too. Sheila Baxter's first play - "Death in a Dumpster: A Passion Play for the Homeless" remembered those who have no memorial -it's been published by Lazara Press. Disappointed that stories about legendary local activist Bruce Eriksen didn't make it into the community play, former newspaper reporter/resident Bob Sarti wrote "Bruce the Musical" - developed by Theatre in the Raw, it premiered at last fall's festival. The Carnegie Community Centre, working with a team of community writers, produced the community opera "Condemned" about people who find themselves homeless after they're kicked out of a low income hotel because the owners plan to demolish the building and sell the land for redevelopment- it's been revived twice by popular demand.

Over the years, we've seen the impact of the community play upon personal lives, careers and arts activity. One ten year old Afro-Canadian boy who'd played five roles in the play had never been able to look an adult in the eye. After the play he held eye contact easily with almost everyone and his self-confidence and school marks soared.

Another play volunteer, Elwin Xie, was a descendent of head tax survivors who grew up in his family's Chinatown laundry. Before the play he was a bored retail salesman embarrassed by his family history. After the play, his life changed. He's performed in professional theatre productions; worked as an historical interpreter at museums; as a backstage production assistant; written about life growing up in a Chinese laundry; developed the "Chinese Laundry Boy Historical Walking Tour"; and mentored First Nations youth.

Six years ago Dalannah Gail Bowen, a long-time jazz and blues singer and fund-raiser, was homeless in the Downtown Eastside, addicted to crack and cocaine. Two things helped her get her life back together. She got into coop housing she'd applied for before she became homeless and she auditioned for the Downtown Eastside community play - got a part, became committed to a routine, and re-connected with her creativity. It was integral to her healing, she said, she remembered who she was. She went on to create and perform a one-woman show of music and poetry about her life "The Returning Journey". Today she's taking the lead on a new initiative, the Downtown Eastside Centre for the Arts, that's offering arts programming for community members at the Inter-urban Gallery.

Since the making of the big community play, our company has focused on providing training and on smaller projects with deeper connections – from Breaking into the Biz arts weekend workshops facilitated by Vancouver’s top artists to a concert of music and memories about the historic black community that didn’t make it into our community play. In 2005, we began a series of workshops and forums involving one thousand DTES community members exploring the roots of addiction. Out of their recollections emerged – on a giant shadow screen - the encounter of two families from different social backgrounds with humanity’s struggle with addiction. Performed by over 30 community shadow casters, actors and musician, the play premiered with eight sold-out shows.

As we work on our projects, we’re following in the footsteps of the collaborative play model Dale Hamilton brought to Canada: filling leadership roles with professional artists; supporting creative development with outreach events; balancing process and product; healthy practice with artistic excellence; generating images and content locally and involving community members in creation and performance. Following in the footsteps of Vancouver’s John Juliani and Savage God theatre company, we’re providing smaller ensembles with specialized training, mentoring and honorariums. We ask the artistic team to be fully prepared at each rehearsal, to support and speak with respect to cast members at every step of the process, to work out differences between team members at another time and place, to avoid taking sides on local issues; to steer past negativity by sticking to the theatre and be prepared to learn from the community. We’ve learned that small everyday courtesies help big time on big projects. So do rehearsal rules created by the participants. And taking time to socialize, learn people’s names, ask how they’re doing and treat them as honoured guests. And – although we don’t have the resources to provide them for every project - so do supports that welcome participants – simple and encouraging auditions, healthy food and shared meals, child care and access to counselling.

We advance our art form by striving for a balance of experiment and accessibility and an aesthetic that is raw, refined and heart-felt. We do our best to provide well organized, smoothly running environments that are inclusive and encourage everyone to give of their best.

Giving birth to new life – whether it’s a child or a new production or festival – is hard work. Some births are easier and shorter, but many are long and painful and may bring up troubling memories from the past. The reason these Downtown Eastside projects have worked and had such a strong impact – is that almost everyone – from professional to novice – has been deeply committed to the purposes; worked with good will; coped patiently with bumps up the road, striven to give of their best and behave with respect; and really, really wanted the projects to succeed.



As participant Stephen Lytton said of the Shadows Project, “It was more than just a play. It was about humanity and community. The Downtown Eastside is the poorest postal code of Canada... There’s nowhere else for us to retreat. We live, eat and sleep the issues of the day. But I want to share the strength, the heat and soul of this community. Our hope is to change the fear factor and to change stereotypical ideas about the Downtown Eastside.”

It’s our home. We live here because we like our neighbours’ compassion, courage, and diversity and the neighbourhood’s values, history, art forms, and cultures; its human scale and character; the physical beauty of its buildings and bits of green space. To build healthy communities, we’re all needed. Terry and I take the small steps we know how to take—creating art that excites us, involves and engages people from our community, and challenges negative stereotypes. We learn about the neighbourhood and share what we learn.

Our Downtown Eastside home is facing enormous challenges. Developers are building high-end condominiums on properties purchased for land speculation. Other developers are building low-barrier housing projects for a new generation of mentally ill people fractured by a combination of mental illness, drug use, homelessness and severe physical breakdown – people not just with one problems but everything at once. These projects are bringing in hundreds and hundreds of people – the wealthiest and most in need – at a pace that feels overwhelming for residents – and yet the city still does not have enough housing for its homeless. Residents are displaced; the gap steadily increases between rich and poor; externally imposed development threatens our community’s distinctive heritage, character and scale. Our BC government is making monstrous funding cuts that are gutting the kinds of arts, sports, educational and service programs that keep our communities healthy and strong.

When we think of next steps on our journey, our community and our company are facing a lot of unknowns.

Our task this week is to produce – in partnership with Jumblied theatre – a six-day Downtown Eastside Arts4All Institute (Nov. 12-19). Our next step is to develop a new project next spring– on a reduced scale – and in creative partnership with Runaway Moon in Enderby, BC, The Downtown Eastside Labyrinth Project. We’re following up on relationships that have developed out of the community play experience.

Regardless of what the future brings, we’ll explore with our colleagues opportunities for a national project. Because Downtown Eastside community members told us - at the 4<sup>th</sup> National Community Play Exchange Symposium - they’re hoping for exchange programs between artists, villages and communities, and initiatives that allow for projects not to be limited to the community that they were created in but to give access provincially and possibly nationally.

We're proud of the many arts and other projects to which the Downtown Eastside has given birth over the past decade. We think of ourselves as joining other Downtown Eastside gardeners to cultivate a healthy garden that grows a variety of healthy plants – a legacy for the Downtown Eastside that documents its history, struggles, people, its great stories and art. It's a legacy for our children and children's children; it's a legacy for the next generation of artists; and it's a gift to share with other communities facing similar challenges.

Terry and I are thinking a lot about dissemination of information and passing on of the torch as we continue to work on the projects on our plate, and cope with the changes.

I've been thinking about how communities vanish or stay strong; how they preserve or lose their unique identities. It's about inter-connection, it's about balancing the needs of individuals and the community as a whole; it's about preserving our physical and spiritual history; it's about preserving our relationships and supporting each other, it's about learning from and listening to the community's wisdom about what it needs and nurturing the community's resources. In the words of Downtown Eastside poet Sandy Cameron, "We work to make our community a better place, not a perfect place, but a better place. If we look for immediate results in this work, we are in danger of falling into despair. Society doesn't change quickly, and our commitment is for the long haul."

Our community's stories remind us to never, never give up; that gains always have to be defended, that you can't leave it to other people to fight your battles; that all of us are involved; and that success and survival- depend upon helping and supporting each other, and some journeys take more than one generation to complete.